

Title: "Markets and Diversity": An Overview

Author: Yolande Pottie-Sherman

Contact: yolandep@interchange.ubc.ca

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Research Question:

How has the "physical" or "real" marketplace been theorized previously across disciplines, periods, and regions? What are the major themes of the literature examining diversity in the marketplace?

Importance:

Marketplaces have long existed as spaces of economic and social/cultural contact and exchange. These spaces take a diversity of forms: market buildings, open-air markets, street markets, purpose-built markets, periodic markets, festival markets, permanent and mobile markets, and so on. These are often sites where difference is encountered (i.e., ethnicity, race, culture, gender, class) in the process of buying and selling. The marketplace allows us to consider the ways in which diversity plays out in different contexts, in both the global north and south, although surprisingly few scholars have considered diversity and markets together. This working paper is driven by the potential of marketplaces to serve as sites of meaningful interaction between diverse groups of people.

Research Findings:

Interaction between diverse groups in the marketplace can encourage a sense of shared identity, hybridity, or appreciation of difference. These spaces serve as meeting places and as sites of economic participation for diverse people that may go beyond the one-sided consumption of ethnicity. Contact, however, can also reinforce social difference and exacerbate pre-existing tensions, particularly under circumstances of economic competition. Seven major themes emerge from the literature: 1) The social dynamics of trade in the marketplace; 2) Markets as spaces of contact. 3) Consuming diversity: Orientalism and cosmopolitanism; 4) Markets and the state: Governance and policy; 5) The political economy of the marketplace; 6) Markets and social inclusion; and 7) The spatiality of the marketplace.

Implications:

A key question raised by the literature review concerns the types of market spaces—and conditions—that encourage meaningful interaction. How can these discourses of multiculturalism and tourism be reconciled with the social and economic function of marketplaces? What is the relationship between economic transaction, sociability, and diversity? Can we plan for these spaces? Further research is needed on the conditions supporting positive and meaningful social and economic marketplace exchanges between diverse people.