

Chapter 11: Food, time and space

Mobile cuisine in New York and Portland

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In the twenty-first century one might expect that the age-old tradition of selling prepared foods in urban public space would have vanished. But in the US the custom flourishes, continuing to draw immigrants to its ranks. One may still encounter a lone Hispanic woman selling tamales, churros or sliced fruit from a grocery cart or Italian ices from a small cart she pushes by hand. But this is rare. Today nearly all vendors rely on trucks they drive or carts that are delivered to the chosen site. A recent change in food vending in the US, which accounts for the current flourishing of street food, is the emergence of the gourmet food truck. Their operators aspire not just to cook and sell food but to prepare food made with fresh, possibly local or exotic ingredients and of high enough quality to achieve the status of 'cuisine', but at affordable prices. The advent of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram allows such trucks to move from place to place without losing their customers. They now number 4,000 nationwide in cities with populations over 100,000 (redOrbit 2014).

To explore the topic of mobile cuisine we first take a brief look at the history of street food vending, primarily in New York. Then we consider four features of mobile cuisine: the food, the business, the vehicle and its use of space and time. Our data is drawn from interviews conducted in 2014 with 40 operators of mobile food trucks in New York and 42 operators of stationary carts and stationary trucks in Portland, Oregon, from observations of the sites where they are located and from online sources and previous academic research. In choosing a type of food, a type of vehicle, a business name and image and locations and times to operate, street food vendors create a kind of proto-architecture. The ethnicity of the vendors, the food and the identity of the business result in a frequently changing ethno-architecture in public space.

In both cities, as in other US cities, vendors make use of publicly accessible space to pursue a commercial activity, with or without official sanction from the property owner or the city government, and sometimes break explicit local regulations.

Vendors are determined and creative in determining what food to sell, in what manner, in what spaces and at what times and locations. They illustrate one of the many, increasingly varied ways that people are appropriating publicly accessible space in ways not originally intended in the design, planning and management of such space. Citizens' appropriation of public space has gained the attention of many researchers (Chase et al. 1999, 2008, Franck and Stevens 2007, Hou 2010, Bishop and Williams 2012). Food carts in particular are evidence of the 'the informal American city' (Mukhija and Loukaitou-Sideris 2014). In addition, temporary insertions into public space, some of which may last for a period of years, are now being encouraged and coordinated by designers and community activists under the banner of 'tactical urbanism' (Lydon and Garcia, forthcoming 2015).

A BRIEF HISTORY

Selling food for immediate consumption in public space, without the benefit of a market or a permanent stall, has a long history in several US cities. In the nineteenth century, when oysters were still cheap and plentiful, vendors in New York sold them from wagons and wheelbarrows parked in the street. They shucked the oysters on the spot and offered customers standing on the sidewalk the added flavors of vinegar, salt and pepper (Ingersoll 1881). Other foods, such as boiled corn, were cooked elsewhere and brought to the street in baskets (Appleton 1850). With the subsequent influx of immigrants from Europe, other street foods appeared. In 1867 a German immigrant sold the first sausage in a white roll, which came to be known as a hot dog, from a pushcart on Coney Island (Wasserman 2009). An 1896 photograph shows a stout, smiling woman selling pretzels. She is dressed in dirndl, apron and kerchief as a German or Austrian immigrant might (<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?79779>).

Jewish vendors from Eastern Europe sold knishes (baked or fried dumplings), sometimes from metal carts that contained a stove fueled with wood. A 1937 photograph shows a vendor selling roast potatoes from a similar cart with metal drawers above the flame in the stove for cooking the potatoes and keeping them warm. (<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?732459f>). Mexican immigrants sold tamales in nineteenth-century Los Angeles from horse-drawn wagons or from carts they pushed (Arellano 2013).

Selling food in public space offered an easily accessible means of earning income upon arrival in the US. It did not require much financial investment or much knowledge of English and one could sell food one knew well to fellow immigrants as well as to a larger market that eventually became familiar with the food. In all cases being able to move from place to place was key. And the initial step – a single pushcart or wagon – could eventually grow into a brick-and-mortar establishment. Yonah Schimmel, a Romanian immigrant, began selling knishes from a pushcart in New York in 1890. A few years later he opened a shop with a few tables. The business continues today, still at its 1919 location on Houston Street, still family owned (Berg 2009).

