

Strategic Visibility and the Production of Day-Labor Spaces: A Case Study from the San Diego Metropolitan Area

Urban Affairs Review
2018, Vol. 54(3) 593–631
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DOI: 10.1177/1078087416659767
journals.sagepub.com/home/uar



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Abstract

In cities across the United States, groups of mostly men congregate in public and semipublic spaces in hopes of being hired for short-term work. The particular spaces where laborers congregate each day are crucial to their economic and social fortunes, yet to date, there is limited research examining the spatial organization of these sites. In this article, I draw on relational perspectives on the production of space and governmentality practices to examine day-labor hiring spaces in the San Diego Metropolitan Area. Drawing on more than seven years of mixed-methods research, I argue that laborers collectively employ *strategic visibility*: a set of spatial practices that reduces the potential for conflict and ensures laborers' continued access to the particular spaces on which their survival depends. This analysis suggests that laborers' site-selection and spatial practices are driven by pragmatic, economic concerns, rather than fear of interactions with policing agencies and/or anti-immigrant residents.

Keywords

day-labor, informal economy, production of space

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Introduction

Every morning in the San Diego Metropolitan Area (SDMA), approximately 1,000 men¹ wait on street corners and sidewalks, the edges of parking lots, and other public and semipublic spaces in hopes that someone will drive up and offer them employment for a few hours, a day, or perhaps longer. These day-laborers, also known as *jornaleros* or *esquineros*, are typically hired for short-term work in construction and agriculture and by home owners looking for help with small construction or landscaping projects. San Diego is but one of the more than 120 cities in North America with active day-labor hiring sites (Valenzuela et al. 2006). The growth of day-labor over the past three decades is part of a broad economic shift toward temporary, contingent, and flexible labor arrangements under neoliberal economic restructuring (Castree et al. 2004; Herod 2001; Theodore 2007). However, most of the attention that day-labor markets receive is tied to community conflicts that occasionally arise around specific hiring sites (Toma and Esbenshade 2001).

Research on day-labor to date is largely aspatial, focusing instead on exploratory surveys of the day-labor population (Valenzuela et al. 2006), critical analysis of day-labor industry's growth as a result of neoliberal policies at multiple scales (Skerry 2008; Smith 2008; Theodore 2003, 2007), ethnographic explorations of individual day-labor hiring sites (Turnovsky 2004; Wakin 2008), and examinations of the role of day-labor in locational and community conflicts (Esbenshade 2000; Espana 2002; Herbert 2010; Toma and Esbenshade 2001; Valenzuela 2000), including research linking localized day-labor issues to immigration policy and conflict at multiple scales (Varsanyi 2008), and community organizing and outreach for day-laborers (Camou 2002; Fine 2006; Theodore 2015; Theodore and Martin 2007). However, recent work has begun to apply geographic perspectives to improve understanding of, and policy construction for, day-labor markets. In the SDMA, for example, there are hiring sites in urban, suburban, and agricultural landscapes. What these day-labor neighborhoods have in common is a higher demand for temporary labor than the region as a whole, as evidenced by significantly higher concentrations of owner-occupied housing, as well as residents who work in the construction or agricultural industries (Crotty 2015). It is clear from this work that the locations of hiring sites are not selected accidentally but rather reflect laborers' reaction to variable levels of employment demand across space. However, questions remain regarding the establishment of specific hiring sites, as well as the processes that give hiring sites such locational stability over time. Many sites in San Diego have occupied the same physical space for three decades or more—in several cases, enduring multiple periods of anti-day-labor activism by area residents and/or

anti-day-labor policing efforts by regional government agencies (Crotty 2012; Eisenstadt and Thorup 1994).

In this article, I draw on more than seven years of mixed-methods research in the SDMA to support three related arguments. First, day-laborers employ *strategic visibility*: Strategic visibility refers to a set of locational and behavioral norms that maximizes their accessibility to employers while minimizing the visibility of any activities that might draw negative attention to the hiring site. Second, the sustained presence of day-labor hiring sites in particular locations normalizes day-labor activities as part of everyday rhythms of the city and embeds them in the landscape. And third, through daily engagement with day-labor spaces, specific site locations become vital parts of laborers' lives and survival strategies. As such, laborers imbue these otherwise marginal urban spaces with a vitality and emotional significance that is often misunderstood or underappreciated by government actors and day-labor activists alike. These relatively simple arguments have long-reaching implications for how we understand power relations in the designation and production of particular kinds of urban space, for day-labor advocacy efforts, and for mapping what Mitchell and Heynen (2009) called the geography of survival in North American cities.

The following analysis draws from participant observation conducted at each of the 45 day-labor hiring sites in the SDMA (see Figure 1). I present representative examples of specific sites, at the microgeographic scale, to further support the argument that laborers employ *strategic visibility* as part of their livelihood strategies. Analysis at the microgeographic scale is an examination of spatial organization at the scale at which most personal and group interactions take place, what Percy-Smith and Matthews (2001) referred to as an "encounter space." In this article, the microgeographic scale refers to the day-labor space—the location where laborers wait in hopes of finding employment. It is in these day-labor spaces that interactions between laborers and a variety of other stakeholders establish the spatial practices and "flows of meaning" that collectively and continuously produce day-labor spaces (Wulff 1995, p. 65).

The analysis is divided into three general sections. In the first section, I examine the day-to-day interactions and negotiations that structure day-labor life, however informally, and establish the daily rhythms of the city. I position this research within the relational perspectives on the production of space and governmentality practices (Amin and Thrift 2002; Foucault 1977; Massey 2005; Murdoch 2006). In the second section, I apply the concept of *strategic visibility* to the microgeographic scale. Laborers' collective employment of strategic visibility in informal hiring site selection is the key factor in their ability to maintain access to particular spaces. The

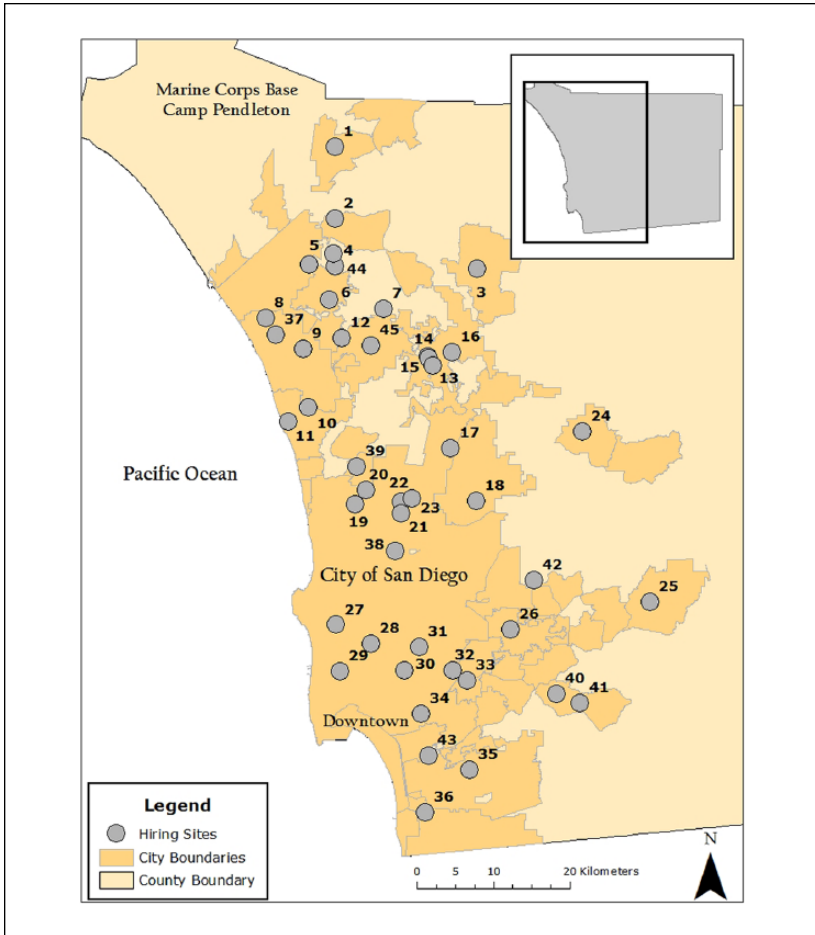


Figure I. Day-labor hiring sites in the San Diego Metropolitan Area.

findings from this analysis run counter to the prevailing assumptions regarding the effects of governmentality practices on *jornaleros'* behaviors (Camou 2002; Esbenshade 2000; Toma and Esbenshade 2001). In this analysis, the “best,” most functional, spaces for day-labor are not necessarily the most visible spaces. Therefore, when laborers look for work in spaces where their public visibility is reduced, the basis for laborers’ locational selection is not the result of self-policing to reduce visibility or remain “in the shadows” (Chavez 1998).

