

# Bottom-up Urbanization and the Culture of Squatting

## A Critical Assessment<sup>(1)</sup>

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**Abstract:** Informal housing, often dismissed as slums or squatter settlements, constitutes a major part of the housing in developing Third World countries. Many researchers attribute the emergence and development of such informal housing, or what some call "bottom-up urbanization," to the informal and uncontrolled economy in countries of the Global South. Several theories emerged in the mid-twentieth century to explain this phenomenon, which led to proposals and policies that encouraged the urban poor to build their own homes. However, this idea met with limited success. This study, which presents a critique of some of these proposals and policies, offers a new theoretical contribution to the understanding of bottom-up urbanization with an emphasis on the centrality of the cultural factor.

Housing

Urbanization

Slums

Informal Housing

Bottom-up Urbanization

Top-down Urbanization

## Introduction

Cities generally arise as a result of a temporal accumulation of the practices of individuals, groups, and various institutions. With the passage of time, and after urban development, the city comes to develop a "bottom," which generally takes the form of a physical space for a group of people from the lowest and poorest social strata. A proper understanding of the "bottom" of cities requires the recognition that these places do not arise on their own. Rather, they are an expression of the materiality of the struggle that takes place among competing ideologies and values. Essentially forming the product of these "lower" informal cultures, the bottom of so-called Third World cities is usually described as informal. Therefore, these cultures are sometimes viewed as a reflection of urban development, or as an embodiment of urban "informality." After decades of government and development agency attempts to regulate urban

growth and extensive research into intervention policies and mechanisms, the problems of Third World cities remain as numerous and poorly managed as ever. Recently, governments and development organizations have had to search for alternatives that will more effectively control the impact of urban expansion on cities' institutional fabric, while scholars and researchers have had to re-evaluate their analytical classifications of the problem.

Literature dealing with the problems of Third World cities in the 1950s and 1960s focused on the inferior cultural and educational aspect of informal settlements, arguing that such settlements resulted from ignorance and a pathological culture which was described as a "culture of marginalization."<sup>(3)</sup> From this perspective, the prevalence of this form of urbanization is due to an ongoing state of cultural indifference among the poor. This point of view constituted a focus of continuous

1 This study was originally published in Issue 37 (August 2021) of *Omran*, a quarterly peer-reviewed journal of social sciences and humanities, and translated by Nancy Roberts.

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3 Janice Perlman, "Six Misconceptions about Squatter Settlements," in: Vijayan K. Pillai & Lyle W. Shannon (eds.), *Developing Areas: A Book of Readings and Research* (Oxford: BERG, 1995), pp. 336-344.

debate for at least two decades until the 1970s, at which time it began to decline.

Thereafter, the focus of academic literature shifted increasingly toward analysis of the political economy of uncontrolled expansion in Third World cities.<sup>(4)</sup> Such literature affirmed the structural aspects of urban problems, arguing that squatters are not outcasts within society but that, on the contrary, their informal settlements are a direct expression of the development of dependent capitalism in their communities. Studies in the late 1970s focused on the political aspects of the development of informal settlements, showing that they do not represent deviations from the prevailing social structure, but rather are closely related to the political systems that govern them.<sup>(5)</sup> Recent studies have also highlighted the close links between the informal sector, the formal sectors of housing and the economy, and official state policy.<sup>(6)</sup> In reviewing its housing and urban development programmes, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has focused on the complex network of relationships within which squatters are situated, and on the dynamic that exists between the formal and informal sectors, as a phenomenon of "coupling" that must be taken into account when designing development programmes.<sup>(7)</sup> Other studies have argued that the existence of informal activity is essential to

the survival of formal national economies in the world in general, and in the Third World in particular.<sup>(8)</sup>

The "pathological" explanation noted above casts blame on the poor, explaining the urban problems of informal settlements as being the result of their lack of motivation to change their living conditions. This study recognizes the inadequacy of this interpretation, which disregards the cultural role and innovative genius demonstrated by the urban poor in taking advantage of opportunities to survive and improve their living conditions. From this point of view, culture is seen as a broad system of values and standards of behaviour that arbitrate relations between the urban poor and the state. Therefore, the culture of the population plays a mediating role between the structure of urban society and the material needs of the city's population.

