

Gazette, Issue 20 (2013)

FCL - Future Cities Laboratory

Journal Issue**Author(s):**

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Publication date:

2013-08

Permanent link:

<https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000304271>

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Originally published in:

Gazette

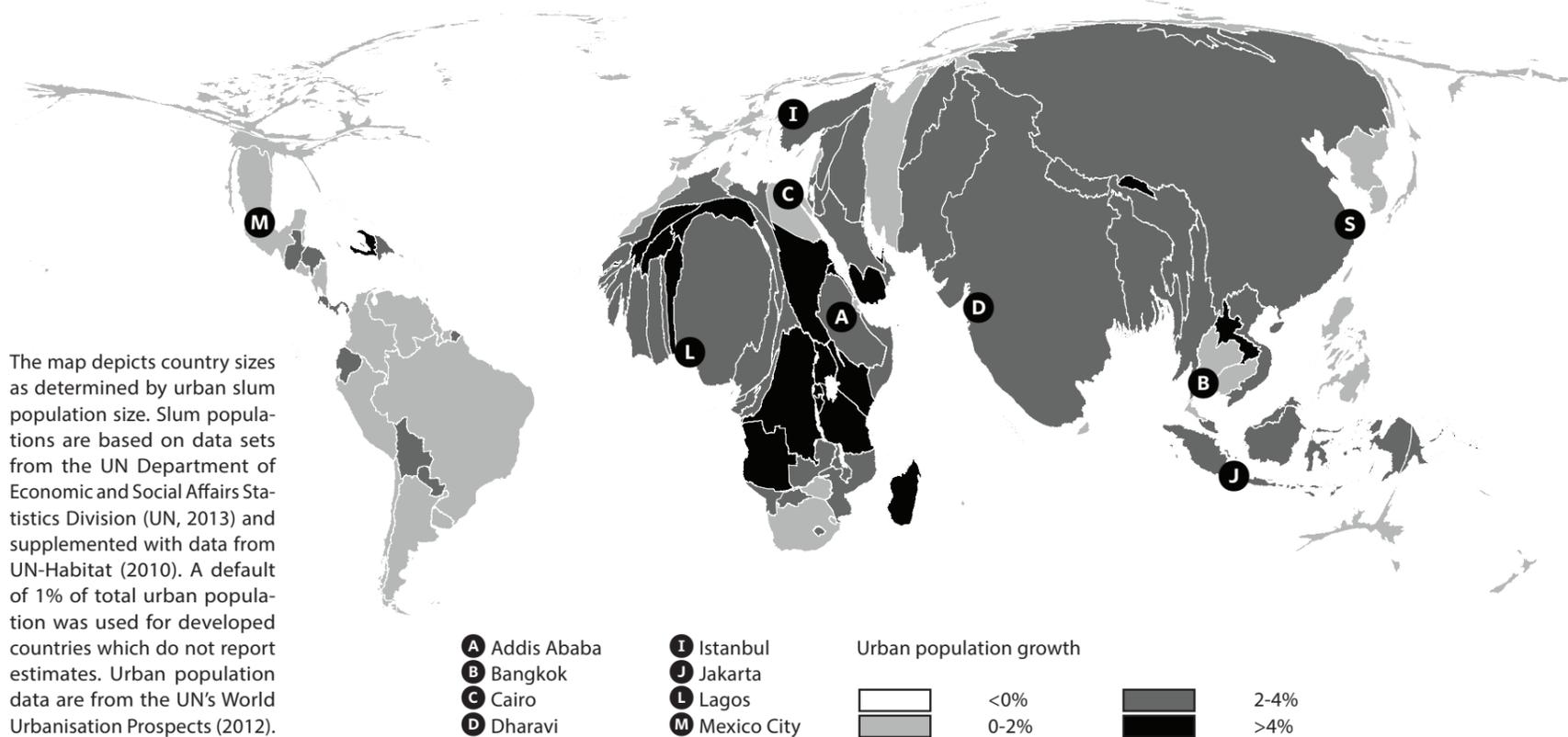
Informal urbanism: A source of information

Michaela F PRESCOTT, Derek VOLLMER, Felix HEISEL

Informal urbanism – development occurring outside the purview of state planning or administrative systems – is a global phenomenon of growing importance. More evocative terms like ‘slum’ or ‘favela’ capture some, but not all the dynamics of informal urbanism. The United Nations’ definition of ‘slum’ is of some use, since it helps highlight urban inequalities in five important aspects: access to safe water; access to sanitation; structural quality of housing; overcrowding; and insecure residential status. Still, an over-reliance on static indicators may distract us from understanding the process and drivers of informality. Informality is perhaps best understood as a ‘generalised mode of metropolitan urbanisation’ (Roy, 2005) and a productive organisational process contributing to a city’s development. This presents obvious challenges for planning and design professionals, but also for urban research. We contend that informal processes are a source of information on our cities, not merely negative consequences of inadequate planning. Indeed, Peter Marris suggests that the conception of informality, or urbanism occurring outside the norm, is in itself questionable: “a slum is a slum only in the eyes of someone for whom it is an anomaly – a disruption of the urban norm and relationships that to the observer seem appropriate to his or her own values and perceptions.” (Marris, 1981, p.62).

