

“Slums and Architects”

Informal settlements and city development

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1 Quick overview about the global slums' situation

- The history of Slums

The first problem to define the “slums” starts with the lack of an agreed definition, there is an important variety of equivalent words in all the languages and geographical regions: French (bidonville, taudis...), Spanish (barraca, solares, cuarterias...) etc. In the Challenge of Slums, the term ‘slum’ is used in this report and in the MDGs in a general context to describe a wide range of low-income settlements and/or poor human living conditions.

The word "slum" was used for the first time in 1953 about an informal settlement in Casablanca, Morocco, to designate houses made from recycle cans. However, the first "slums" as such appeared in Europe, especially in England in the early nineteenth century, during the industrial revolution and the first major rural exodus. They have spread rapidly in the mid nineteenth century to become an international phenomenon.

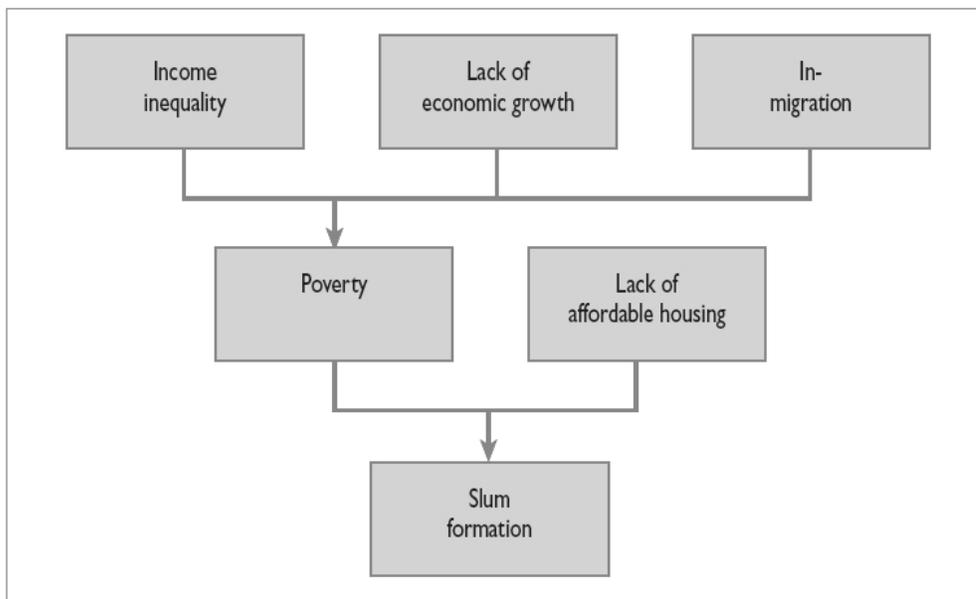
To understand the phenomenon, it is important to note that in 1801 the population of England and Wales was nine million. In 1851, it was eighteen million at the end of the century, it reached forty million. This phenomenon of rapid population growth, combined with a rural exodus and lack of commitment to the state, which explains the formation of English slum in the nineteenth century. The same phenomenon may partly explain the current phenomenon in developing countries.

In developing countries, the term of slums has a pejorative meaning and simple refers to lower quality, perception of poverty, insecurity.

Two factors combine to produce the phenomenon of slums in the 1950s.

The first is the increase in rural poverty. Indeed, for many governments who come to recover their independence after years of colonial rule, the country's development through the growth of the secondary and tertiary sectors. "Most governments in the Third World misled by industrialist ideology (in its Marxist form or liberalism), wanted to copy the rich and sacrificed their farmers». Their policy is, therefore, placed on urban development at the expense of rural areas. Their status is totally devalued, the city becomes for many farmers their only chance of survival. The second factor, totally related to the first, is the image conveyed by the city. It is presented as a dynamic place of empowerment that allows more income.

Inequality, poverty and slums formation¹



The consequences of this migration to the big cities are actually quite dramatic because the housing supply is much less than the flow of people who arrived in the city. The only solution for these migrants who arrive without savings is actually outside the city. Therefore appeared in all "urban voids" and periphery, pockets of informal settlements where a total unhealthy reign.