The final section highlights the noneconomic uses of day-labor spaces and the ways that *jornaleros* informally regulate their spatial organization and acceptable behaviors within day-labor spaces. The combination of these entangled sociospatial relationships between laborers, nearby stakeholders, and day-labor spaces themselves creates an emotional geography that connects individuals to a place in profoundly meaningful ways (Bosco 2006, 2007; Davidson, Bondi, and Smith 2005; Davidson and Milligan 2004; Pile 2010). These emotional connections to a place further solidify each day-labor space as part of the local landscape.

Research Methods and Local Context

The findings presented in this article are drawn from data collected between 2005 and 2012 as part of a mixed-methods project that took place in the SDMA. The primary purpose of this project was to reduce or eliminate day-labor-related community conflicts through geographically informed planning and policy implementation. The primary research methods for the project were site mapping, participant observation, and informal interviewing at or near hiring sites. About 45 hiring sites were identified in the SDMA during the mapping process. Once a site was identified, it was surveyed a minimum of four times per year, at three-month intervals, during which time the number of laborers using the site, as well as their demographic characteristics (race, gender, age), was recorded. Informal interviews were also conducted at each site at least once per year to better understand the ways that laborers used the sites and to identify particular social issues that were generating conflict at each site. Of the 45 sites, six were also selected for in-depth participant observation. These sites were selected because they exhibited particular geographic characteristics that are common among SDMA hiring sites.² These observation periods lasted between two and six weeks depending on the site, during which time I spent up to eight hours per day engaging laborers and nearby stakeholders in conversation and informal interviews, and observing laborers' activities between hiring opportunities.³ The stakeholders in each day-labor space vary, but there are a number of common actors. *Jornaleros*, customers, employees and owners of nearby businesses, local area residents, police agencies, and property owners all have a "stake" in the everyday activities in day-labor spaces. *Jornaleros* are stakeholders themselves, though for clarity, in the remainder of this article I use the term stakeholder to refer to all actors except *jornaleros*.

My long-term ethnographic engagement with day-labor activities at the regional scale includes more than 500 individual visits to day-labor sites and hundreds of hours of participant observation. This wealth of qualitative data

forms the foundation of the following discussions of the ways that various stakeholders interacted with day-labor hiring sites, both in times of relative stasis and during moments of day-labor-related crisis.

City Rhythms, Governmentality, and the Production of Day-Labor Space

Day-labor spaces are activity areas where *jornaleros* wait for potential employers, negotiate the terms of each job, eat, drink, socialize, and otherwise spend the time in between each employment negotiation. To be clear, day-labor spaces are not the locations where *jornaleros* perform paid labor; day-labor spaces are the general areas where *jornaleros* wait to be hired. Various actors produce day-labor spaces through informal negotiations that define where, when, and how day-laborers solicit employment. As a result of the constant negotiation and renegotiation between actors, sociospatial relationships are coproduced, and the boundaries of day-labor spaces become flexible and fluid. In this way, day-labor spaces are permeable, adaptable, and can be noncontiguous in some cases.

Spatial negotiations in the city depend on the immediacy of social interactions, which collectively constitute what Lefebvre (1996, p. 227) called “the music of the city.” Lefebvre (1996) further argued that understanding the rhythms of daily life—the differing speeds and interaction between pedestrian and automobile traffic, the comings and goings of shopkeepers and customers, even the sounds and smells at different times of the day—requires patient observation and reflection. Lefebvre (1991) further argued that these spatial practices collectively produce urban space by mediating the tension between what he called representations of space—abstract, imagined, and idealized spaces—and representational spaces—spaces that are adapted for use by residents.

Urban rhythms are not limited to peoples’ movements and activities. They also include institutional regulations, infrastructural constraints, automated machinery, the migratory patterns of animals, and a myriad of other elements out of the direct control of individual inhabitants of the city. John Allen (1999, p. 56) provided a thorough definition in his essay “Worlds Within Cities”:

By city rhythms, we mean anything from the regular comings and goings of people about the city to the vast range of repetitive activities, sounds and even smells that punctuate life in the city and which give many of those who live and work there a sense of time and location. This sense has nothing to do with overall orchestration of effort or any mass coordination of routines across a

city. Rather it arises out of the teeming mix of city life as people move in and around the city at different times of the day or night, in what appears to be a constant renewal process week in, week out, season after season.

Individuals use the rhythms of the city to frame their daily experiences; these rhythms are critical for understanding the routine interactions and negotiations between *jornaleros* and other stakeholders that collectively produce day-labor spaces. People understand order in the city as consistency in the “vast range of repetitive activities” and the sense of time and location that those activities provide. As Allen points out, this is not to argue that city rhythms are fixed or consciously organized, but that order is constituted through the production of a multitude of overlapping daily rhythms (Allen 1999; Amin and Thrift 2002). Therefore, *disorder* is identified by individuals as notable changes in daily practice or experience. Disorder is the embodied effect of changes in city rhythms.

Analysis of urban rhythms within the contemporary city must acknowledge the role of *governmentality practices* in shaping the movement and behaviors of individual inhabitants (Foucault 1991). Governmentality practices refer to methods of indirect social control, which neoliberal governments increasingly rely upon to regulate the behaviors of area residents. Recently, a number of authors have drawn on Foucault’s conceptualization of governmentality for understanding how particular groups are controlled through indirect techniques of governing (Dean 2010; Hiemstra 2010; Inda 2006; Puar and Rai 2002). In these perspectives, power is exercised through the normalization of particular knowledges and representations, which define appropriate forms of conduct and induce those behaviors in others. This notion, as John Allen (2003, p. 67) eloquently pointed out,

appears to be quite unremarkable—until, that is, one recognizes that the techniques of power only show up as an effect on the actions of others. There are no direct constraints on behavior, no overt sanctions or prohibitions on what should and should not be done.

The narrative of immigrant “illegality” provides an example of a technique of governmentality that, without making use of any direct behavioral constraints, sanctions or prohibitions, leads individuals to behave in ways they otherwise would not. The effects of the “illegality” discourse are quite significant, marginalizing Latinos, regardless of documentation status, both socially and economically. In a case study from Leadville, Colorado, Nancy Hiemstra (2010, p. 94) highlighted a number of the effects of “illegality” narrative. First, cheap immigrant labor is vital to the industries that have grown

under neoliberal philosophy: “by categorizing immigrants in particular ways, the federal government puts into place a self-sustaining, multi-scalar system for managing and controlling their labor.” Second, illegality depends on a particular understanding of the national border. Within discourse of illegality, the border between the United States and Mexico is symbolically defined as a dividing line between order and deviance, between danger and safety, and between lawful citizens and criminal migrants (Chacon and Davis 2006; Inda 2006). The discourse of illegality and criminality proves especially powerful, as it makes everyday residents view those that might be immigrants as threats to be policed. Both of the above effects limit immigrants’ mobility in their areas of residence (Hiemstra 2010). Because there is no visual marker of citizenship status, *all minority bodies* are marginalized and subject to increased surveillance and scrutiny when they seem “out of place” (Cresswell 1996).

In urban geographic literature, research drawing on the *right to the city* is critical for understanding how conflicting claims to space are negotiated. Most of this work examines the actions of groups that are understood to be powerful in the popular imagination—the state, police agencies, and corporations—as in opposition to groups thought to be less powerful in the popular imagination—women, the poor, homeless, minorities, and immigrants (Mitchell 2003; Varsanyi 2008; Wilson 1991). This body of research provides substantial evidence in support of the argument that the history of cities and urban design are intimately linked to the desire of those in power to control and, in particular, reduce the visibility of disorder. How disorder is defined varies both spatially and temporally. As Wilson (1991) observed, in nineteenth-century England, much of urban and public space regulation was intended to mollify changes in gender politics that saw women in cities beginning to organize and assert themselves politically. More recent research in North American cities links the decline of truly public spaces to the goals of neoliberal urban governance, which prioritizes social control to facilitate unfettered consumption and flows of capital. In both nineteenth-century London and U.S. cities of the twenty-first century, the political processes that determine government policy often exclude the groups most affected by new regulations (Low 2015; Smith and Low 2006; Swanson 2010; Zukin 1995, 2005). In these conflicts, the battle for the right to the city is fought through the occupation of public spaces in defiance of physical or regulatory actions meant to remove particular groups from the shared spaces of the city. Understanding the role of everyday occupations and constant negotiations in determining access and control of space is crucial for understanding how groups exercise their *right to the city* (Crotty and Bosco 2008; Low and Smith 2006; Mitchell 2003; Swanson 2007, 2010). The increasing importance of indirect forms of governance in the neoliberal city has drastic implications

for *right to the city* research because when governmentality practices are successful, individuals choose to avoid particular spaces on their own. In that case, the battle for the *right to the city* is not lost, it simply never begins.