Viewing the informal sector as a problem of urban progress, and the "Third World" as a category to which this problem applies, are both major errors. This study examines the problems which arise from generalizing about the processes of developing informal housing at the bottom of Third World cities and argues that the processes through which informal housing develops in some countries of Latin America and the Middle East differ completely both from each other and from generalized global perceptions of the relationship between the state and informal settlements.

## 1. General Patterns of Informal Settlements

Informal settlements are identified by a variety of local terms. In Turkey they are called *gecekondular*, in Brazil, *favelas*, and in Colombia, *barrios*. All are densely populated, sprawling residential communities, generally established outside the formal legal and economic structures of many Third World cities. Given the inability of local and national governments to create adequate employment opportunities and

provide housing for the urban poor, low-income individuals were forced to invade public or private lands and create such informal settlements through a process that usually consists of a complex web of relationships with the so-called formal sector.<sup>(9)</sup>

Historically, the spontaneous growth of slums on government and private lands has been due to many problems of Third World cities. The slum settlement

4 Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grass Roots* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

5 Ibid.

6 Rod Burgess, "Self-Help Housing Advocacy: A Curious Form of Radicalism," in: Peter M. Ward (ed.), *Self-Help Housing: A Critique* (London: Mansell, 1982), pp. 55-97.

7 Hans Harms, "Historical Perspectives on the Practice and Purpose of Self-Help Housing," in: Ward (ed.), pp. 17-53.

8 Burgess.

9 John F. C. Turner, *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

process can be divided into four basic stages: land invasion, social formation, urban development, and urban maturity.<sup>(10)</sup> The process of indiscriminate invasion begins slowly and gradually with a small number of people; then, over time, it becomes a collective process, and sometimes the mobilization of gatherings of squatters on the ground. At other times, land grabbing is the result of the spontaneous actions of individuals in search of housing, leading to the seizure of state or private lands. The other method of indiscriminate settlement is carried out by a group that directs a semi-coordinated process to invade the land gradually, frequently with an awareness that the authorities may ignore this action. Sometimes, when the authorities interfere in the process of land grabbing through squatting, especially if the land belongs to the private sector and its original owners complain, squatters will be evacuated promptly and forcefully.<sup>(11)</sup>

In some countries, the idea of organizing squatters is instigated primarily by political parties or proxies in order to mobilize certain population groups. Opposition political forces may seek to use these movements to threaten the government's political legitimacy, especially when the confrontation between settlers and the police leads to demonstrations, and the authority attempts to suppress the protests of the local population, or to destroy what they have built randomly in a few days.

Prior to election campaigns, some weak governments may resort to facilitating the process of land appropriation through squatting, which sometimes occurs on privately owned land, in exchange for

squatters' votes. Although the occupation process may take place over a short period of time, many land owners allow it because they want to obtain infrastructure which the government provides for settlers, since this raises the prices of these lands, which in turn allows the original owners to negotiate later with the government in such a way as to collect suitable financial compensation based on the price estimated for lands after they have been developed.

At the turn of the twentieth century, many slums came to be accepted as residential communities due to their widespread nature and the sheer difficulty of removing them.<sup>(12)</sup> In order to understand this issue in depth the traditional and modern conditions under which planners have dealt with these slums in different countries must be presented. The modern conception of bottom-up urban expansion in the fields of geography, sociology and urban studies has come to include different strategies under labels such as self-help, auto-construction, and urban survival tactics. These strategies are usually considered positive efforts. However, it would be a mistake to associate them with a specific geographical region, such as the Third World or countries of the Global South, or with a particular class such as the urban poor. Instead, we must understand that informal urbanization (slums) is a practice inclusive of all economic and social levels,<sup>(13)</sup> a fact which is inconsistent with the use of the term in countries of the Global North to refer to any urban activities outside the scope of laws and regulations in force.<sup>(14)</sup>