¹ UN-Habitat
2003, *The challenge of slums, global report on human settlements*, p.17
ISBN 1844070379

- Some numbers to understand the situation

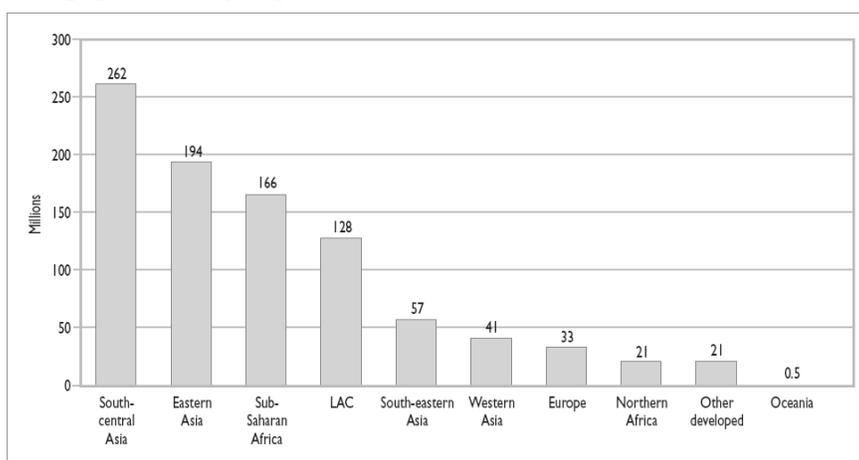
Total, urban and estimated slum population by major region, 2001²

Major area, region	Total population (millions) ^a	Urban population		Estimated slum population	
		(millions) ^a	Percentage of total population ^a	(thousands) ^b	Percentage of urban population ^b
World	6134	2923	47.7	923,986	31.6
Developed regions	1194	902	75.5	54,068	6.0
Europe	726	534	73.6	33,062	6.2
Other	467	367	78.6	21,006	5.7
Developing regions	4940	2022	40.9	869,918	43.0
Northern Africa	146	76	52.0	21,355	28.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	667	231	34.6	166,208	71.9
Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)	527	399	75.8	127,567	31.9
Eastern Asia	1364	533	39.1	193,824	36.4
South-central Asia	1507	452	30.0	262,354	58.8
South-eastern Asia	530	203	38.3	56,781	28.0
Western Asia	192	125	64.9	41,331	33.1
Oceania	8	2	26.7	499	24.1
Least developed countries (LDCs)	685	179	26.2	140,114	78.2
Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs)	275	84	30.4	47,303	56.5
Small island developing states (SIDS)	52	30	57.9	7,321	24.4

Sources: a Total and urban population: *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision*, Table A.1. b Slum population and percentages calculated by UN-Habitat using data from DHS (1987–2001); MICS (1995–2000); WHO/UNICEF JMP (1998–1999).

The urban population in the world is rising generally. The estimates are that more than 60% of the increase in the world's urban population over the next three decades will be in Asia, mostly in China and India, but also in Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Nine out of 23 cities with populations of more than 10 million people are in Asia. Similarly, Asia will have many cities projected to have more than a million people each. The urban growth rates in most parts of Asia are more rapid than that of the world.

Slum population by region, 2001³



² UN-Habitat
2001, *a Total and urban population : World Urbanization Prospects*

³ UN-Habitat
2003, *The challenge of slums, global report on human settlements*, p.14

In 2000, 29% of the urban population live in slums. With such a proportion, we understand that we are not facing marginal issues but indeed facing a social phenomenon of great concern. In addition, changes in the number of people living in slums between 1993 and 2000 have no reason to make us optimistic. Because even though the overall proportion of slums does not increase the number of people living in areas of poverty, meanwhile, continues to grow. Nevertheless these figures collect a lot of different types of slums. All slums are not the same situation, the same degree of misery.

However these figures are often enhanced because it is difficult to identify clandestine populations and governments minimized them.

- The diversity in the slums

Slums, like poverty and secure tenure, are multidimensional in nature.

It's very important to understand that slums are different according to their localization. For instance, a slum in Africa won't have the same building logic than a slum in Europe or in Asia. Furthermore, dwellings in the slums are diverse, it could be a simple temporary structure or more permanent.

The common point of all spontaneous habitat areas is poverty, lack of hygiene, a fragile roof, overcrowding, short living conditions extremely difficult. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there are two types of precarious habitats.

The first one will be called "slums of despair" is a place of decay where people gather without a real group consciousness and without much hope.

The second type of informal settlement will be "slums of hope" is inhabited by a population that has a group consciousness that has the desire to live and improve their daily lives. The man in the slum is part of a certain social dynamic, with the awareness of belonging to a culture, a movement.

It is therefore much easier to intervene in the second type of slums because the population can provide a much larger commitment.



Slum in Dharavi, Bombay ⁴



Slum in Kibera, Kenya⁵

^{4 5} www.lecartographe.net



Slum in Smokey mountain, Manila⁶



Slum in Porte d'Aubervillier, Paris⁷

- The land ownership

Land ownership is a very important criterion to understand how the slum can interact with government.

