

PAPER DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP (PDW)

THE ORGANIZATION OF ILLEGAL MARKETPLACES

April 3 & 4, 2025, Institute of Sociology, University of St.Gallen, Switzerland

Organizing committee

Loïc Pignolo, Universität St. Gallen, Switzerland
Guillaume Dumont, Emlyon Business School, France

Illegal marketplaces are “organised places, whether physical (e.g., a weekly trading event in the town square) or virtual (e.g., an electronic platform, such as Etsy), for trade” (Aspers and Darr, 2022; p.824). They operate based on shared norms, roles, meanings, and routines, implemented by marketplace organizers or derived from mutual adjustment among actors, thereby shaping trade in important ways (e.g., Aspers and Darr, 2022; Dewey and Buzzetti, 2024; Tzanetakis, 2018; Tzanetakis et al., 2016). They offer the means to facilitate illegal transactions and provide opportunities and sources of power for marketplace organizers through place-based cooperation, gathering of people, infrastructure, digital technologies, and/or pooling of resources. No less importantly, they are a focus of attention for policymaking and law enforcement, with most state institutions striving to eradicate them (e.g., Beckert and Dewey, 2017; Coomber et al., 2019; Gottschalk, 2010; Paoli, 2014).

Whether online or offline, illegal marketplaces are places where the dynamics of markets, illegality, state institutions, vulnerability, and power intersect, raising important questions that have yet to be addressed by the emerging stream of scholarship in this field: What social, spatial, and technological conditions allow for the emergence of illegal marketplaces? How are they organized to face the coordination problems associated with illegality? Who are the organizers, how do they make decisions, and what resources do they use? How do they help to set prices, facilitate product supply, and protect traders? Who are the market participants, and how is power distributed among them? What are the differences between online illegal marketplaces and physical ones?

This third edition of the “Ethnographies of Illegality” Paper Development Workshop (PDW) will focus on selected organizational and managerial aspects of illegal marketplaces. We welcome proposals that investigate illegal marketplaces using ethnographic and, more broadly, qualitative approaches, and address one or more of the following four themes.

- **Organization:** The operation of illegal marketplaces requires organizational structures, governance, and cultures, as well as conventions, maintenance, and

development strategies. This theme focuses on the organizational aspects, particularly the organizational forms, rules, monitoring mechanisms, and sanctions enabling the operation of illegal marketplaces, as well as the socialization of market participants, their coordination problems, and power distribution.

- **Space:** Illegal marketplaces are often located at the intersection of online and offline spaces. This theme focuses on rethinking the notion of space in relation to illegal marketplaces. We encourage authors to consider how market participants appropriate specific spaces and places to develop their activities and how multiple spaces are intimately connected in the design and operation of marketplaces.
- **Work:** Illegal marketplaces involve the work and labor of different actors. This third theme will approach the activities and tasks performed in markets and marketplaces through the conceptual lens of work, allowing for the exploration of essential aspects of their functioning, such as the division of labor, labor relations among actors, consequences of organizational elements for their working conditions and careers, and meaning of their work.
- **Regulation:** Illegal marketplaces are legally embedded, making the study of regulations and legal frameworks crucial for understanding them. The fourth theme explores the relation between illegal marketplaces and their local regulatory contexts. We encourage authors to uncover the complexity of the relation between state institutions and law enforcement agencies, their role in shaping markets, and marketplaces' organizational, spatial, and working characteristics.

By exploring these themes across contexts and activities, the workshop aims to produce new knowledge in three areas: the infrastructure(s) and organizations that enable illegal marketplaces to emerge, grow, and transform; the contemporary cultural forms of illegal exchange in different geographical locations; and the differences and similarities between illegal marketplaces and their legal counterparts.

Purpose and format

This PDW aims to guide researchers from different disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, criminology, and organizational studies) at varying stages of their careers in developing their papers. Invited discussants will help participants in a collegial way to formulate novel ways of using their data to construct a compelling narrative for their paper and develop a theoretical contribution based on these data.

The PDW will be structured as an interactive two-day workshop. Each author will be given 10 minutes to present their paper and 35 minutes for discussion. Two discussants will review each paper and provide constructive feedback to strengthen and improve the authors' work. The discussants will all be senior researchers. All authors must also commit to reading two selected papers before the workshop to provide additional feedback. With the participants' agreement, the workshop will serve as a springboard for publishing a special issue. Hence, published papers will not be accepted.

Discussants include Patrik Aspers (University of St.Gallen), Matías Dewey (University of St.Gallen), Gabriel Feltran (Science Po), Dennis Rodgers (IHEID), Meropi Tzanetakis (University of Manchester), and Guillaume Dumont (Emlyon).

Abstract submission

Please send an abstract of 500 words and a short biographical note to gdumont@em-lyon.com and loic.pignolo@unisg.ch by December 1, 2024. Notification of acceptance will be sent by January 1, 2025. Papers must be submitted by March 6, 2025.

There is no registration fee. We will cover lunch on both days and the dinner on the first day. Partial grants for travel and accommodation can be provided to a small number of participants with limited resources. Please indicate if you require financial support. Participation in the workshop is open to all upon registration.

References

Aspers, P., & Darr, A. (2022). "The social infrastructure of online marketplaces: Trade, work and the interplay of decided and emergent orders", *The British Journal of Sociology* 73(4): 822–838.

Beckert, J., & Dewey, M. (2017). "Introduction: The Social Organization of Illegal Markets", in Beckert, J., & Dewey, M. (eds) *The Architecture of Illegal Markets. Towards an Economic Sociology of Illegality in the Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–34.

Coomber, R., Moyle, L., & Mahoney, M. K. (2019). "Symbolic policing: Situating targeted police operations/'crackdowns' on street-level drug markets". *Policing and Society* 29(1): 1–17.

Dewey, M., & Buzzeti, A. (2024). "Easier, faster and safer: The social organisation of drug dealing through encrypted messaging apps". *Sociology Compass* 18(2).

Gottschalk, P. (2010). "A contingent approach to policing organised crime". *Criminal Justice Studies* 23(1): 21–31.

Paoli, L. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tzanetakis, M. (2018). "Social order of anonymous digital markets: Towards an economic sociology of cryptomarkets", in Potter, G., Fountain, J., & Korf, D. (eds) *Place, space and time in European drug use, markets and policy*. Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers.

Tzanetakis, M., Kamphausen, G., Werse, B., & von Laufenberg, R. (2016). "The transparency paradox. Building trust, resolving disputes and optimising logistics on



Universität St.Gallen



conventional and online drugs markets”, *International Journal of Drug Policy* 35: 58–68.

Preliminary program

Day one

08:30–09:00	Welcome coffee
09:00–09:15	Introduction
09:15–10:45	Session 1
10:45–11:15	Coffee break
11:15–12:00	Session 2
12:00–14:00	Lunch break
14:00–14:45	Session 3
14:45–15:15	Coffee break
15:15–16:00	Session 4
16:30–17:45	Keynote
17:45–18:30	Cocktails
19:00	Dinner

Day 2

08:45–09:15	Welcome coffee
09:15–10:00	Session 5
10:45–11:15	Coffee break
11:15–12:00	Session 6
12:00–14:00	Lunch