Another nineteenth-century precedent for today's food trucks is the night-lunch wagon. In New York in the 1890s temperance societies started operating them in order to serve hot food and coffee and tea to working people, from 7:30 pm to 4:30 am, after the 8 pm closing time of restaurants, to discourage them from seeking food in local taverns. The first enclosed lunch wagon, called the Owl, opened in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1887, taking food to local factories, and spawned a number of companies that specialized in the construction of such wagons (Schiller 2011).

In the twentieth century, engine-driven vehicles that incorporated kitchens made the cooking, moving and selling tasks easier and more efficient: operators could drive to various locations, be sheltered, and both cook and sell the food on site. Eventually known as lunch trucks, they often traveled to factories and construction sites. In the 1950s through the 1970s the owner of a Baltimore diner had a whole fleet of such trucks (Keiger 2008). In the 1970s immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries took advantage of the lunch-truck type, which came to be known as *loncheheras*, to start cooking and selling tacos and other Mexican dishes in the heavily Hispanic neighborhoods of East Los Angeles; they still do in various areas of Los Angeles (Hermosillo 2012). In the 1980s, lunch trucks, eventually known as 'grease trucks', started frequenting the Rutgers University campus in New Brunswick, New Jersey, becoming a permanent and continuing feature of campus life, well known for Fat Sandwiches (LaGorge 2012). Food trucks of all types now find customers on campuses throughout the country.

While the meals these food-truck operators continue to sell are often tasty and well received, their owners do not aim to prepare and sell high-end foods akin to meals more typical of restaurants. It was in the twenty-first century that owners of food trucks and carts began to pursue that goal. In 2007 Thomas DeGeest left a high-level job at IBM in New York to start Waffles and Dinges, a food-truck business specializing in waffles and toppings. Over the years he worked hard to achieve the crispy authenticity of the ones from his home country – Belgium (Wafels and Dinges). In 2013 DeGeest opened a café in the East Village serving the same but more diverse menu. In 2008 Roy Choi, the son of the owners of a Korean restaurant in Los Angeles, started what quickly became a widely recognized and inspirational food-truck business. Kogi BBQ combines Korean barbecue with Mexican-style tacos and burritos. Starting as it did during a recession, it demonstrated the possibilities of starting a successful street-good food business with a new, ethnically based cuisine in pressing economic circumstances. In 2010 *Zagat* began reviewing food trucks. That same year *Food and Wine Magazine* named Roy Choi its best new chef and a reality show, *The Great Food Truck Race*, aired on television. Mobile cuisine had arrived.

THE FOOD

It is the food that best distinguishes the newest generation of mobile cuisine from other historical and contemporary types of food vending in public space.

The operators seek to specialize, to serve distinctive dishes and to provide a particular eating experience, much as owners of restaurants do. They seek a niche in the market. The result is cuisine that varies by ethnic origin, kinds of ingredient, and savory or sweet, since some food trucks offer desserts and others serve savory meals and snacks. Earlier lunch wagons and those that now operate on or near college campuses do not show this degree of variation, serving instead generic kinds of food. Similarly, many food carts in New York adopt very similar menus, and *loncheras* in Los Angeles continue to specialize in tacos and burritos.

Serving a specific ethnic cuisine is one way vendors seek to offer a particular food experience. In New York, among the 40 trucks surveyed, the most common cuisines were Latin American (8 trucks) and Asian (5), with Lebanese, Indian, Italian and French or Belgian being less frequent (2 each) and one truck that serves Australian savory pies. Other trucks offer fusion cuisine such as Asian tacos. One of the most well-known New York trucks surveyed, Korilla, fuses Korean with Mexican, serving tacos and burritos stuffed with Korean fillings. Other foods are distinctive in other ways, drawing from particular locations or cultures such as Philadelphia cheese steak, Maine lobster, Jewish hot dogs and knishes or addressing dietary needs such as vegan and kosher. A lobster roll was the most expensive and possibly the most distinctive meal for street vending in New York (\$18). The least expensive was a knish, probably not made on the truck (\$3).

Among the 42 carts surveyed in Portland, the most common cuisines were Asian (7 carts) and Latin American (5), with Italian (3) being less frequent and one cart each serving the cuisines of Brazil, Romania, Scotland and Mauritius. The Italian cuisine varies between authentic northern Italian dishes (Burrasca) and locally adapted brick-oven pizza. Other foods in Portland originate from regions in the United States such as Kansas City barbecue, Southern and Alaskan reindeer sausage. Some cuisine came from a local, organic food movement: at Tastebud, food cooked in the cart's wood-burning oven comes from a nearby farm. The most expensive meal among the carts surveyed is a rib platter from Homegrown Smoker (\$14); the least expensive include tacos for \$1.50 each and seaweed salad for \$2.50.