## 2. Top-down Planning: From the Higher Authority to the Popular Base

In principle, the idea of urban planning relies, as theorist John Friedmann has stated, on the creation of "an activity that precedes the making of decisions

and the initiation of actions."<sup>(15)</sup> This kind of planning, which begins with higher authorities and is carried out on the whole of society, including

10 Paul Baross, "Sequencing Land Development: The Price Implications of Legal and Illegal Settlement Growth," in: Paul Baross & Jan van der Linden (eds.), *The Transformation of Land Supply Systems in Third World Cities* (Aldershot: Brookfield, 1990), pp. 57-80.

11 David Collier, *Squatters and Oligarchs: Authoritarian Rule and Policy Change in Peru* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

12 "Informal Housing," in: Hernando De Soto, *The Other Path* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), pp. 17-55.

13 Nezar Alsayyad, "Urban Informality as a 'New' Way of Life," in: Ananya Roy & Nezar Alsayyad (eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), pp. 7-30.

14 Vinit Mukhija & Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, "Introduction," in: Vinit Mukhija & Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris (eds.), *The Informal American City: Beyond Taco Trucks and Day Labor* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), pp. 1-17.

15 John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

the bottom classes, has long been a typical method of building and managing towns and settlements. There are several historical examples, the most famous of which may be the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century urban transformation of Paris by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century planning and construction of Brasilia as the new modern capital of Brazil. According to James Scott, this top-down approach can be seen as an attempt by the state to shape society "in such a way as to facilitate the implementation of various modern practices, from taxation and forced conscription to policing and prevention of rebellion."<sup>(16)</sup> In this model, the planner controls the overall process, in addition to having a clear view of the public interest and taking pride in scientific and technological progress. Marshall Berman describes how the story of Faust, written by the famous German novelist and philosopher Johann Goethe, provides the model of a character who lays a plan and establishes a comprehensive vision for a new society.<sup>(17)</sup> Famous planners who have followed this top-down approach include Le Corbusier, who planned Islamabad in Pakistan, and Robert Moses, who reshaped New York City in the 1950s.<sup>(18)</sup> These planners' aversion to spontaneous, unorganized urban communities and their conditions - be they slums

or informal settlements — reflects a professional attitude towards anarchy per se. However, it may also reflect a class bias against these forms of settlement as a threat to order and authority.

This type of top-down planning has succeeded in creating vibrant environments. However, this generally not been achieved without exacting high costs, including demolitions and evictions accompanied frequently by processes of displacement, replacement and renovation. Here comes to mind the famous debate between Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford in the 1960s, in which Mumford insisted on the possibilities of top-down planning,<sup>(19)</sup> while Jacobs focused on ordinary people's right to the spaces of public streets, and rejected the sweeping government interventions involved in the Master Plan. In many parts of the Third World, this type of top-down planning has represented a typical standard of urban governance, whereby presidents, ministers, and governors make critical decisions without any carrying out any consultative procedures. Opposition to these practices did not arise until the mid-twentieth century following the emergence of equality-related issues, opposition to racial discrimination, and female voices demanding equality.

### 3. Bottom-up Urbanization: From the Popular Base to the Top

From its inception, the idea of bottom-up planning has focused around empowering users and encouraging community participation, particularly that of neighbourhood and city dwellers. This type of planning arose in the United States of America at the hands of planners such as Paul Davidoff, who affirmed the role of advocacy and pluralism, called for grassroots community action, and defended the role of community participation.<sup>(20)</sup> Jacobs was an influential figure in this movement, as she believed in ordinary people's ability

to know their needs. In contrast to Moses' top-down planning approach, which was reflected in large-scale urban regeneration projects in New York, Jacobs affirmed the importance of streets, neighbourhoods, and small blocks which, although they might appear random to those engaged in top-down planning, actually constitute "complex systems of functional order."<sup>(21)</sup> "Participation" soon became the byword for this type of planning, which adopts a strategy that allows disadvantaged citizens to have a role in "full

16 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

17 Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988).