The unfortunate aspect of past research examining the *right to the city* is that by focusing on mechanisms of control, rather than the ways that individuals and groups resist, rework, and remake spaces in the city, the work further marginalizes the groups whose plight it sought to draw attention to.⁴ In the context of day-labor studies, understanding the production of space as trajectories of overlapping daily rhythms is crucial, as it sharpens analysis of social dynamics among area stakeholders that can generate conflict. Early research on day-labor conflicts argued that day-laborers are viewed as “out of place” in suburban landscapes, normatively understood as “White” places (Esbenshade 2000; Crotty 2007). Yet even within highly racialized landscapes, such as suburbia, day-labor sites fail to generate contentious community conflicts more often than not. The absence of conflict is the result of two overlapping processes: laborers’ collective employment of *strategic visibility* and the production of normalcy through sustained presence of day-labor hiring sites in particular locations. Through these two spatial practices, *jornaleros* “secrete” space, thereby transforming representations of space into representational space (Merrifield 2002, p. 90).

Strategic Visibility and the Geography of Day-Labor in the SDMA

Success as a day-laborer depends on *strategic visibility*. Strategic visibility is the result of the complex and contradictory spatial demands of day-labor life. A day-laborer must be both visible and accessible so that a potential employer can see him and then approach him to negotiate the terms of employment. This need pushes the individual laborer to make himself as visible as possible, thereby increasing the number of potential employers who are aware of his availability. However, laborers are also dependent on the continued existence of the hiring site for their future employment. This leads laborers to avoid activities that draw negative attention and could jeopardize laborers’ collective access to the space.

Day-labor spaces are not homogeneous. The SDMA exhibits a number of place-specific characteristics that produce substantial differences between day-labor spaces within the region. Day-laborers in the SDMA are considerably more diverse than what national-level survey data indicate (Crotty 2014, 2015; Valenzuela et al. 2006). The U.S. military has a substantial presence in the region, and after completing their service, many veterans remain in the region. For some disabled veterans, day-labor markets provide a means of

generating income with low repercussions if their disability prevents them from completing a job. These men tend to seek work at sites that are accessible via the light rail system that serves the southern and eastern parts of the metro area. Another unique feature of the SDMA day-labor markets is the presence of a hiring site near the current or historical commercial center of nearly every municipality on the rural–suburban fringe of the metro area. The locational logic for these sites is relatively simple. Where population density and employment opportunities are low, sites must be convenient to the main activity centers of each small town. Despite substantial changes in the “centrality” of many of these commercial centers, day-labor spaces continue to operate in the same locations. The rugged physical geography of the SDMA also generates differences between day-labor spaces. There are many steep-walled canyons, hills, and other undeveloped open spaces in the region. For many years, migrants have camped in these spaces, often seeking work in agriculture or construction at nearby day-labor hiring sites. Laborers in the region refer to this type of housing arrangement as “living in the mountains.” By squatting in these canyon spaces, laborers make their labor available in areas where housing costs are extremely high. These three key characteristics are foundational elements of the five-part typology of SDMA day-labor sites identified by Crotty (2015). This typology organizes sites based on a variety of factors—the neighborhood demographic characteristics; spatial factors, such as distance from a major road or distance from a light rail station; and several locational characteristics that are common among many hiring sites in the region (e.g., proximity to a canyon where many of the laborers who use the site live). Table 1 provides additional details regarding the five types of sites. Despite differences in the characteristics of laborers at particular sites, differences in method of accessing day-labor spaces, and differences in the type of work hired from each day-labor space, day-laborers use of strategic visibility is consistent across all five hiring site types.

Laborers’ use of strategic visibility is also consistent across all 19 municipalities in the SDMA, each of which has a slightly different set of public space regulations that could potentially limit *jornaleros*’ ability to access and/or control the space in their daily search for employment.⁵ These variations in legal geography prove less important to laborers’ spatial strategies than variations in social tolerance for laborers’ presence among area stakeholders. In almost every case, the local police interact with laborers informally, using their implicit authority to guide day-labor activity to established day-labor spaces. This is partially due to local police forces’ reticence to ticket laborers looking for gainful employment. Policing or preventing people from trying to find work is not considered to be important police work and violates many officers’ own moral code (Herbert 1997). It is also the

Table 1. SDMA Hiring Site Typology.

Site Type	Description	Key Characteristics
Traditional center city	Center city sites are located primarily within central San Diego where population density is relatively high, even where single-family homes are the dominant housing type. Laborers who use center city sites reach the hiring site in a variety of ways. The neighborhoods around center city sites offer rental housing but not low-cost housing. To access their preferred hiring site, laborers may travel by public transit from lower-cost rental areas. Others may share a nearby residence to keep housing costs low. Better established laborers use their personal automobiles to access center city sites.	High population density, high rental density, proximity to public transit.
El Barrio	El Barrio sites are characterized by neighborhood racial and class-based segregation. Located in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods in the SDMA, El Barrio sites are also characterized by lower-cost rental housing and residents with lower median income than other types of day-labor neighborhoods.	High percentage of Hispanic residents, low percentage of White residents, low median rent; low median income.
Construction–town center	The construction–town center factor highlights clustering of construction employment and the availability of low-cost housing near the hiring site. Many of these sites exist in suburban town centers that have experienced disinvestment in recent years and now offer housing that is relatively affordable by San Diego County standards. At these sites, laborers need not travel great distances to make themselves available to employers.	High construction employment, low median rent, low median household income, location in a suburban or rural town center.

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Site Type	Description	Key Characteristics
Agricultural legacy	Agricultural legacy sites are primarily located on the suburban–rural fringe. These sites are located near to agricultural land use and in neighborhoods with disproportionately high levels of employment in agricultural industry. Laborers access these sites on foot or bike, as public transit is extremely limited on the rural fringe of the SDMA.	High agricultural employment, proximity to agricultural land use, long distance from public transit.
Migrant campsites	The mostly undocumented laborers who use these sites squat in area canyons or undeveloped spaces, walking out each morning and waiting at a nearby hiring site in hopes of finding work. Many of these hiring sites were established when the predominant land use nearby was agricultural. Over time, these areas transitioned from agricultural to suburban residential and commercial land uses.	Canyon adjacency, high median rent.

Source. Adapted from Crotty (2015).

Note. SDMA = San Diego Metropolitan Area.

result of day-labor spaces consistently transgressing divides between public and private space such that police and property owners are limited in their ability to forcibly relocate the *jornaleros*. Finally, in the SDMA, the department of Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE), colloquially known as the “border patrol” or “ICE,” maintains an active presence. Interviewees at all 45 sites recounted instances of “ICE raids” at their hiring site. Although I do not have empirical data on these raids, most *jornaleros* believed that ICE raided each site about once per year. These raids did not affect undocumented *jornaleros*’ site-selection or locational strategies, as the likelihood of being caught in a raid was believed to be equal at all sites. As the following examples demonstrate, day-laborers exhibit a relatively nuanced understanding of the legal and social geography in and around day-labor spaces.

The term *day-laborer* is so closely associated with “illegal immigrant” in U.S. public discourse that the terms are treated as roughly synonymous

(Varsanyi 2008). Therefore, day-laborers are viewed by many members of the general public as dangerous or threatening elements, simply by virtue of their visible presence (Cresswell 1996; Esbenshade 2000; Hiemstra 2010; Varsanyi 2008). It must be noted, however, that effects of governmentality practices are spatially mediated. This leads to differences in public perceptions of immigrants and minorities from place to place. The power of discourse-based governmentality practices is that the people it refers to cannot know with certainty which members of the public accept these negative discursive associations. When governmentality practices are successful, members of the target group alter their own behavior, potentially to their own detriment, to avoid scrutiny from the public. By this measure, there is little evidence that governmentality practices produce significant effects on day-laborers' locational selection process.