In both New York and Portland many operators of trucks and carts reported that their choice of cuisine came from their ethnic or family background (39 and 58 percent, respectively). Not surprisingly, then, family was often the source of recipes (50 percent and 63 percent, respectively). Choice of food was also based on market assessments, so that the food was not yet available (there was 'no Brazilian food in Portland') or that it would be popular (32 percent and 29 percent). Sometimes the reason was personal preference, eating food in other locations or an ideological position. In New York the choice of Canadian food came from travelling there; Philadelphia cheese steak from having a friend in Philadelphia; and fried chicken because 'I am very patriotic. I believe that American food needs to be served in New York City.' When asked why he chose the type of food his cart serves, one Romanian owner in Portland answered that he wanted to 'represent my [his] country'.

Some owners had learned recipes professionally, such as one longtime chef. The owner of Taste of Transylvania said 'I love to cook. My Romanian cookbook is ready to publish.' The owner of Burrasca, who immigrated from Italy to Portland specifically to open a food cart, changes his menu seasonally, serving meals he learned to cook from his grandmother in Tuscany such as sautéed squid, *zuppa lombarda* and *pasta e fagiol*. One customer wrote on Yelp: 'This cart is more like a bistro found in a winding Italian city than a cart' (Yelp). The bistro experience is enhanced by drinking wine purchased from another cart nearby. Since 2012, Portland food cart owners have this unusual advantage over their colleagues in many cities: they are legally able to sell beer and wine if it is consumed in designated areas with seating (Anderson 2014).

The foods described here increase the ethnic diversity of cuisine in a given neighborhood. In large cities like New York, that already have such diversity in some locations, it can bring that diversity to customers in other locations. The city government in Toronto tried out its own vending program to increase the ethnic diversity and healthiness of food sold from carts, particularly in neighborhoods that had few places to purchase food (Newman and Burnett 2013).

THE BUSINESS

Street food vending offers would-be entrepreneurs an affordable means of opening their own businesses. When asked why they started a food-vending business, a majority of Portland owners (82 percent) and over half of New York owners (59 percent) reported that they wanted to have their own business. A majority of operators are first- or second-generation Americans. Fifty-eight percent of the owners in Portland and 44 percent in New York are immigrants. In New York many others are first-generation US citizens (40 percent). This proportion is lower in Portland (10 percent). Most of the businesses are young: in Portland the average number of years a food cart has been in operation is two years; in New York it is four. In New York, however, three respondents have owned their businesses much longer: 12, 15 and 20 years.

Many owners turn to their countries of origin to choose what food to sell and, relatedly, for establishing the identity of the business. In other cases, owners choose a cuisine and a related identity based on their US cultural backgrounds. In almost all cases in Portland the identity of the business matches the owner's ethnic background as an immigrant or his or her cultural background in the US (92 percent). In New York a match between background and business identity is less frequent (46 percent), possibly because fewer owners there are immigrants. In Portland ethnicity of the cuisine is evident in 79 percent of the business names, including: Saaj Baghdad, The Flying Scotsman Fish and Chips, Delicious Taste of Transylvania, La Callejera and Burrasco. Regional US cultures are identified as well: Alaskan Reindeer Sausage and Kate's Southern Kitchen. In New York ethnicity or geographic origin is apparent in nearly half the names of the trucks surveyed, including: Taipan Express, Mausam Curry Bites,

La Belle Torte, Shorty's Philly Steaks and Sandwiches, Moo Shu Grill, Mamu Thai Noodle and Yankee Doodle Dandy. As in the early days of food vending in New York, mobile cuisine provides opportunities for small business owners to use their ethnic backgrounds as a resource. Our survey results suggest that in the twenty-first century the owners' backgrounds are valuable both for knowing how to prepare the foods and for creating a distinctive identity for the business. Entrepreneurship meets ethnicity.