There are three major trends: the first concerns the cities where the land market is mostly private and unregulated, the second those where the soil belong to the municipalities and the third ones where public policies protect the occupants of the slums, regardless the landowner.

2 Slums is it a city? Comparison between slums and cities

- Slums versus City : The differences

The first characteristic that is putting outside the slums of the city is its illegality. It means that many slums are simply not recognized as such. Officially cards do not mention them and their inhabitants do not exist. Contrary to inner cities that give an image of richness there is in the slum omnipresent misery. Poverty is the base table of the entire slum.

The unemployment rate in slums is often very high and the assets are the working poor or low-skilled workers. In Dakar in the slums of Pikine, 25% of the population is inactive. In most cases, only the father works and he must feed a large family.

In many slums in developing countries, people live with around one euro per person per day. In the city that barely covers a coffee in a bar. In the slum of Dharavi in India, in 1995, people lived with \$ 23 per month per person.⁸ Some

⁶ Google earth

⁷ www.lecartographe.net

⁸ <http://donnees.banquemondiale.org/theme/pauvrete>

families earn more than that, but they do not earn enough to feed and pay the rent or the loan the same time, so they are constrain to live in the slum.

The lack of urban furniture

What make the difference in between the informal settlements and the city is that they are not, or few, urban facilities and services. No sewer, no water connection, no electricity, no carriage way, no garbage collection, no police, no sanitation, no educational facilities, etc. These are basic equipment.

Water is one of the most important and is mentioned in all the slums in the world. People go and get it to several hundred meters to a fountain or in some places slum dwellers have to pay their water, like in Kalayan in Manila.

On the other hand, the lack of urban furniture may seem like a detail, but it is a sign marking the status of non-city.



Slums in Bombay⁹

Density in one level

In contrast to the city which grows much in verticality, the informal settlements grow in a shape of an oil stain. As much the city can densify without being overpopulated, as the densification of a slum leads directly to a total congestion of space. The density in the slum is related to the average size of plots and the average family size.

The slum is the antithesis of the modern city. It is not capitalized, generates few flow (car, internet, water, electricity), its inhabitants leaving little or did not move too far away, all the shops are present, the people working either inside or nearby they move around a lot on foot, the activity in the street is very rich ... The image used by its inhabitants is often spontaneously, that of a village.

⁹ <http://histoiregeopicasso.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/bidonville1>

This is the opposite of the modern city, consisting of areas of activity that need to take his car to buy goods, also made up of mostly poor suburbs in activity, where the only meeting places are schools, centers social, places of worship, parks, cemeteries, supermarkets and sports fields. In the modern city, very few people walking on the sidewalks, except in the city center and the children do not play in the street...

The French philosopher and urbanist Paul Virilio expresses the idea that every time a step forward was taken, it generates a loss. According to us, the modern city has destroyed the social proximity and model of the slum, this urban village can help us rebuild this bond that so many politicians and associations looking to create in France.

- Slums, a city on its own

Slum: an organized space

The house is almost the only element that constitutes the fabric of the slum. The space is organized according to this module. The size plots that will determine the morphology of the slum.

The circulation spaces are often narrow and real public spaces are almost non-existent. However, the pathways (almost always pedestrian) are in order. We do not find exactly the same logic everywhere but overall the scheme is as follows¹⁰:

- One or several main streets, relatively large. It use often as a public space.
- Lanes, narrow and used as a semi-public space.
- A network of semi-public dead-end serving several private courtyards. It could also be used as a common area for people living around.

The maintenance level is related to the hierarchy: private spaces are often well maintained compare to public spaces.

Slum: a social place

First of all it is the gathering place for people from almost the same background. A slum area is a community or a group of several communities that share the same way of living and a great solidarity is created among the inhabitants¹¹.

¹⁰ DWYER D.J
1975, *People and housing in third world cities*
ISBN 0582480647
UN-Habitat
2003, *The challenge of slums, global report on human settlements*
ISBN 1844070379

¹¹ UN-Habitat
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Today, it is an essential element in the fight against poverty. Without the support and social relationships, it will be even more difficult to improve their area.

Social relations could be compared as the villagers. The noise made by the other is seen as a sign of life, not an attack. Women help one another to cook and to watch the children for whom the slum is a huge playground.

In addition, we have seen, for instance in Manila, that in the slums the common areas are often shared. In my point of view, this improves the social exchange.

It is through this social cohesion that people can expect to improve their lives and be heard by the authorities.

- Slums, a transition space?