18 Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

19 "Home Remedies for an Urban Cancer," in: Lewis Mumford, *The Urban Prospect* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1962), pp. 184-201.

20 Paul Davidoff, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1965), pp. 331-338.

21 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

administrative authority" by voicing their needs and desires during the planning process.<sup>(22)</sup>

This call originally emerged in the countries of the Global North as a form of resistance to the top-down approach. However, bottom-up planning did not emerge in the countries of the Global South in the same way. Rather, it was introduced through the intervention of an elite group of external experts, including architects, planners and economists. This group highlighted "local capacities" as a means of confronting the "squatter settlements" that had arisen in the wake of the rapid urbanization that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s; The interest in providing housing for the urban poor was not limited to governments, but stretched to international agencies, researchers, and architects, who participated closely in this debate in a variety of ways in keeping with the nature of their work and class interests.<sup>(23)</sup>

The self-help strategy put forward by British architect John F. C. Turner became the best-known approach to dealing with housing problems in the Third World. In his book *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments*, Turner criticized the inability of architects and planners to determine the nature of the preference to be given to the resident population. Turner drew a distinction between centralized (subordinate) and self-governing (autonomous) systems based on the necessity of "autonomy" in housing and services. He emphasized that centralized techniques, hierarchical bureaucracy, and mass production and distribution in subordinate systems lead to dire economic consequences, including additional expenditures for administrative procedures and general operating costs. In contrast, small-scale, low-energy, low-technology and labour-intensive operations produce an autonomous, low-cost housing supply.<sup>(24)</sup>

The self-help housing strategy quickly spread beyond the Third World to become a general strategy for acquiring land and building housing for the poor. Addressing the contradiction between planned and

unplanned development, Paul Baross postulates four stages of conventional development. The first is "planning," a stage that includes obtaining administrative approvals. This is followed by the "servicing" and "building" phases, which allow the construction of homes on legally offered land. The final stage is that of "occupancy," which involves selling or renting homes to users. Baross points out that all these stages (planning, servicing, building, and occupancy) are beyond the reach of the poor in many Third World cities, and that what happens in reality is an inverse sequence of these stages (occupancy, building, servicing, and planning). Since "planned" development requires significant upfront investments and fixed expenditures, "unplanned" development (informal urban development or grass-roots urban expansion) becomes the only way for the urban poor to obtain land and housing, which are then serviced at a later time.<sup>(25)</sup>

The recognition of Turner's strategy led to the rapid development of recommendations for the adoption of new policies, most notably those made by the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, who in his book *The Other Path* identified four stages of informal urban development. According to de Soto, this "illegal" process could be improved and made "semi-legal." through privatization, deregulation, and the elimination of bureaucracy.<sup>(26)</sup> De Soto then broadens these recommendations in his book *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*, in which he calls for the poor to be "integrated" into the formal sector by giving them titles to these illegal properties. He claims that the poor are already richer than people and government imagine them to be, and that their main problem is their inability to convert informal assets ("dead capital") into "living capital." The solution he proposes involves formalizing and legalizing what the poor have already built, then including it within the state-approved urban map.<sup>(27)</sup>

22 Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, vol. 35, no. 4 (1969), pp. 216-224.