Every city is host to some amount of informality, but like urban population growth, it is much more prevalent in emerging economies, which are also the most rapidly urbanizing (see Figure). While in

(Continued at left)



The map depicts country sizes as determined by urban slum population size. Slum populations are based on data sets from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division (UN, 2013) and supplemented with data from UN-Habitat (2010). A default of 1% of total urban population was used for developed countries which do not report estimates. Urban population data are from the UN’s World Urbanisation Prospects (2012).

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the traditional (formal) understanding of city planning the object is the outcome of centralised rules and decisions, the informal object results from social, economic, and sometimes ‘illegal’ bottom-up processes. Informality is often reinforced by structural inequalities, which themselves have unique historical and economic drivers. We take no normative stance on whether this activity should be brought under a formal system, but by understanding the logic and norms governing these processes; we might be able to design plans and policies more fit to the context. This edition of the FCL Gazette presents a series of methods

and approaches to the study of informality, offering a cross-section through aspects such as policymaking, social transactions or operations, and urban evolution. Eight contributions cover cities on four continents and neighbourhoods ranging from shantytowns to cosmopolitan quarters. While cities like Singapore have with great effort moved, for the most part, beyond the informal, informality remains a characteristic challenge and attribute of many cities globally. The intention of this Gazette is to acknowledge informality’s role and contribution in the generation of present and future cities.

Popular Urbanisation

Lindsay SAWYER **I L M**

In the existing literature, the disparate cities of Istanbul, Lagos, and Mexico City are mostly described as ‘informal’, as ‘self-built’, or as ‘slum’. This process is a major part of the daily realities of these cities, yet the existing scientific vocabulary does not seem adequate to describe the diversity of everyday experiences in all of these urban spaces. In a recent paper, Monika Streule and I (2013) propose the concept of Popular Urbanisation to consciously and explicitly shift our perspective away from static categories of urban form and artefacts that so often serve to exceptionalise/marginalise, and towards the social production process of such spaces. By opening up the interpretation and representation of such urban spaces to include a consideration of

different ways of producing urban space (Kudva 2009), we aim to address the following changes frequently called for: differentiation within informalities (Roy and AISayyad: 2003), critical debates on binary concepts such as formal/ informal (McFarlane: 2012; Varley: 2013) and calls to decolonize “informality” studies (Robinson: 2006).

We examine in detail the empirical and theoretical use of Popular Urbanization as an ordinary but nevertheless very specific process of planetary urbanization, viewing cities as consisting of multiple, contested territories inscribed by complex local histories of social agency. This has the potential to offer non-universalizing but comparative theoretical engagements with different urban spaces across space and time. This process-oriented term allows us to enrich the debate on urbanisation in order also to challenge and pluralize the overall applied macro-narrative, which commonly is centred on economic development.

Jakarta: Urban environmental planning and river ‘normalisation’

Derek VOLLMER **J**

The basic rationale for the ‘slum-upgrading’ movement of the 1970s was simple: residents needed cleaner and safer environments in order to thrive. Today the interventions are more nuanced, but this concern for environmental health persists. Two out of five criteria that the United Nations uses to define a slum relate to water and sanitation. Environmental degradation in informal settlements is often attributed to the low salience of environmental issues, or just ignorance. However, it is not for lack of desire. In my fieldwork in riverside settlements of Jakarta I have observed many

examples of neighbourhood-organised waste collection and recycling, tree plantings and community gardening, riverbank clean-ups and stabilisation efforts. In short, residents value their environment, but the transaction costs associated with providing services are frequently too high. Residents adapt to seasonal flooding and poor water quality because they are powerless to intervene at a meaningful scale. Most households pay a monthly fee to have solid waste privately collected, only to see the pushcarts emptied at another point along the river. By being tolerated but never integrated into the city, households are locked into this behaviour and scapegoated as the cause of more complex environmental problems (Vollmer and Grêt-Regamey, in press). This notion underpins Jakarta’s plans for ‘normalising’ its rivers — clearing and stabilising riverbanks and relocating residents to serviced public housing. There of course is no ‘normal’ state for an urban river, but it seems that achieving a more ‘desirable’ state requires incorporating residents into the formal Jakarta.