In the SDMA, day-labor hiring sites are located in neighborhoods where employment opportunities for *jornaleros* are highest. Compared with regional averages, day-labor neighborhoods have statistically higher levels of owner-occupied housing, as well as formal-sector employment in the construction and agricultural industries (Crotty 2015). This correlation demonstrates an understandable locational strategy at the regional scale that maximizes employment opportunity for day-laborers. What remains less clear is how particular locations *within* neighborhoods are designated for day-labor activity and how those locations are maintained as day-labor spaces over time. Without long-term historical analysis, it is impossible to know how particular locations were established as day-labor spaces. However, observation at existing sites in the SDMA shows that *jornaleros'* continued use of particular spaces is not driven by a desire to avoid public scrutiny but rather as a result of urban rhythms and the demands of day-labor employment seeking. The strategies employed by laborers are adapted to make the best use of particular spaces for employment seeking and a variety of other purposes. Furthermore, *jornaleros'* voluntary reduction in visibility does not necessarily translate into reduced employment opportunities or fortunes relative to other laborers at the site. If finding a job were simply a function of the number of people to whom a laborer was visible, hiring sites would only exist on the largest and most heavily trafficked roads. Only 7% of informal hiring sites in California are located along "busy streets" (Gonzalez 2007, p. 8). That such a small percentage of hiring sites exist on busy streets is evidence of a more nuanced locational strategy used by most *jornaleros*. The foundation for strategic visibility lies in the distinction between visibility and accessibility, and how both are shaped by the site and situational characteristics of particular places. The fortunes of day-laborers depend to a greater degree on *accessibility* than visibility, and roads with high traffic flows are often less accessible than less

visible spaces nearby. In San Diego County, only 29% of day-labor sites are located within 30 meters of a major road, but 96% of the sites are located within 300 meters of a major road. This strategy works because employers do not decide to hire a day-laborer impulsively. Employers know where hiring sites are located and depend on laborers to be in the same places each time they want to hire help. Hiring sites located near to, but not on, busy roads are convenient for employers and do not create unnecessarily hazardous traffic conditions, which would draw negative attention from the general public. Indeed, laborers choosing to congregate in spaces where employers can pull over without causing hazardous traffic conditions provides a good example of a spatial practice that accomplishes both of the primary goals for *jornaleros*. At each informal hiring site, laborers must negotiate the particular site and situational characteristics to maximize their accessibility and minimize their physical obtrusiveness to the general public.

Laborers' ability to change the physical design and infrastructure at an informal hiring site is limited. The existence or situation of sidewalks, shade trees, buildings, parking lots, and driveways are static. Activity in the spaces is not static, however, and the intensity of activity varies spatially and temporally. Local traffic patterns and the operating hours of nearby businesses are just two of the many factors that influence the production of day-labor space. *Jornaleros* move and adjust the boundaries of day-labor spaces throughout the day in response to daily rhythms of the city as well. Site 30 (see Figures 1–3) in San Diego provides a good example of a site where laborers take advantage of the street and building layout to make themselves strategically visible (Figure 3). The site is convenient for employers, as it is less than 200 meters from a freeway and is positioned along one of the major east–west thoroughfares in San Diego. The day-labor space is adjacent to a paint store located on the southeast corner of the major thoroughfare and a smaller side street. Laborers congregate primarily in two areas along 33rd street (marked A and B in Figure 3). This situation renders the site nearly invisible to cars passing on the busy street but allows laborers to congregate directly adjacent to the primary parking area for customers of the paint store. For the first few hours of each day, there is very little activity in the parking lot on the west side of the side street. The bank does not open until 9:00 a.m. each day, and though the grocery store is open, its customers tend to park on the northwest side of the parking lot, which is closer to the store's entrance. During this time, and in response to the minimal parking lot traffic, laborers extend their waiting area farther into the parking lot (marked C in Figure 3). This provides greater space for negotiating with employers and other nonemployment-related activities. As traffic increases throughout the morning, the day-labor space shrinks as the

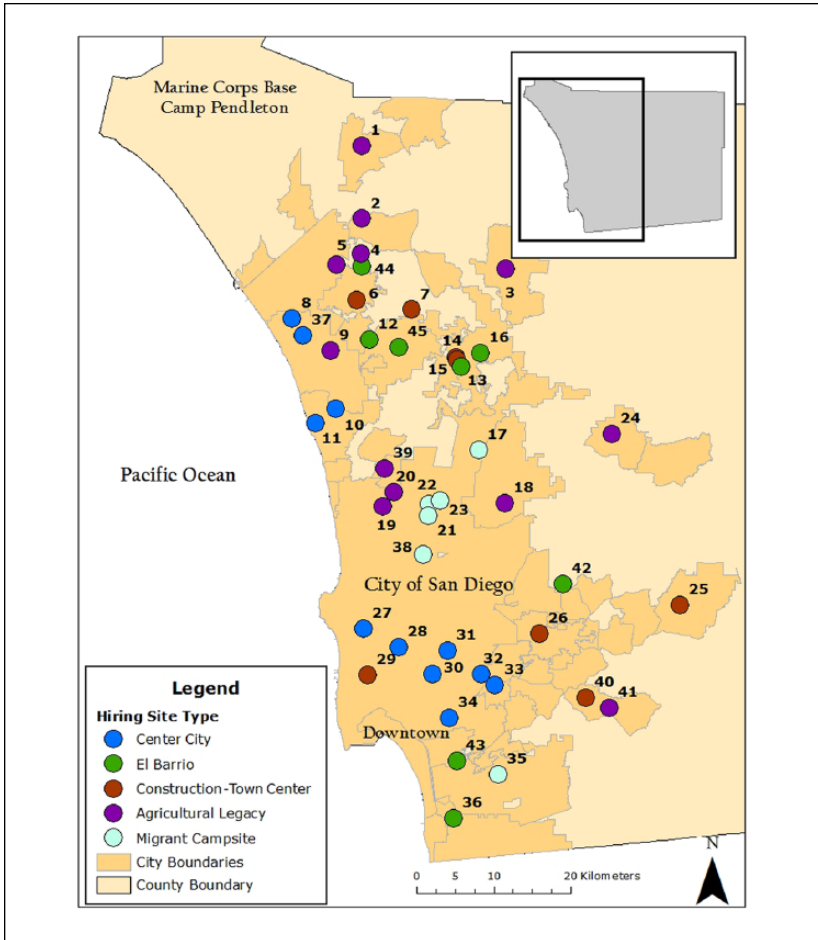


Figure 2. San Diego day-labor hiring sites by type.

jornaleros relocate a few meters to avoid disturbing customers of the bank and grocery.

Laborers at the canyon-adjacent site in North San Diego, shown in Figure 4, similarly use the street layout to make themselves strategically visible. At this site, laborers primarily congregate along the smaller side street in the area marked “A” in Figure 4. From this position, their visibility is minimized for traffic on the major street, but they are easily accessible for any employer who wishes to hire help for the day. Laborers at this site also adjust their locational

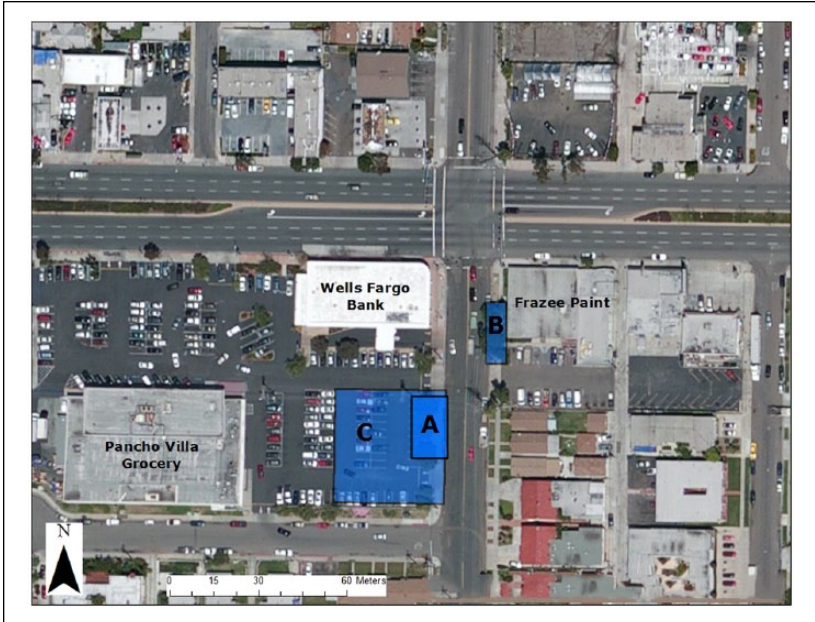


Figure 3. Site 30.

Note. *Jornaleros* looking for work as general laborers adjust their waiting areas depending on traffic flow (illustrated by zones A and C). Those looking for work as expert painters cluster in the area marked B.

strategies according to urban rhythms. Early in the morning, and sometimes late in the evening (after 7:00 p.m.), a few laborers will wait in the area marked “B” in Figure 4. From this position, the laborers are more visible but no more accessible. Extending the day-labor space to the corner was a much less common practice than the daily expansion and contraction of the day-labor space on 33rd Street. In my 22 visits to the site, I only saw laborers waiting on the corner five times, and I was not able to determine a particular factor in their choice other than the time of day and possibly boredom. In my conversations with laborers at the site, none conveyed a specific reason for waiting in one space versus another. The locational practice is so deeply embedded in a place that it is not something that is actively considered.