23 Turner.

24 Ibid.

25 Baross.

26 De Soto, *The Other Path*.

27 Hernando De Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

However, even before being embraced and praised by neo-liberal advisors such as de Soto, this essentially self-help approach to housing policies landed widespread criticism. According to Rod Burgess, for example, the main flaw in this approach lies in the unexamined assumption that the output of the urban poor (not only their dwellings, but their infrastructure as well) is a free, unprotected voluntary product. Burgess holds that drawing a distinction between dependency and autonomy (institution-based housing and self-help housing) amounts to a "false class polarization,"<sup>(28)</sup> and that they should not be viewed as two different systems, but rather as two different poles of capitalism, the former representing the formal appraisal of real estate capital, and the latter representing the small-scale production of housing in its entanglement with the general conditions of capitalism. Meanwhile, Hans Harms traces the structural context in which the self-integration housing approach emerged, concluding that this approach confuses the "freedom to build" with the "necessity of survival." On this basis, Harms distinguishes between the "self-help" executed by the population, and similar measures undertaken by the State, concluding that the first represents "class struggle from below," while the

second embodies "class struggle from above," which is an attempt to "increase integration into the existing world social order, and the continued accumulation and hegemony of capital."<sup>(29)</sup>

According to Burgess and Harms, adoption of self-help for self-integration as an official policy shifts responsibility for housing production onto the urban poor in such a way that the State can evade the responsibilities entrusted to it. Thus, the depoliticization of the housing issue has contributed to the depoliticization of the State. Accordingly, Burgess and Harms assert that by identifying hierarchy, bureaucracy and size as sources of the housing problem, Turner turns the role of the State into a technical issue. And like Turner, De Soto failed to identify the State's foundational role in capitalist modes of production. Moreover, the problem lies not in understanding the role and limits of self-integration per se, or even in advocating bottom-up community-based planning, but rather, in understanding the purposes of those who advocate this type of planning. It therefore becomes necessary to study what bottom-up urban expansion means in current capitalist systems.

#### 4. Slums in the Middle East and Latin America

Utilising applied examples, this section will highlight the slums of the Middle East and Latin America, the analysis of which will help to establish the analytical argument for this study. The following examples were selected on the basis of procedural rather than geographic or temporal criteria, as they demonstrate the evolution of the informal urban environment in general. As the following four cases reveal, the expansion of informal housing is governed by the cultural specificity of each community.

##### a. Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Rio de Janeiro's Rocinha, one of the largest shantytowns in Brazil, is considered a "slum neighbourhood success story."<sup>(30)</sup> In the 1970s, the

neighbourhood's residents, who numbered 150,000 at that time, lived in wood and mud huts without water or electricity. By 2007, however, they had obtained the full right to such services. This change was brought about mainly by the Favela-Barrio Program. The program began in 1994 with financial assistance from the Inter-American Development Bank, and its goal was to develop slums; i.e. "to transform informal settlements (favelas) into officially recognized neighbourhoods (barrios)."<sup>(31)</sup> This program also reflected a shift in Brazilian public policy from eradicating shantytowns to attempts to integrate them into the city.

When Janis Perlman followed up on her 1970 ethnographic investigation of the shantytowns of Rio

28 Burgess, p. 67.

29 Harms.

30 Robert Neuwirth, "Squatters and the Cities of Tomorrow," *City*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2007), pp. 71-80.

31 Ananya Roy, "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, vol. 71, no. 2 (2005), pp. 147-158.

de Janeiro, she found that these improvements had made little difference for the residents of Rocinha.<sup>(32)</sup> In the past, parents had used the spectre of poverty to shame their children, saying such things as, "If you don't stay in school and study hard, you'll end up nothing but a garbage collector." Three decades later, however, the job of garbage collector required a diploma. Similarly, many residents told Perlman that they had been harmed by the improvements made by the government or international agencies, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank. In the words of Perlman at the time: "Too many candidates seeking the favelas' votes, and too many unkept promises, have led to widespread political corruption and deepening skepticism."<sup>(33)</sup>

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Rocinha had become the site of shantytown tourism. Tourists can use the "Discover Brazil" website<sup>(34)</sup> Business magazines promote these activities as "entrepreneurial opportunities" for favela residents.<sup>(35)</sup> By 1978, Villa El Salvador's population had grown to 300,000,<sup>(36)</sup> Strangely, however, legal recognition and formalization led to a decrease in the number of community organizations.<sup>(37)</sup> Since 1999, successive mayors of Villa El Salvador have launched a series of programs and projects to strengthen participatory management and improve financial conditions, but most of them have failed to achieve positive results due to poor funding, lack of professional experience and a complete lack of trust. The fragmentation of public participation further undermined residents' ability to express their opinions, while ongoing poverty exacerbated the situation.