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GAZETTE

Issue 20	Tags Informality, urbanism, planning, housing, slums, Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Cairo, Dharavi, Istanbul, Jakarta, Lagos, Mexico City
Date -/08/2013	Editorial Team Series Editor: Stephen Cairns Editors and Convenors: Michaela F Prescott, Derek Vollmer, Felix Heisel
Fold, Punch, File	Published by FCL – Future Cities Laboratory Singapore ETH Centre for Global Environmental Sustainability (SEC) 1 CREATE Way, #06-01 CREATE Tower, Singapore 138602 gazette@fcl.arch.eth.ch

ETH Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

Jakarta: Urban morphology or informality?

Michaela F PRESCOTT **J**

Settlement of 'informal' nature existed along Jakarta's Ciliwung River prior to the Dutch colonial era of the 17th-20th centuries. Waterfronts were important to the development of local settlements, being significant interfaces between the outside world and the territorial hinterland. This type of settlement—common to Southeast Asia—is known as 'kampung'. Originally referring to the area on the riverbank near the landing point, and along the path leading to settlements on higher ground, kampung was later adopted by the Europeans and associated with 'compound' and 'camp' (Widodo 2009).

The early centuries of the colonial period saw the development of a dense town modelled on Dutch urban design principles. Historians of Jakarta note the paradox of building a town based on Northern European settlement patterns on the swampy coastal lands of the tropics. The government adopted a racial segregation policy and the native population groups settled in kampungs on the urban periphery. Mismanagement and rapid development deteriorated the city's water bodies and lead to increased flooding and worsening of public health conditions; and improvement strategies were enacted to varying success (Valentijn 1862). As Dutch inland territorial control increased through the 18-19th centuries planned settlements developed to the southeast. These followed a different pattern, with large estates fronting roads and kampungs filling the inner blocks. Sitting outside the spatial planning of the colonial government kampungs developed a local organisational structure—providing a basis for community and spatial management—which is still in practice. Today political leaders seek the ideal of a modern, 'world-class' city; however locals still refer to Jakarta as 'perkampungan yang besar' – the big village – which reflects the persistence of traditional settlement patterns.

Cairo: Protocols of urban informality

Charlotte MALTERRE-BARTHES **C**

Sixty-five percent of the 20 million people forming the Greater Cairo Region live in informal housing. The mechanisms of informal urbanization are destroying thousands of hectares of already scarce fertile fields at the periphery of Cairo.

(1) The expansion follows the property lines of the Egyptian 'feddan' (El Kadi, 1990), narrow strips of farming land between 100-300 meters long and 6-17 meters wide. The surrounding irrigation canals usually turn into passageways and streets, forming a new urban grid. (2) The farmers and landowners subdivide a single feddan usually into 24 equal plots, with local brokers involved in clearing bureaucracy and government restrictions. (3) The resulting change in land use from agriculture to informal housing generates a 200% profit, which is a powerful incentive to sell the land. (4) The purchasers are rural migrants or low-paid urban workers from downtown Cairo. They will either buy a completed unit or hire a local contractor to build. (5) Most houses are constructed from reinforced concrete, poured on site and finished with red brick infill. The rate of construction can be as hasty as a floor per month. (6) Speculative developers or a group of small investors may even build towers up to 15 floors. There are claims that the pace of such constructions has quickened since the 2011 revolution.

The immediate consequence of these thriving protocols of informality is, apart from disclosing the powerlessness of planning authorities, a doomed competition between urban informality and agricultural space at the fringes of Cairo.

Addis Ababa: Documenting informality

Felix HEISEL **A**

Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, might double its population of four million inhabitants within three decades as a result of rural-urban migration and natural growth (United Nations 2012). In 2011 housing shortages of roughly 700,000 units drove the city administration to announce plans to redevelop all 'informal' and 'unplanned' parts of the city by 2020. However, all households undertake informality either through consumption or production of employment, services, land and housing (Fransen and van Dijk 2008). Approximately 80% of building stock in Ethiopia's capital may be considered 'sub-standard, slum-like or informal' (UN-Habitat 2011). While most households have been formalised to some degree, either through a title, access to electricity, potable water; and/or education, insecurity of tenure leaves households susceptible for redevelopment or relocation.

Unquestionably, the physical buildings and infrastructure of most informal settlements need to be upgraded or replaced. However, social networks and spatial and cultural values, which are developed and embedded within these areas, require study and preservation and can become a basis for development. The documentary movie series ' _Spaces' (2011 onward) attempts to remember and learn from the use of architecture and its social role in informal settlements. Built by their users such spaces redefine private and public boundaries, connection to the ground, and the allocation and influence of utilities. The documentary's filming originally served as a teaching tool for students; however, public interest and resultant discussions raise awareness of alternatives to tabula-rasa demolition, which may protect both the history and income of inhabitants throughout the upgrading process.