At this site, I came to know a *jornalero* from Jalisco, Mexico, named Hector.⁶ Hector is about 60 years old and spends seven months a year in San Diego working to support his family in Jalisco. He returns to Jalisco the remaining months to be with his wife and three of their six children, who live at home. Hector has made the trek from Jalisco to San Diego each of the



Figure 4. Site 22 in San Diego.

past 40 years. Every year, he returns to the same day-labor space to look for work. Although the type of work for which he is hired changes with the continual shift from agricultural land use to suburban residential, the physical space he occupies (and depends on) in the community has not. When I asked Hector why he looked for work at this particular site, he responded, “I have come here for many years. I know this place well. It is close to where I camp.” Hector’s decision regarding which hiring site to use is based on long-term familiarity with the space and its spatial proximity to the canyon space where he lives more than half of every year. When asked why he chose to wait in one area along the street as opposed to others, he was nonplussed. “I don’t know. The whole street is the same. I wait here . . . I wait there . . . it’s all the same.”

When there is no convenient side street to use for a hiring site, laborers often use situational characteristics to maintain access to more functional day-labor spaces. One common method is for *jornaleros* to congregate in a space that is 5 to 10 meters from a busy road. This simple action also reduces laborers’ visibility, as moving even a short distance from the road keeps the men out of the line of sight of a great number of drivers. Figure 5



Figure 5. Site 37 in Carlsbad.

shows site 37, which is located along an old state highway in northern San Diego. At this site, laborers have congregated in a parking lot adjacent to a nursery and convenience grocery store for more than 30 years. Once a potential employer enters the parking lot, the laborers are clearly visible and accessible; however, the areas where the men wait for work are considerably less visible to passing traffic. The laborers congregating in area B use the nursery's tree line to reduce their visibility, whereas another group of laborers waits in and around their own automobiles in area A. Both waiting areas are a sufficient distance from the main road to reduce their visibility to nonemployers as they pass the site at 80 kilometers per hour. It also would be impractical for the laborers to negotiate terms of a job with an employer on the main road. There is no safe space for employers to stop their vehicles out of the flow of traffic, which moves quite quickly on this old state highway. Therefore, though the *jornaleros'* locational strategy at this site reduces their visibility, laborers do not choose to wait away from the main road to avoid publicity or surveillance. The less visible spaces simply work better for day-labor activities.

Locational Conflict, Cooperation, and the Production of Day-Labor Space

Negotiating the informal rules of behavior and interaction can be challenging for newly arrived laborers and ethnographic researchers alike. It takes time to learn the particular rhythms and sociospatial dynamics that govern each day-labor space. There are a myriad of factors that go into spatial decision making for day-laborers; however, the relationships developed as *jornaleros* learn the informal rules of each day-labor space and connect each laborer to the site in important and meaningful ways. This connection to place means that laborers rarely switch sites after they select a space to wait for work (Turnovsky 2004, 2006). The regularity of sociospatial activity at each site provides stability in a profession where stability is rare, and continuity is highly valued. Strategic visibility at the microgeographic scale is an important element in the production of day-labor space, but it does not prevent conflict in every case. Claims to space must be negotiated continually, and though these negotiations do sometimes generate conflict, they also produce affective bonds that connect the day-labor space to stakeholders in the neighborhood.

Throughout the fieldwork for this project, I observed little tension in the relationships between laborers and stakeholders in the immediate vicinity of day-labor activity. At hiring sites in San Diego County, business owners were mostly indifferent to the presence of *jornaleros* near their stores. A number of stores and shopping centers employ security guards to regulate the activities that occur on their property, but day-labor activity was not the impetus for hiring a security guard at any site in the county. Few stakeholders actively worked to prevent laborers from congregating in the general area, though some of the limitations to private control of space discussed below influenced the business owners' decisions regarding attempts to control day-labor. Most took no action related to day-laborers, and a few took actions to address the most common problems that arise as a result of the *jornaleros*' presence.

Contentious Relationships

The stability I observed in the locations of day-labor hiring sites in San Diego County is not necessarily indicative of stakeholder approval of day-labor activities. In some cases, it is simply the result of laborers' ability to adapt day-labor spaces to shifts in social, legal, and even physical geography in the places they wish to wait for work. As a group, laborers draw on nontraditional resources that other stakeholders in negotiations for control of space simply cannot, or will not, match. Need, time, and cooperation are particularly



Figure 6. Site 11.

Note. *Jornaleros* previously congregated in the space marked A but have since relocated to the spaces marked B and C.

important resources for laborers in their struggle to maintain access to preferred spaces for congregation (Crotty and Bosco 2008).

Changes in the microgeography of a day-labor space can occur under a number of circumstances. The most common circumstance is when a new stakeholder enters the *daily* negotiation for control of space. One such occasion is when nearby properties change ownership or management. This introduces new actors who are invested in the space and have the authority to restrict access to private property. Figure 6 shows site 11, a day-labor space in Northwest San Diego County.

According to a longtime area resident, day-labor activity at this site dates to the 1970s. For most of that time, laborers congregated primarily in the area marked “A” in Figure 6. In 2010, all *jornaleros* stopped congregating in area A. The bulk of the men moved across the street to the area marked “B.” A smaller group of *jornaleros* moved to the area marked “C.” According to laborers in both of the newly established waiting areas, the impetus for their movement from the traditional waiting area was a change in ownership of the

adjacent commercial shopping center. The new owner did not approve of the laborers congregating along the driveway to the shopping center and repeatedly called the local police to visit the site and remove the laborers. The laborers acquiesced to the owner's request and simply found new areas to congregate nearby. Both of the new areas are easily accessible and near enough to the original waiting area that any employer who visited the site to hire help would certainly still be able to connect with the *jornaleros*. In fact, both areas B and C are improvements in terms of the *jornaleros*' strategic visibility compared with area A.

In area B, laborers congregate in a shaded area near the back of a low-traffic parking lot. Thanks to limited traffic, negotiations can take place comfortably and the *jornaleros* are considerably less visible to the bystander public. Area B is on private property but straddles the property line between two hotels, so laborers can easily cross the boundary that determines legal authority within the day-labor space. Laborers who wait in area C wait along the public sidewalk generally next to their personal vehicles, which they park along the street. Area C is clearly visible from the northbound interstate exit ramp, so it is at least equally visible as area A, but it is even more *accessible* because the road design allows for employers to safely pull to the side of the street to negotiate the terms of employment. To hire help at site A, employers had to pull all the way into the shopping center parking lot or stop their vehicles in moving traffic on Encinitas Boulevard. As the laborers shift the areas where they congregate, they must negotiate access to space with other stakeholders. Because the laborers in area C congregate almost entirely in public spaces, there is little that the police can do to prevent them from occupying that space without committing to long-term physical presence themselves. Moreover, even long-term police presence is no guarantee that day-labor activity would cease in area C. In this particular municipality, there are no existing regulations that provide legal justification for forcibly relocating laborers (or any other resident) from a sidewalk.⁷ Therefore, the laborers who congregate in area C have a substantially stronger position in their negotiation for controlling space than do the laborers who congregate in area B, which is located on the property line between two commercial properties. Either owner could seek the police's assistance in enforcing their private property rights and relocating the *jornaleros*. The challenge in this type of negotiation is the persistence of the property owner in enforcing his right to control space relative to the laborers' need to access the space in their search for employment. Local police can only force laborers to leave the complainants' parking lot. This proves rather ineffectual if the police are unwilling to dedicate significant time to directly policing the day-labor space: *Jornaleros* could simply move back onto private property after the police leave the area.

The importance of understanding the microgeographic dimensions of individual hiring sites is made clear by examining the sociospatial relationships that govern the production of day-labor space at sites connected to Home Depot stores. Officially, the company takes no position on day-labor issues:

The existence of this issue is one that's beyond the Home Depot's control . . . Like many businesses, we have a policy of non-solicitation of our stores by individuals and organizations who aren't affiliated with our company. The reason for that is really simple—our customers tell us they want a shopping experience that's easy and comfortable. (quoted in Greenhouse 2005, A1(L))

This statement by a Home Depot spokesperson provides insight into the key factor for regulation of day-labor activities connected to Home Depot stores: consumer comfort. Examining the regulation of day-labor activities near Home Depot stores in the San Diego area provides further evidence of the flexibility in day-labor-management strategies exercised by the manager of each store. Every Home Depot location in the San Diego area employs a security guard who is tasked to maintain security in their parking lots. In most cases, their responsibilities are focused on preventing automobile break-ins and theft, though in many cases security guards are also required to enforce the company's nonsolicitation policy. There is considerable variation, however, in the degree to which this directive is enforced between Home Depot locations. The differences in day-labor management between store locations can be attributed to two factors: the personality and temperament of the private security guard assigned to each location and the number of customer complaints about day-labor activity at each store.

The security guards assigned to Home Depot stores are contracted through a private security firm, and their continued assignment at a particular location depends on meeting the demands of the store manager. Many of the security guards empathize with the day-laborers' situation and, in some cases, even refuse to police the laborers' activities. One such security guard named Joe described his experience on his first, and last, day assigned to a Home Depot store.