The cases of the Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Villa El Salvador in Lima, Peru reveal the inherent contradiction between top-down planning and bottom-up planning, as well as slums' negative social and cultural impacts on the lives of

their residents by ignoring the role of culture and the specificity of each individual community. The next two cases assess the processes through which informal urban communities expand in the Middle East. The next case begins with Egypt, where random expansion has taken place based on the illegal division of agricultural lands, a division that has been accelerated by urban expansion in Cairo. The final case looks at Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s, where the process of random expansion is linked to residents' ability to take advantage of existing regulations and laws.

### c. The Zabbaleen, Cairo, Egypt

"Zabbaleen" is an Egyptian Arabic word that literally means "garbage collectors." In Cairo, however, the word also refers to a neighbourhood bearing this name located on the eastern edge of the city, where garbage collectors live. The work of these people, most of whom are Christians, the major religious minority of Egypt, consists of collecting food waste, leftover paper, boxes, bottles, and plastic materials from the rest of the city and transporting them to the Zabbaleen neighbourhood, whose residents clean, treat and resell their reusable elements. The neighbourhood is a city unto itself, with grocers, a butcher, cafes and a school. The life of garbage collectors involves gruelling, filthy work, which is also high-risk, involving sharp objects such as needles, metal fragments and broken glass, as well as disease-causing bacteria. This danger is reinforced by a lack of awareness of the risks that result from this exposure. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon in the Zabbaleen neighbourhood for the job to be passed on from one generation to the next. Although there is a school in the neighbourhood, the children of garbage collectors rarely have any choice but to follow in their parents' footsteps.

Multiple attempts have been made to formalize waste collection in Cairo, most notably by international waste

32 Janice Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

33 Janice Perlman, "Marginality: From Myth to Reality in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, 1969-2002," in: Roy & Alsayyad (eds.), pp. 105-146.

34 Ibid.

35 De Soto, *The Other Path*.

36 Jörg Plöger, "Gated Barriadas: Responses to Urban Insecurity in Marginal Settlements in Lima, Peru," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2012), pp. 212-225.

37 Michaela Hordijk, "Participatory Governance in Peru: Exercising Citizenship," *Environment and Urbanization*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2005), pp. 219-236.

management companies.<sup>(38)</sup> In 1981, the Zabbaleen Program for Environment and Development was launched with funding from the World Bank in the aim of improving the living conditions of the neighbourhood's residents. By the 1990s, most of the makeshift huts in the neighbourhood had been replaced with sturdier concrete and brick structures.<sup>(39)</sup> The first rockslide occurred in 1993, killing 70 people. In 2008, residents woke up again to the sound of falling rocks, which destroyed nearly 100 brick structures and killed more than 100 people. The anger of the residents was directed primarily towards the government, which people said had neglected early warning signs of the disaster, including cracks in the retaining wall. However, the problem has continued to be neglected until a new catastrophe emerges. While searching for the bodies of family members who had been "buried alive" in the 1993 rockslide, residents complained that "no one listened to them because they were poor, helpless, and classified as subhuman."<sup>(40)</sup> Possession of land and shelter in the Saudi Arabian cultural context does not require pre-orchestrated or extensive collective action for the illegal occupation of land to take place. Hence, the Kingdom provides a clear example of the cultural and social specificity of innovative processes through

which the urban poor have arrived at effective strategies for obtaining shelter.