The costs of opening and running a mobile cuisine business are relatively low. Among the respondents surveyed in Portland the average purchase price of a food cart or truck with kitchen equipment was \$26,500. Owners can avoid that initial investment by leasing carts rather than owning them as 22 percent of those interviewed in Portland do. In New York the average purchase price for a truck is about \$68,000 and nearly all the operators own their trucks (98 percent). Both trucks and carts can be re-sold to recoup at least part of the initial investment if the business does not succeed. The ease of entering the mobile cuisine business is also evident in its accessibility to those without previous experience in food-related fields. Over half of those interviewed held no previous position in food services (49 percent in Portland, 60 percent in New York). In Portland previous occupations included construction work, dance director, engineer, radio-show host and corporate manager. In New York owners had been teachers, actors, plumbers, business managers and film scouts. Adopting recipes from family members further enables the transition to mobile cuisine. Fifty-five percent of the owners in Portland and 47 percent in New York learned their recipes from family members. Recipes were often known prior to opening the business (69 percent in both cities). This prior knowledge of recipes from cultural and family origins also creates a personal connection between the owner's background and the identity of the business, one that connects the ethnicity of the owner to the ethnicity of the cuisine.

The difficulty of getting a license to vend in New York, the many, sometimes conflicting regulations along with harassment from police and local businesses, create a very difficult business environment for all types of vendors (Devlin 2011). Vendors in New York who use carts report experiencing more harassment than vendors using trucks (Dunn 2013). Certainly, the city government shows no interest in supporting mobile cuisine, limiting the number of licenses and making it illegal to park in the most attractive locations because those are metered parking spaces.

The survey findings from New York confirm the difficulties truck owners have. On a scale of one (easy) to five (difficult), 70 percent of the owners in New York rated the difficulty of city regulations as a four or higher, with the average rating being 4.0. Nearly 80 percent specifically cited the nearly daily parking violations that cost \$65. One owner described New York as 'the most impossible city in the nation to do this'. Forty-one percent of owners have received health violations, receiving an average of two violations. One respondent reported that an inspector had said 'I have to give you something before I leave your truck.'

Portland city government has taken a more supportive approach, requiring that property owners who lease carts provide water and electricity services. Carts are required to have licenses and to comply with health and safety regulations but are allowed to have external additions, such as canopies, which actually violate the licensing restrictions (Newman and Burnett 2013). In general, authorities are not strict with code enforcement. Then city mayor Sam Adams commented in 2009, 'We have worked really hard to stay the hell out of the way' (Peat 2009). The food carts in Portland feature prominently in travel guides such as *Travel Portland*, which has a link on the city's official website: 'Portland's selection of 600+ food carts has drawn global acclaim.' Not surprisingly, few Portland owners expressed any difficulties with city regulations; the primary complaint was the city's requirement for grey water collection (16 percent).

THE VEHICLE

The New York vehicles surveyed are all trucks of different sizes and shapes. Most, manufactured to be food trucks with complete kitchens, can cost between \$20,000 and \$200,000. They can easily be moved under their own power. In Portland mobility is more theoretical. Most of the vehicles there are trailers modified in different ways: by installing kitchen equipment, making connections for utilities and creating openings and, sometimes, exterior counters. The price of carts ranges from \$3,000 to \$50,000. These carts can be moved if necessary, as required by Portland law, but they remain in place for years at a time. Operators often prop up the vehicle on cement blocks or jacks. Since they are stationary in Portland, food carts connect to electrical and water hookups provided by the owner of the site, as required by city regulations. Since they move each day in New York, food trucks must have their own generators for electricity, must carry their own fresh water and have sufficient storage for wastewater. In New York mobility is made possible with social media informing customers of location and cuisine: 72 percent of owners in New York display a way to access information online via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and websites. Forty-five percent of owners in Portland do.

The New York trucks surveyed serve food from a window, located on one long side of the truck, which opens to the adjacent sidewalk or other pedestrian space. The window is usually a sliding one protected by a vertically hinged shutter. Orders are given at the window, food is received through the window and payment is made there, or sometimes to a person sitting in the front seat with the door open. The long side gives ample surface to post a menu, to advertise other locations the truck may frequent, to give contact information for hiring the truck as a caterer and to indicate the Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and website addresses. The entire surface of the truck serves as a moving billboard and is often covered by an all-encompassing vinyl wrap. Operators often hire a professional graphic designer to create a wrap that visually captures the character of the food offered, a useful branding technique that also makes the truck easily recognizable (Figure 11.1).



Figure 11.1
Moo Shu Grill food
truck, South Street
Seaport, New York.
Photograph by
Jonathan C. Jones,
2014.