I just hate people being hypocritical. These guys are just looking for work and I'm supposed to keep them off the property? I took this shift as a favor to my boss. He said they needed someone to cover it so I did, but he didn't say shit about what I was supposed to do here. I thought it was parking lot security job, watching cars and shit. Then she (the manager of the Home Depot) comes running over saying "One of them is in the parking lot." I asked her who *they* were. She said "the day workers." Bullshit. I ain't never working here again.



Figure 7. Site 10.

Note. *Jornaleros* previously congregated in area A but have relocated to areas B, C, and D due to customer complaints about their presence.

In the majority of cases, however, the security guards' ability to relate to the *jornaleros* and communicate in a respectful manner facilitates relatively stable sociospatial environment at each site. Situations where security guards are hypervigilant in policing day-labor activities are less frequent and reflect differences in tolerance for day-labor activity among the customers at the locations. In the absence of customer complaints, laborers are left to negotiate access to space among themselves and with the security guard. When customers complain about day-labor activities, the security guards are instructed to take actions to restrict day-laborers' activities more severely. This is the case at the Home Depot location, designated as site 10, located in Northwest San Diego County (Figure 7).

Early in the mapping portion of this project, I observed laborers at this Home Depot location congregating primarily in the area marked "A" in Figure 7. From this space, the laborers were beyond the line of sight of cars passing along the adjacent major road and also out of the way for the majority of the store's customers. In this space, *jornaleros* were accessible to employers while

reducing their public visibility. Their locational strategy at this site also illustrated their collective respect for the customers who did not wish to hire labor that day. At this particular location, the laborers' employment of strategic visibility proved insufficient for eliminating complaints from nonemployers. The areas of day-labor congregation at this site changed in 2008, when customer complaints about day-laborers' presence led to a change in the security guard assigned to the store location during active day-labor hiring hours. The new security guard is more assertive in restricting laborers' access to private property. As a result, laborers now congregate on public sidewalks near the driveways at the northern and southern ends of the parking lot (marked B and C in Figure 7). Even after being relocated, laborers display a nuanced understanding of urban rhythms in their locational selection. The northern and southern driveways are used less frequently than the middle driveway, so there is less potential for congestion when employers stop their vehicles in the driveway to negotiate terms for a job. Laborers also congregate in the area marked "D," which straddles the line between Home Depot's property and undeveloped space to the south. From all of these new positions, laborers can make themselves accessible to employers, and are positioned in spaces that store management and security cannot legally restrict.

These new areas of day-labor congregation are much more visible than area A and would be less accessible to employers if Home Depot management did not also view laborers' employers as *customers*. According to the security guard assigned to the store during the main hours for day-labor activity, the laborers must remain on public property until an employer pulls onto Home Depot property, at which point the *jornaleros* are allowed to enter the parking lot and negotiate their terms of employment. Even at sites where laborers are viewed as a problem, Home Depot's priority is always providing a comfortable shopping experience for their customers.

As these few examples should make clear, even when tensions exist or increase between laborers and stakeholders in or around day-labor spaces, they almost never form the basis for a conflict at the neighborhood, municipal, or broader scales. Stakeholders use the resources available to them to exert influence and control space in particular ways, but the temporal and spatial negotiations that produce day-labor spaces also generate affective bonds between individuals and groups. These affective bonds are embedded in *place*, as they not only connect stakeholders to each other but also to the particular day-labor spaces where the emotional connections were made. Overall, particular emotional geographies emerge (Bosco 2006, 2007; Ettlinger 2004; Thrift 2004), where affective bonds decrease animosity, and, in many cases, generate productive and supporting arrangements between laborers and stakeholders in day-labor spaces.

Reciprocity in Jornalero–Stakeholder Relationships

Stakeholders whose daily routine includes substantial time spent near day-labor spaces often develop mutually beneficial relationships with *jornaleros*. Many business owners, for example, accept the presence of laborers near their businesses and even support the *jornaleros* in a number of ways. The owners and managers of convenience grocery stores throughout the region are particularly supportive of day-laborers congregating near their businesses. The laborers choose to wait near the convenience stores starting early in the morning because the stores are common stops for construction crews picking up inexpensive food, coffee, and other sundries at the start of their workday. Congregating near these stores places laborers in the path of travel for their most important potential employers. Convenience store owners and managers benefit from laborers' presence in two ways. First, laborers are quite consistent and loyal customers. Second, laborers may attract other customers to a particular store and thereby improve that business's fortunes. Most convenience store owners in the SDMA acknowledge that the *jornaleros*' presence may intimidate some customers, but none that I spoke with believed the total loss of business was particularly significant. Two store owners even argued that the laborers attracted customers to their store rather than others and viewed the presence of day-laborers as a means of differentiating their store from others like it.

Jornaleros' role as regular customers of the stores they congregate near alters their relationship with those businesses. Some convenience stores in the region stock special products for the laborers, which vary depending on the particular types of laborers who visit the site each day. For example, the laborers who wait at the site shown in Figure 5 are regular customers of the convenience/liquor store located at the west end of the building in the center of the image. The grocery stocks a number of products that are popular among the predominantly Hispanic laborers who visit the store daily. Some of these goods are stereotypical Hispanic foods: a variety of tortillas and hot sauces and canned foods (soup and beans are most popular).⁸ The store also carries a number of products that laborers demand as a result of their relative poverty and the fact that most of the laborers at the site reside in area canyons (e.g., packages of ramen noodle soup; waterproof matches; inexpensive hats, gloves, and socks; soap, shampoo, and other toiletries). By providing goods that the laborers need and want, the convenience store increases its daily receipts and changes the nature of the day-labor space. The site ceases to be a place exclusively for employment and socializing between laborers. It becomes a space of mutual benefit, if not dependence, for the *jornaleros* and the business alike. When the relationships between *jornaleros* and nearby

stakeholders are based on reciprocity and respect, it allows for more productive discussions of how to best manage activities in the day-labor space. For example, the convenience store in Figure 5 provides a portable toilet that is freely accessible to both laborers and other customers in immediate need. Nate, the owner of this particular convenience store, explained his decision to pay for the toilet as both “good for business” and an effort to “keep the peace” with the businesses with whom he shares a building and parking lot.

Eh, those guys have been waiting for work here longer than I’ve been here. Someone told me like 30 years, but I don’t know. They (laborers) don’t get in the way much and they buy stuff from me . . . I don’t have a public toilet inside the store, so the one out back is for all my customers. That way they don’t bother the folks at the café.

Public urination and defecation are among the most common complaints regarding day-labor spaces. At sites without access to toilets, norms of social acceptance often require that *jornaleros* find discrete places to relieve themselves, and often, area stakeholders do not view their selected locations as sufficiently discrete. Therefore, establishing access to toilets for laborers is a critical step in avoiding conflict related to day-labor activity. And Nate is not the only shopkeeper in the region to provide bathroom access for laborers (see Figure 8).

Alternative Uses and Self-Regulation in Day-Labor Spaces

An unfortunate aspect of most day-labor research is that it tends to overstate the occurrence of conflict and the role of negative social interactions in the negotiation of day-labor spaces. In reality, the vast majority of social interactions in day-labor spaces are positive. *Jornaleros* in this research demonstrated an admirable collective ability to find happiness under challenging circumstances, which can give day-labor spaces a convivial atmosphere. Day-labor spaces play a substantive role in the collective psychology of *jornaleros* because, first and foremost, day-labor hiring sites are spaces of socialization. Laborers congregate at sites every day in hopes of finding work; however, the nature of day-labor employment provides ample time for socializing among laborers and with community members who regularly pass through day-labor spaces as well. Laborers are quite active in reworking spaces for their purposes, which are not exclusively related to finding work.