<http://www.spacesmovie.com>

Bangkok: Family Networks as Drivers of Urban Change

Sonja BERTHOLD **B**

Unregulated land use in Bangkok has duplicated the urban pattern of mixed economic functions, while at the same time leading to uncontrolled densification and expansion of the city along major roads and into verticality. Land use changes result from shifts in patterns of landownership, land prices, and expected returns from construction. The existing, visible morphological and spatial diversity of inner-city neighbourhoods in Bangkok is understood to be a consequence of the transformation of socio-economic organisations and strategies carried by social groups, as opposed to the outcome of urban planning policies.

Both 'guanxi', which is the act of cultivating relations and social bonds that can turn into business and policy coalition, and 'family networks' are recognised as strong drivers of urban change in regard to property and programme exploitation. Family networks in Bangkok seem to propel and promote urban transformations, leading to spatially and culturally rich neighbourhoods, which are accepted and appropriated by residents and visitors alike.

Family networks may be conceived here as communities with an informal authority structure. They combine attributes of communities with those of institutional organisations. These attributes include reputation building and norm enforcement mechanisms, as well as legitimacy of authority – either through charisma, tradition or organisational bureaucracies. As social groups, family networks continuously shift boundaries of private and public spheres, treating property as a common-pool resource. In other words family networks pragmatically match means to ends in order to get things done. Family norms and codes of conduct regulate access to shared material and social resources. As enterprises family networks interpret legal rules, and continuously reframe norms for their community, thereby establishing 'participatory anticipation' and long-term visioning of the future.

Dharavi: A real-estate playground

Martha KOLOKOTRONI **D**

Can redevelopment be a solution for tackling the increase of slums in cities, or is it just one more governmental fashion that will be replaced by the next trend in the coming years? Central to this question is not only a critique of the applied redevelopment strategy, but also an exposition of the need to focus on other methods that might be more effective in driving the

spatial configuration of informal territories. Through the case study of Dharavi, India's largest slum, I identify public-private redevelopment as a characteristically neoliberal approach to transforming informal areas, an evolution from the slum demolitions and slum 'upgrading' processes characteristic of the late 20th century, Dharavi has been a magnet for businesses and has gradually evolved into a real-estate playground. In 2004, the State Government of Maharashtra announced its plans to transform the slum into a "beautiful city" by 2013 through the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP). The DRP was defined in the context of visions for a 'world-class' and 'slum-free' Mumbai

Shanghai: Gentrification with Chinese characteristics

Ying ZHOU **S**

Since China accelerated its economic liberalization in the early 1990s, Shanghai's urban development has come to symbolize the country's economic global re-integration. In the city centre, the western end of the former French and International concessions is transforming to resemble the likes of Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg or New York's Williamsburg. Its proliferation of boutique cafes, designer showrooms and ateliers are spatial markers for the 'rise of the creative class'. Despite the increasingly international trend quarter vibe, the procedural 'informalities' of Shanghai's spatial productions confound western presumptions of property rights, institutional stability and clarity, represented by the outward appearance of a globalizing and modernizing physical environment. This compels an interrogation of the agents, drivers and the local frameworks for Shanghai's urban spatial production.

Creative entrepreneurs with cosmopolitan knowhow and transnational linkages are innovating spatial reuse within the Concessions. They exploit the vestiges of the planned economy: ambiguous property rights, fragmented ownerships and institutional immunities in property procurement. Not only do they resist and evade institutional appropriation, but they also seem to be developing mechanisms for heritage preservation. The persistence of adaptive governance abets the unplanned yet distinctive realisation of a creative quarter; in a process of 'gentrification with Chinese characteristics'. Expat, returnee Chinese and local stakeholders, from designers to developers to residents, form public-private coalitions in which they often each perform multiple roles. They grow increasingly adept at adapting to the discretionary decision-making of the different levels of the state and ad-hoc adjustments to policies. With their international best practices, these small-scale developments are diversifying development processes and scales, realising the global aspirations of an international quarters within local frameworks.

(Bombay First and McKinsey: 2003), featuring mixed-use complexes, elevated skywalks and wide roads. However, a decade later, the implementation of the plan has neither started nor has it been abandoned. The complex bureaucratic apparatus at work, difficulties in establishing public-private partnerships, and several political complications were major hurdles responsible for the long delay. The redevelopment process, which has glorified certain design paradigms and neoliberal policies, has so far not been successful in transforming Dharavi. It remains to be seen whether authorities will continue to push for redevelopment or simply wait for the next trend.

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