The owner of Yankee Doodle Dandy, who is so keen to sell food that represents the US, has adorned his truck with images of the American flag and the Statue of Liberty. The food truck craze has led companies that design wraps to advertise their expertise online; many of those sites show images of trucks that have won recognition for their design. Online competitions, such as '1 designer-per-day.com' sponsored by *Inspiration Product Design eMagazine*, invite customers to nominate candidates for best food truck designs. The site for that competition displays a Korilla BBQ truck from New York. Not all food trucks surveyed, however, take this high-style approach; some of them resemble more humble lunch wagons, displaying their stainless steel sides, with the main visual feature being color images of the food they offer. Such trucks are more likely to appear at one location, such as at a public park in Red Hook Brooklyn, so they have little need to be a traveling billboard as well as a food truck.

Most of the vehicles surveyed in Portland are former trailers that require a truck in order to be moved; a few are themselves trucks that remain in one place for extended periods of time. Both types of vehicles have a far more personal and hand-made appearance than trucks in New York. Many owners make their carts appear as established as possible, covering the empty space under the vehicle and around its wheels (Figure 11.2). Owners frequently decorate the exterior with wood or aluminum siding, shrubs in planters and even a picket fence. The overall effect is that of a small building with a foundation. In the majority of cases it appears that design professionals were not engaged, that the owners designed and fabricated the adaptations and decorations themselves, possibly with local crafts people. Some owners provide counter, stools, tables and chairs. Nearly all the carts have operating



Figure 11.2
La Jarochita food
cart, SW 5th Avenue
and SW Stark Street,
Portland, Oregon.
Photograph by Philip
Speranza, 2014.

canopies to protect customers at the window from rain. In parking lots the former trailers face head in – into the parking lot (see Figure 11.5). The window for serving customers is then at one short end, rather than on a long side, giving limited space for serving and limited surface area for advertising.

Relative to restaurants, the small size of vehicles minimizes overhead expenses for utilities, cleaning and the need to hire a large staff. In Portland 37 percent

employ no staff at all; those that do employ on average two people. In New York, the likelihood of employing staff is much higher: 93 percent do and, on average, they employ four people. Even small restaurants employ far more staff. The Farm Café, a restaurant in Portland with only ten tables, depends on 25 employees to cover management, kitchen staff and wait staff.

Food trucks and carts offer opportunities not only for starting a business but also for growing and diversifying. Eighteen percent in New York and 10 percent in Portland currently own a brick-and-mortar restaurant in addition to their truck or cart with the same name, serving the same cuisine. Owners in New York diversify in another way: 18 percent also own a food cart or market stall. The desire among owners to open a restaurant in the future is notable, particularly in Portland, where a full 88 percent are keen to do so. In New York the figure was lower but still substantial: 35 percent. Owners in both cities would serve the same food as they do now. The owner of Sweet Chilli NYC explained: 'The truck is the first step toward opening a brick and mortar.' One of the reasons given in New York for establishing a food truck business was precisely to develop a brand: 'There is no better way to develop a product and a brand than by having a food truck in the city.'

Other owners saw restaurants as too much trouble and too competitive. One replied that it is 'easy to make a living with the truck'. Mobility works in the other direction as well: 11 percent in Portland and 10 percent in New York had owned a restaurant previously. While owners in Portland have plans to expand by opening a restaurant, it is more common in New York for owners to operate more than one truck: 30 percent of those interviewed do. Most own one or two additional trucks, but at least two owners have three or four other trucks. One owner expects to buy more trucks rather than opening a restaurant; others may own several trucks and still have plans for a restaurant. The business Korilla BBQ has three trucks and, since the survey was completed, has opened a restaurant as well. Other types of diversity are apparent. A banker in Japan owns the Minizo cart on the eastside of Portland that he uses to advertise his restaurant of the same name in downtown Portland. Tastebud, a food cart in downtown Portland, started out as a family farm that participated in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program. In 2000 they brought a mobile wood-fired brick oven to the Portland Farmer's Market. In 2005, after selling their farm, they moved back to Portland. Now they have a cart, a truck and a restaurant.

SPACE AND TIME

Food vendors are able to seek out optimal locations and optimal times of the day, week and year for finding customers. In New York trucks move after a few hours. One truck in Portland varies location by season, as it travels to farmers markets in the spring, summer and fall and to locations near a park and a square during the winter. In Portland food carts stay in one location for a period of years but they can be moved, should conditions change.