At the site depicted in Figure 3, laborers have extended the day-labor space into an adjacent parking lot, which they use primarily for social

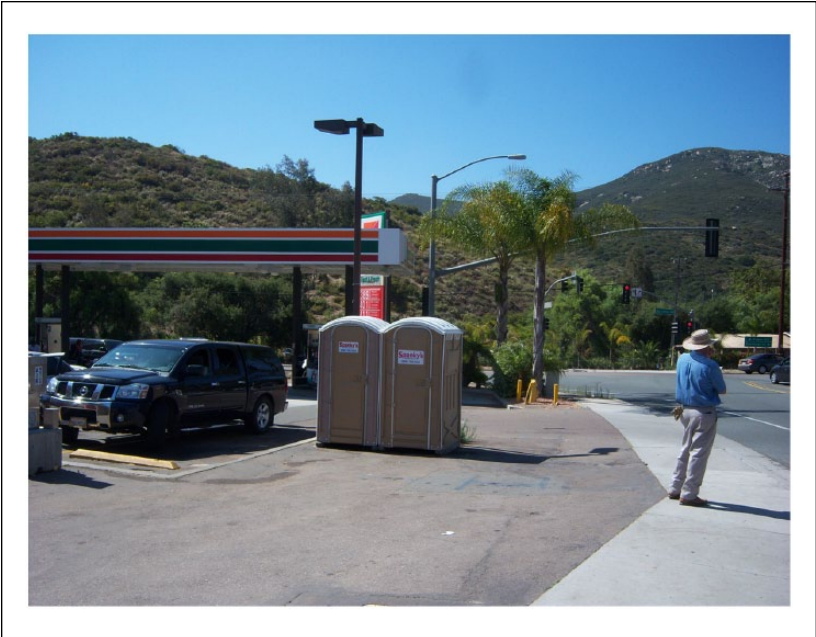


Figure 8. Portable toilets provided by the shop owner near this hiring site in Southwest San Diego.
Source. Photo credit: Crotty.

activities while they wait for employers. The rear edge of the parking lot is lined by a short concrete wall that the *jornaleros* use as a backstop for handball games. The laborers sometimes play small-sided soccer games on the edges of the lot when customer traffic is low and the parking lot is empty. The laborers at this particular hiring site are somewhat unique because the surrounding businesses overwhelmingly approve of the *jornaleros*' presence. Neither the grocery store, bank, nor paint store that are adjacent to the site have sought to remove laborers from the area, and have acted on the laborers' behalf. The bank located adjacent to the day-labor space employs a private security guard who patrols the parking lot. According to a number of laborers and an employee of the bank, in 2008 the security guard assigned to the building was aggressive with *jornaleros* in his efforts to control activities in the bank parking lot. After a number of customer complaints regarding the security guard's behavior toward the *jornaleros*, the bank demanded that his company assign a new security guard who was more sensitive to the social dynamics in the neighborhood. Through this action, the bank helped to

maintain the long-standing informal arrangements regarding the use of space in the area. The affective relationships between the nearby businesses and day-laborers are more evident in simple interactions that take place every day in and around the day-labor space. Employees of the grocery store often stop and socialize with the *jornaleros* on their way to work. The younger laborers sometimes flirt with female employees, who, occasionally, flirt back. Employees of the paint store similarly stop and chat with *jornaleros*—though their conversations tend to be more professionally focused than do the interactions between *jornaleros* and the grocery store's employees. In neighborhoods where local businesses and local residents view laborers as a problem, as was the case at the Home Depot depicted in Figure 7, *jornaleros* are less assertive in their control of space and engage in fewer playful behaviors in day-labor spaces.

The degree to which day-labor spaces are used for playful activities is related to the construction of place, and where laborers as individuals understand their position in relation to other actors. Therefore, laborers “with papers” may be bolder in their methods of attracting attention—both for finding employment, and creating and maintaining social ties. Similarly, undocumented day-laborers may feel greater freedom to draw attention in neighborhoods where the residents are demographically similar to themselves. It is through these interactions that laborers develop social and economic networks, informally organize the day-labor space, and enforce behavioral norms for each hiring site.

Microcultures of Day-Labor Encounter Spaces

Each day-labor site can be understood as an “encounter space”: the space where most personal and group interactions take place (Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001). The regularity of interactions in encounter spaces collectively establishes the rhythms of the city and, in the case of interactions between laborers, employers, and local stakeholders, produces day-labor space (Amin and Thrift 2002; Massey 2005). The nature of day-labor space varies between sites and is constantly being produced through new interactions and engagements. Norms for spatial organization and acceptable behaviors are part of the “microculture” of each particular hiring site (Wulff 1995, p. 65). Day-labor spaces serve both economic and social needs. The microculture of each site must serve both needs simultaneously. The norms of behavior and sociospatial organization at day-labor sites are constantly being reworked, remade, and redefined. The consistency of daily happenings at each site is the result of considerable informal policing of behaviors deemed inappropriate at a particular site. In most cases, this means that longer-tenured laborers (or

other stakeholders familiar with the space) alert newer, or misbehaving, laborers when their behaviors violate the informal “rules” for each site.

The microcultures of day-labor spaces develop through particular forms of spatial organization. At sites throughout San Diego County, laborers congregate in groups of three to five men while they wait for employers to arrive. These small groups are ideal for socialization and also improve the groups’ employment opportunities. Through regular conversations, the small groups of laborers develop stronger friendships and affective bonds with particular laborers. These social bonds improve each laborer’s employment opportunities because they establish a foundation for recommendations during the rapid employment negotiations for day-labor work. The best jobs for day-laborers tend to require more than one laborer. When one member of a group is hired, he often recommends other members of the group to fill remaining positions.

The small groups *jornaleros* establish often follow racial, ethnic, or class-based divisions. For laborers who speak different languages, this is not so surprising; socialization is difficult when members of a group do not share a common language. However, laborers’ self-segregation within day-labor spaces is often caused by less obvious processes. In some cases, the divisions between laborers are the result of geographic or structural factors, as was the case at site 27, where three distinct groups of laborers used the day-labor space to somewhat different purposes (Crotty and Bosco 2008). In other cases, divisions are the result of differences in access to particular resources. At the day-labor space depicted in Figure 6, there are significant demographic differences between the laborers who congregate in the area marked B and those who congregate in area C. The group in area B is almost entirely undocumented immigrants from Central America. Due to their lack of legal residence and corresponding fear of deportation, these men are motivated to avoid public attention to a much greater degree than are the Hispanic-American *jornaleros* who congregate in area C. The *jornaleros* who wait for work in area C are all legal residents of the United States and have access to more resources (e.g., automobiles, stable housing, and government assistance) than do the Central American *jornaleros* who wait for work just across the interstate. The divisions within the day-laboring population at this site demonstrate the importance of different types of resources in negotiations for space, and, in particular, how structural resources like citizenship affect the ways that groups of laborers engage with and produce day-labor spaces. At this site, like many others, the social divisions along racial, ethnic, class, and documentation status that exist within the day-labor population are mediated by social and geographic situation. Each laborer’s engagement with the day-labor space is the product of an ongoing intersection of processes entangled

across space. Urban form and social stratification change more slowly than other aspects of *jornaleros*' lives, so cleavages within the population occur along the more intractable lines of division within the broader society. More simply, the markers of identity along which *jornaleros* tend to organize are produced in relation to the production of day-labor spaces themselves.

The social divisions like those observed at site 11 are uncomfortable and diminish laborers' ability to organize to improve their daily experience but are not a direct threat to the continued existence of a day-labor space. That is not the case at sites where drug and alcohol use become part of the microculture of the day-labor space.

Informal Regulation of Deviant Behaviors

For day-labor spaces, littering, public urination/defecation, and visible drinking and/or drug use are the behaviors most likely to draw negative attention from the public and nearby stakeholders. How laborers manage these issues varies depending on the microculture of the site, which is shaped in no small part by the neighborhood and landscape in which the site is located. In my observations at hiring sites throughout San Diego County, I identified two sites where alcohol use is a part of the daily routine for a portion of the day-laborers: sites 27 and 29. These sites are located in neighborhoods reasonably near to each other and share several common characteristics that distinguish them from other (sub)urban areas in the region. They are both beach communities located in the central part of the metropolitan area. A sizable percentage of the residents in both neighborhoods are young, and the commercial geography of both neighborhoods caters to tourists and young adults; there are a disproportionate number of bars and restaurants, as well as adult entertainment venues concentrated in the area. The most conspicuous difference between these neighborhoods and other suburban areas is the presence of a visible homeless population in both neighborhoods. Despite the relatively affluent residential populations in both neighborhoods, poverty and homelessness have been, and continue to be, a significant and visible part of the landscape. Local residents may not like the visible markers of poverty in their neighborhood, but they accept them as part of life in their chosen "lifestyle zone" (Ford 2005). Day-labor sites hardly stand out in a landscape where homelessness is hypervisible and vice comprises a significant portion of the local economy. In this context, the norms of acceptable behavior in day-labor spaces are less conservative than in other neighborhoods.

During my fieldwork at site 29, I observed between 10% and 20% of the laborers drinking alcohol while they waited for work. Despite the prevalence of alcohol use at the site, laborers at the site still enforce limits on acceptable

behavior, however. The norms of behavior here have to do with the *public visibility* of the consumption. Most laborers mask their drinking in various ways,⁹ so the standard for acceptable behavior is violated when someone drinks straight from his can or bottle—such that a passerby could be sure that he was drinking alcohol and not coffee, soda, or another less intoxicating substance. Public use of marijuana is less common than alcohol consumption at this site, but it does occur with some frequency. Laborers share responsibility for regulating acceptable practices for marijuana use as well. Specifically, those who chose to use marijuana were discouraged from using particular smoking paraphernalia at the site. Hand-rolled marijuana cigarettes or “joints” are acceptable, as they appear identical to the hand-rolled cigarettes that many of the laborers smoke. Other smoking devices, such as pipes, or improvised devices from cans or bottles are less accepted—particularly during prime hiring hours. Drugs, such as methamphetamine, heroin, or crack cocaine, are not used publicly, though a few of the men who wait at the site use them on occasion. The laborers I spoke with, who admitted to using these sorts of drugs, also claimed to stay away from the hiring site while under their influence. The variety of minor behavioral adjustments that laborers at site 29 make to reduce the visibility of intoxicating activities demonstrates a fairly nuanced understanding of tolerance for deviant behavior at the neighborhood level. By maintaining a standard of behavior that is less problematic than other elements in the landscape, the laborers ensure their access to the day-labor space—for whatever purposes they choose to use it.