In between rural and urban

The slum is the first drop point of the farmers whom want to flee from the poverty countryside. "It's first the rural poverty that fills the slums, then the natural growth is taking over" Noël Cannat, French sociologist. The informal settlements are often the only financially viable option, but particularly they offer a way of life close to a village life. The slum, with its "houses" family and social relationships is therefore less destabilizing than the city that may seem surprising and aggressive.

In addition, slum's scale is much more human than the scale of megacities in developing countries.

The slum as a "village within a city" is a reassuring place and allows rural people to socialize with the city gradually, while keeping the benchmark.

Yona Friedman, architect, philosopher and artist, in his publications from the 70s, he alludes to cities that go beyond what he calls "the critical group size" works. Thus, the model of major cities and megalopolises he opposes the urban villages, small entities located within cities. But what is very surprising when we move into a slum, it's the peaceful atmosphere due to the lack of car noise, the social life in the street, with many small shops, children playing freely outside ...

This reflection should invite us to reconsider the life in the neighborhoods of our modern cities, to make it more alive, more joyful, more human, more traders, less mono-functional, less empty, less "dorm."

3 The Role of Architects in the intervention on the informal settlements

- The main stakeholders

There are several main categories of stakeholders involved in improving the informal settlements and the creation of affordable housing:

- The governments of the countries involved in the shantytowns
- International institutions (including the UN and the World Bank)
- Regional development banks (Inter-American, African, and Asian)
- NGO
- Northern countries (through aids and specific projects)
- Cultural and technological cooperatives (encouraging training)

The countries that are directly affected are mostly overwhelmed by the problem because their policy does not give priority to housing. In addition, support and planning that they undertake to solve the creation of slums aren't effective due to the unstable governments, corruption, and lack of competence.

For rich countries, the lack of shelter in the South is such that the perspectives of building and civil engineering seem endless.

Despite the importance of the International Union of Architects (founded in 1948) or the International Architectural Foundation (founded in 1974) - which organized the first international competition for self-attended - the role of architects in the institutions and projects settlements remain secondary.

- Organised self-help housing, a solution?

“If your blanket is short, learn to double up if you want to cover yourself” Filipino Barrio saying¹².

The self-construction is to produce a building asking few or no professional. Self-planning involves roads, parks and public squares are drawn by the people, without recourse to a surveyor, a planner or a representative of the municipality (or the community in general). It could be one of the ways to try to solve the issue of informal settlements. Moreover, this kind of project create a real social link between people, everyone helps each other in acting for the community.

¹² DWYER D.J
1975, *People and housing in third world cities*, p230
ISBN 0582480647

For instance, in Saint Hannibals Empowerment center, people had to sign an agreement before leaving in the housing saying that they will act for the community and train to be able to do the tasks. This is also a good way to involve people in their neighbourhood. Moreover it's important and vital for a success that the community participate because; they know the area and their problems better than practitioners as outsiders will ever know. "Getting their input and having them help decide the nature of a project will develop a sense of 'ownership' and increase the project's chances for success", according the MIT.



Saint Hannibals Empowerment Center

"In an economy of scarcity, the mass of the common people, though poor possess the bulk of the nation's human and material resources for housing. Their collective entrepreneurial and managerial skills (and spare time) far surpass the financial and administrative capacity of even the most highly planned and centralized institutional system – whether dominated by the state or by private capitalist corporations." JFC Turner, 1971.

- A possible role for today's architect

An education to improve

I think that Architecture schools are not unaware of the problem because often there are some exercises about doing a shelter, or a foldable structure, but students are not aware about the cost of the design, the guidance is so little that the result makes no sense. As Patrick Coulombel says in *Beyond a shelter* "the cost of an emergency shelter for a refugee family in Darfur is around 250 dollars and it will last about five years, can an architect coming out of one of the world's excellent architecture schools create a good shelter on that budget?"

Humility and adaptability, qualities of a slum's architect

Until now, architects didn't really put a lot of effort in the fight against informal settlements. Yet the study reveals that the future of slums is not necessarily in their eradication but rather in their rehabilitation, their evolution. The role of the architect is, firstly, to detect potential social, urban and techniques on which it can rely on the other hand, understand the needs of slum dwellers to guide them towards improving their habitat.

It seems that architects have everything to gain by doing this new mission because working on existing and original urban situations can be a source of wealth in architecture, and a very beneficial experience for professionals. Behind the rusty corrugated iron is hiding a culture, a hope and it would be a shame to abandon in favor of a virtual image of modernity.

As Patrick Coulombel said "it's our responsibility to take the necessary initiatives, to become the principal actors in the battle for the future".

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