According to the New York survey, the most frequented locations are along public sidewalks in Manhattan in the financial district, around Union Square and in midtown. The time spent at these locations is quite limited: a two- to three-hour period around lunch time on weekdays as they serve workers on their lunch break (11 am to about 2 pm). The routine is to park at a metered parking space and run the risk of paying a fine (since it is against New York City law to sell any goods from such spaces). Of those surveyed that park in such locations, 86 percent have received fines, the majority of them every single day they park in Manhattan. They consider the fine a cost of doing business.

The truck operators surveyed work an average of 5.5 hours on weekdays; most serve food only at lunchtime. A few trucks go to a section of the South Street Seaport where six trucks can share a pedestrian plaza on weekdays and weekends, all year, from 11 am to 7 pm. Three are accommodated at a privately owned parking lot in Brooklyn in the Dumbo neighborhood on weekdays at lunchtime. In these locations, the vendors pay the South Street Seaport management and the owner of the parking lot. During warmer months, options increase. From May to October, from 10 am to 6 pm on weekdays and until 7 pm on weekends, trucks can vend on Governor's Island, paying a fee or a percentage of profit to the Trust for Governor's Island.

Weekends in warmer months offer the widest choice of locations. The seven trucks around a park in Red Hook, Brooklyn go only to that location and only on weekends April through October, from 10 am to 8 pm. They pay no fee to use the public streets adjacent to the park. Other trucks go to the biweekly food rally held on Sunday afternoons in Grand Army Plaza next to Prospect Park in Brooklyn from



Figure 11.3 Food truck rally, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, New York. Trucks open to the interior of the plaza. Photograph by Jonathan C. Jones, 2013.

June until October and pay the Prospect Park Alliance (Figure 11.3). A majority of trucks (85 percent) cater special events. Most of the others would like to cater but have not received requests.

When food trucks are located on streets and serve customers on the sidewalk, they use urban space much as the early vendors of oysters and roast potatoes did. Customers line up on the sidewalk, waiting to order or to receive an order. At some rallies, trucks line up facing each other across a linear pedestrian space, as on Governor's Island. The arrangement is reminiscent of a street fair. Or they may form a circle facing inward, as at Grand Army Plaza, an arrangement resembling a food court. In both cases customers wait in line inside the collective, pedestrian space of the rally. At Red Hook, trucks are parked along two streets adjacent to the park, facing it. There, at South Street Seaport and at Governors Island customers can eat at adjacent picnic tables.

In New York only three sites where surveys were conducted are privately owned. The situation is dramatically different in Portland. All the carts and trucks surveyed rent space on a monthly basis from the owners either of parking lots or of vacant property not yet developed for other purposes. From 3 to 67 carts establish themselves on a single site forming what are locally called 'pods'. In four pods, in downtown Portland, the carts are always located on the outside edges of a parking lot (Figure 11.4). They serve customers on the adjacent public sidewalk who reach the pod on foot: tourists walking around the city, workers coming at lunch-time or late night revelers coming from clubs. On the more residential Eastside carts are more likely to occupy properties awaiting development; there they face inward toward a common space. The owner of the property may furnish this space with a canopy, protecting customers from the rain, and picnic tables and benches.



Figure 11.4
Food cart pod, SW
10th and Alder,
Portland, Oregon.

The pod at Division and 50th even provides a fully enclosed, heated shed with tables and benches, a small children's library, a large-screen TV and free Wi-Fi. Given the low-density, residential nature of the area, customers are more likely to come to the pod by car and park on neighboring streets.

While trucks in New York travel to sites where they will find customers, often informing customers in advance where they will be, the fixed location of carts and trucks in Portland requires customers come to them, much as they might go to restaurants. Perhaps it follows, then, that in Portland, where the carts are in fixed locations, they tend to keep the hours of restaurants, being open for breakfast or lunch and into the evening. On the Westside of Portland, an area that tourists frequent and where clubs stay open late into the night, some are open until 5 am and one, Small Pharaoh's Egyptian and New Yorker Food, is open 24 hours. On the Eastside, which is more residential, carts stay open only into the late afternoon or early evening.