One somewhat surprising use of the day-labor space at site 29 is for alcohol and drug *rehabilitation*. For men dealing with addiction issues, it may seem counterintuitive that a day-labor site where drugs and alcohol are regularly present could serve as a space for both emotional and economic recovery. On my first visit to the site 29, I met a laborer in his early 40s named John. John is originally from New York City, where he worked as a welder until he “got into trouble because of his drinking.” He moved to San Diego in August 2001. For John, the move to San Diego was a life-altering experience. It was “right before 9/11, if I had still been there I’d probably have died.” According to John, he “straightened his life out” for nearly eight years. He was married and had a child. He had a job doing high-rise welding and belonged to a union. In 2008, John became an early victim of the “Great Recession” when the job he was working was indefinitely put on hold because the developer ran out of money (Crotty 2014; Elsby, Hobjin, and Sahin 2010). John and his wife “hit a rough patch in their relationship” about the same time. That confluence of events proved very difficult, and John began drinking and using methamphetamine. His addiction cost him his marriage, his job, and, recently, the legal right to see his son. During my fieldwork at site

29, John had been in and out of recovery for a year. For him, day-labor work is an entrée into potentially longer-term employment if he can stay away from drugs and alcohol. If he relapses, day-labor work will still be an option. Compared with jobs in the formal sector of the economy, day-labor has very little memory. Site 29 is an important part of John's financial recovery. It is also an important part of his emotional recovery and support network. John did not return to the site for several days after our first conversation. When he returned, several of his friends at the site asked where he had been.

John: Tweakin' for a few days.

Christopher: Well that's the *wrong* answer. What happened?

John: I called to talk to my son and Diane wouldn't put him on the phone. I got a skateboard for him.

Christopher: Sorry John. She can't keep you away forever. You're his father.

These sort of supportive exchanges and positive, affective relationships are an important part of John's recovery. In his own words, "I don't know where I'd be without these guys . . . probably dead."

John is not alone in his use of day-labor space for recovery. Laborers at site 29 spend significant portions of their day reading pocket Bibles provided at addiction support meetings. Others discuss the amends they want to make with friends and family. Day-labor spaces provide an environment where laborers can establish and strengthen social connections and support networks. How they use those networks depends on their needs at a given time. Through these social processes, day-labor hiring sites are layered with emotional content that produces thick connections between *jornaleros* and particular day-labor spaces (Bosco 2006). Those connections are particularly important for John, who believes that this day-labor space and the network of friends he built there are quite literally keeping him alive.

Conclusion

The rhythms of the city are immensely complicated in practice but are quite representable when observed over time. The stability produced through routinized activity in place is critical for the production of day-labor spaces. The ritualized, repetitive activities and social interactions imbue day-labor spaces with affective meaning. *Jornaleros* and other nearby stakeholders come to depend on day-labor spaces in various ways and take actions to maintain access to specific day-labor spaces.

Examining day-labor spaces from this perspective provides insights regarding the role of governmentality practices on day-laborers' locational selection processes. The findings in this study provide nuance for the means by which governmentality practices produce material outcomes in place. These findings are not meant to undermine the important contributions to understanding how social control is exercised in contemporary society made by governmentality scholars in the past 20 years (Foucault 1991; Hiemstra 2010). Rather, the example of day-laborers' collective employment of strategic visibility highlights the ways that traditionally marginalized groups like day-laborers can, and do, defy stereotypes about themselves. Hiemstra's (2010) powerful articulation of the effects of the neoliberal discourse of immigrant "illegality" provides an example of governmentality limiting residents' freedoms at the regional and state scale. Yet there are undoubtedly examples of migrants who resist the constraining force of these narratives and create spaces of resistance that serve their needs. In the case of day-laborers, one could argue that day-laborers' practice of strategic visibility is the result of their fear of deportation or arrest that could result from members of the general public reporting them to local policing agencies (Hiemstra 2010).

Undocumented laborers would certainly prefer to not be arrested or deported. However, strategic visibility does not protect *jornaleros* from regular, if infrequent, raids by policing agencies in the region. Day-labor sites are not secret, despite their situation in relatively less visible locations. I asked nearly every laborer I spoke with to explain how he decided where he would look for work, and where he preferred to stand waiting within the day-labor space. In six years of fieldwork, only one group of laborers voiced a basis for site selection that was related to anti-immigrant sentiment. The overwhelming majority cited a range of attributes that made a particular site attractive, most of which were related to immediate material concerns: the amount of work at a site, accessibility from the laborer's residence, sufficient space for socializing, and social connections with other laborers at a site. Strategic visibility is little more than the spatial logic that laborers collectively employ to maintain access to those material amenities that make life as a *jornalero* easier. Day-laborers regulate the locations of, and acceptable behaviors at, informal hiring sites to maintain access to spaces that *work* for them (Massey 2005). Through spatial practice of strategic visibility, *jornaleros* transform representations of rural, suburban, and urban spaces into day-labor spaces—spaces in which the power of governmentality practices is muted.

Day-labor activity is not an inherently political action. It is social, survivalist entrepreneurialism (Valenzuela 2001). Few laborers that I met in the five years of fieldwork view their struggles through a political lens. Rather, their

desires are articulated as hope for economic success and gaining respect from employers, other day-laborers, and community stakeholders. However, as *jornaleros* employ strategic visibility, they exert their right to inhabit the city and create spaces that work for them. Their survival strategy can hardly be described as pure resistance because *without organization*, day-laborers facilitate their own exploitation as a low-cost labor source that strengthens the neoliberal economy. Alleviating the workers' rights abuses and other challenges of day-labor life requires that day-labor and workers' rights advocates consider the role that space and place play for organizational efforts. Understanding the critical role of particular day-labor spaces in *jornaleros*' survival strategies calls the viability of organizational strategies that seek to relocate *jornaleros* to a centralized workers' center into question. Rather, day-labor advocates must facilitate day-labor organizing at the scale of the day-labor space, and allow *jornaleros* to organize in the spaces they already know and, to a large extent, control. When laborers begin to articulate their hopes for the future and organize from day-labor spaces they designated, that they manage every day, that they care about, then *jornaleros* will no longer simply exert a right to exist. They will exert a right to thrive. They will demand their right to the city.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all of the day-laborers and other stakeholders who participated in this research project. Their openness and engagement with the project ultimately made the research successful. The author would also like to thank Dr. Fernando Bosco for his guidance on many early drafts of this article. The editors and anonymous reviewers for the Journal of Urban Affairs also provided thoughtful and constructive feedback that made the paper stronger. Finally, the author would like to thank Dr. Emily Farris for her encyclopedic knowledge of urban social theory.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. In the San Diego Metropolitan Area (SDMA), better than 99% of day-laborers are male. As such, I use gendered language in reference to laborers throughout the article.

2. See Crotty (2015) for a more substantial discussion of hiring site typologies.
3. I did not seek work as a day-laborer for two reasons. First, community-level day-labor conflicts that this project sought to reduce or eliminate are always linked to hiring sites, rather than the sites of employment. There are a great many worthwhile issues to study related to employment sites and working conditions; however, that was not the focus of this project. The second reason for not seeking work as a day-laborer was driven by the need to build trust with laborers at each site. The fieldwork took place during the depths of the Great Recession, a time when job opportunities for day-laborers were extremely limited, and seeking work would have placed me in direct competition with the laborers whose trust I was trying to build.
4. Herbert and Beckett's (2010) work examining homeless individuals' connection to place in Seattle is a notable exception.
5. The specific legal geographies that each laborer must negotiate varies according to a variety of factors. Their documentation status is very important. Undocumented laborers are notably less active in asserting their right to space than laborers "with papers." Each laborer's housing status is an important part of his own legal geography. Those homeless laborers face considerably more challenges in terms of legal geography, as there are no spaces in their lives where they have unchallenged right to occupy space.
6. Hector is a participant-selected pseudonym. All research participants referred to by name in this article are participant-selected pseudonyms.
7. City of Encinitas Municipal Code: <http://www.ci.encinitas.ca.us/index.aspx?page=120> (accessed February 21, 2012).
8. Most of the canned goods have "pop-top" lids, so no additional tools are required to access the contents.
9. Drinking beer from opaque coffee cups is the most common method of masking public consumption. Some laborers would hide their beers behind the tires of cars along the street and periodically walk to their beer and take a sip.

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