Food trucks and carts increase the color and visual complexity of what otherwise may well be more formal and less visually interesting urban settings. The sight and smell of food adds an additional sensual dimension. And when people line up to purchase items or find a place to eat nearby, the setting becomes even livelier. Customers may engage in conversation with each other and with the staff of the business. In all these respects, food vending enlivens urban public space as a street festival might, but everyday and also with an ethnic character that is generated by the ethnicities of the cuisine and the businesses. One could well say that the trucks in New York and the carts in Portland create ethnoscares in public space.

Food vending that brings liveliness to public space is particularly valuable in locations that would otherwise be deserted such as empty lots, the edges of parking lots or unused sections, as in Portland. In that city food carts enliven urban space in different ways depending on their spatial arrangement. Carts in pods on the Westside of the city, at the edge of privately owned parking lots, face the publicly owned sidewalk. Consequently, they reinforce the interface between private property and the sidewalk public right-of-way, much as traditional storefronts do. Carts in pods on the Eastside transform privately owned lots, as yet undeveloped, into active public spaces, much like parks without the planting (Figure 11.5). Among the variations across the two cities, the pods on the Eastside stand out. With the support and additional amenities added by the owners of the empty lots, including seating and tents, the food vendors transform unused, privately owned space into places of eating and gathering. In New York when food trucks operate from individual parking spaces located at the curb of public streets, between a lane of traffic and the sidewalk, they bring lively commercial activity to that public sidewalk. Or, when a food truck rally is held at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, it is temporarily transformed into an outdoor food court.

Food carts and trucks may increase the density of people in public space, bringing additional crowding to locations already congested, such as busy commercial sidewalks. As lines of people wait place or receive an order, they may interrupt pedestrian flow, making it difficult for others to pass or to reach nearby shops and restaurants. This often raises the ire of local businesses and city government. It was

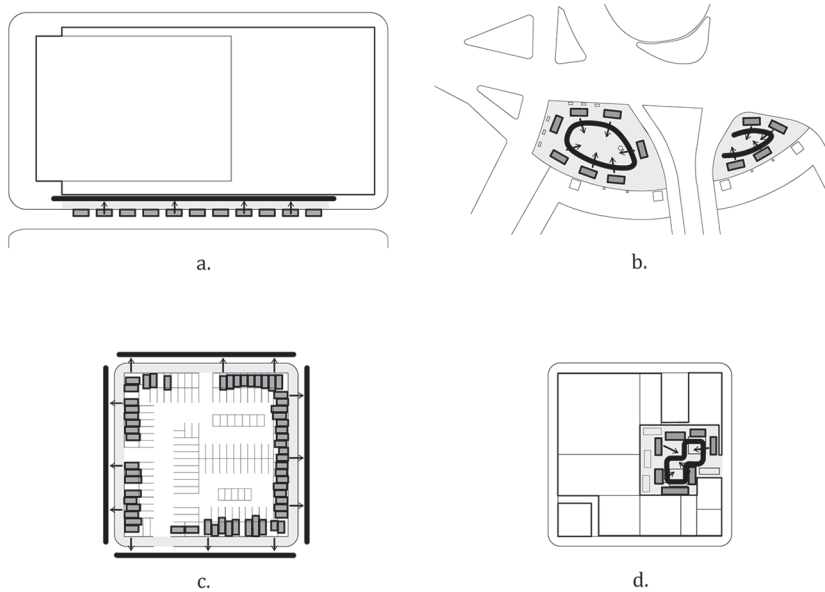


Figure 11.5
Spatial organization
of vehicles: a. Food
trucks at 47th Street
and Park Avenue,
Manhattan; b. Food
truck rally, Grand
Army Plaza, Brooklyn;
c. Food cart pod,
Alder and SW 10th
Street, and Portland,
Oregon; d. Food cart
pod, Ankeny and SE
28th Street, Portland.
Graphics by Philip
Speranza.

such opposition to street vending that led to early regulations on the use of sidewalks (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht 2009) and to the complete removal of pushcart markets from New York streets in the 1930s (Bluestone 1991). Opposition continues from businesses, and restaurant owners also hold that vending takes business away from them and, with the lower costs of operation, has unfair advantages. However, one market research survey of customers found that without the truck or cart, half the respondents would have obtained their meal from a fast food outlet and another 20 percent would have skipped the meal altogether (NPD 2013).

TEMPORARY AND ADAPTIVE

The temporary and highly adaptive features of mobile cuisine offer opportunities for owners, customers and cities. Owners can make an investment and commitment that is more delimited than what is required for a brick-and-mortar restaurant. This provides recent immigrants with invaluable opportunities to start a business. A recent documentary film, *Dog Days*, about hot dog carts in Washington DC, profiles a woman who emigrated from Eritrea. Over the 22 years she has been operating her cart, she has been able to send her children to college. The commitment can vary in duration. The vehicle can first be a test of the cuisine and the market as well as a way of building that market. In 1990, two immigrants from Egypt opened a single hot dog cart in New York. Noticing a possible market among cabdrivers, they changed to an Arab cuisine, including lamb, chicken and rice, drawing many customers from nearby offices. By 2014, the Halal Guys owned five carts and opened their first restaurant (Hands Schuh 2014) and are planning to

open a nationwide franchise (Vadukul 2014). Mobile cuisine can serve as transition in the other direction: from a brick-and-mortar business to a cart or truck, allowing the owners to continue a food-related business but at less cost.

The mobility of a truck or a cart allows its operator to respond to an immediate market, to particular site conditions and to changes in both. It can stay in a given location for a short or longer period of time, depending upon the availability of customers, and move to preferred locations at preferred times as well as to catered events. When the vehicle remains in one location for an extended period of time, it still retains the potential for physical mobility. Consequently, should the site where it is located be slated for redevelopment, the owner can move the cart to a new location while still retaining the business. The same applies to trucks that may also be welcomed at privately owned, empty lots until they are redeveloped.

The temporary presence of the vehicle benefits those who own or manage publicly accessible spaces. The enlivening of space that occurs does not require long-term commitments from those who own the site or from those who manage it, be they municipal agencies or the private or civil sectors. As the needs and objectives of organizations and agencies change, so can their practices of leasing and managing the spaces where the trucks and carts park. Owners of parking lots and undeveloped property in Portland can derive income from renting space to carts but, should the opportunity for selling or developing the property arise, they can easily terminate that arrangement. Similarly in New York, corporate and civil organizations have the opportunity to invite food trucks to their properties during particular seasons of the year, on particular days or for just one event.

The temporary presence of mobile cuisine can benefit owners and hosts but the changing availability of sites and the changing content and enforcement of regulations also create a high degree of uncertainty for the business owners. That uncertainty can be exacerbated by unpredictable changes in the enforcement of regulations and by changes in the regulations themselves; both can work to the detriment or the benefit of food-vending businesses. It was a recent modification to state liquor laws in Oregon that allows them to serve beer and wine under prescribed circumstances (Anderson 2014). In many cities the regulations of food vending are being contested and modified (Gan 2014).

Despite the uncertainty of regulations and the severe constraints they can pose, mobile cuisine is proliferating throughout the country, inspiring other types of mobile commerce such as selling clothing (Best 2014). Both are cases of the larger phenomenon of temporary urbanism (Bishop and Williams 2012, Greco 2012) or tactical urbanism (Lydon and Garcia forthcoming 2015). That is, the insertion of new, possibly short-term uses into publicly accessible spaces to transform them quickly without extensive planning or expense. Other examples include: pedestrian plazas incorporated into streets and alleys; parklets created in on-street parking spaces; community gardens and pop-up markets in empty lots; farmers' markets, flea markets and festivals wherever space can be found. Notably, many forms of temporary urbanism, like mobile cuisine, center on the production or consumption of food.

Food trucks and carts are not only temporary but, in their mobility, highly adaptive: they can move or be moved, intact, from one location to another as immediate or long-term needs and constraints change. As with other cases of temporary or tactical urbanism, food trucks and carts exemplify the responsiveness and flexibility of an *adaptive* urbanism where the vehicles themselves are changing and changeable urban design elements. Food trucks and carts are temporary material elements that locate themselves within the far more fixed framework of urban infrastructure of streets, sidewalks, parking lots and other publicly owned as well as privately owned outdoor spaces.

Mobile cuisine and many other cases of temporary insertions demonstrate the continued burgeoning of grassroots appropriations of urban public space (Franck 2013). Governmental responses to these activities vary widely: in the case of food vending, from the enforcement of regulations that make it difficult, and even illegal, to pursue encouraging and even promoting it. It would be beneficial to vendors and to the public for more cities to allow and support food vending and to adopt ways of managing the 'unplanned' (Oswalt 2013). Food vending will continue, regardless. Citizens who invent and pursue this use of public space are creative and determined and a wider public, the many customers of mobile cuisine, welcomes them.

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