The previous four cases demonstrated different attempts at informal housing development. The cases selected from the Middle East, which occurred under distinct social and political conditions, represent joint processes based on the need to adhere to a gradual approach whereby occupiers avoid confrontation or negotiation with the government or political parties. The ways in which the urban poor in the Middle East obtain shelter have proven to be non-confrontational, based on gradual accumulation. In Latin America, by contrast, politics and confrontation with the government and opposition parties play an important role in the poor's acquisition of the right to seize state land and transform it over time into integrated communities supported by infrastructure. However, illegal land ownership and unregulated construction methods may be said to be common factors in the process by which the urban poor find shelter in both Latin America and the Middle East. The structural constraints implicit in the development of dependent capitalism in both regions can be seen as systematically excluding the urban poor from the housing market, placing them outside the formal channels for the production of housing as a market commodity which is sold and exchanged.

## Conclusion: The Future of Slums and the Importance of the Cultural Factor

Where, and with what, do the paths of bottom-up and top-down urban planning begin? If top-down planning is meant to be the antithesis of bottom-up urbanization, then "top" here includes innumerable aspects of hegemonic power. Moreover, in order to determine what the "top" and "bottom" are, the idea of the baseline from which decisions emerge requires review, and the levels and direction of intervention should be redefined. Only after this assessment

can we have a balanced discussion of urbanization "from above" or "from below." However, the planning process, whether top-down or bottom-up, is constrained by action through an institutional hierarchy. In top-down planning, those in power take direct measures, while in bottom-up planning, institutional structures allocate space for those who lack it. In other words, the idea of "top" and "bottom" creates an overall space that determines the direction

38 Wael Fahmi, "The Impact of Privatization of Solid Waste Management on the Zabaleen Garbage Collectors of Cairo," *Environment and Urbanization*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2005), pp. 155-170.

39 Wael Fahmi & Keith Sutton, "Cairo's Contested Garbage: Sustainable Solid Waste Management and the Zabaleen's Right to the City," *Sustainability*, vol. 2, no. 6 (2010), pp. 1765-1783.

40 M. Saleem Bukhari, "Squatting and the Use of Islamic Law -a Case Study of Land Occupation in Madinah Munawara, Saudi Arabia," *Habitat International*, vol. 6, no. 5-6 (1982), pp. 555-563.



of decision-making and the processes in which the rich or the poor, the strong or the weak, engage. The top-down layout assumes a downward arrow from the source of power at the top, while bottom-up planning assumes an upward arrow from the weak at the bottom. What we are really interested in here is the capabilities that emerge in the middle zone between these two, which is the fulcrum of any society, and whose absence negatively affects all aspects, whether social or economic. It may be said that the relationship and direction of movement between "from above" and "from below" will change over time. One notes, for example, that urban revolutions contributed to the primacy of a top-down path.

In this connection, neoliberal advisors such as De Soto have called for the formalization of the informal sector. However, the successive financial crises in the current century have already provided irrefutable evidence that the poor have not benefited from this approach. Rather, events have demonstrated the tendency of the formal sector, from banks to governments, to operate informally by exploiting legal loopholes for the benefit of the powerful, thereby making them richer than ever. Indeed, several recent cases of financial fraud have revealed that success in capitalist societies depends not only on "free markets" and deregulation, but also on manipulating the media to divert attention, bringing unfair lawsuits to silence the opposition, and using money to buy the support of major politicians.<sup>(41)</sup> Intervention designs ranging from underground power lines to the provision of brightly coloured staircases and brick gates were later touted as essential services that would formally integrate the slums into the city. Announcing the establishment of facilities such as day care centres, laundrettes, and salsa ballrooms was seen as an effort "to attract and encourage the community to embark on its journey of self-improvement." Meanwhile, roads were built for the first time to allow police and sanitation departments to access formerly inaccessible parts of the city. However, the real problem here was not that the slums were regarded as isolated, inaccessible and unintegrated urban entities that needed input from the capital's experts. Rather, the problem lay in the designers' view that existing homes needed

to be removed and demolished to make room for an infrastructure that would allow integration and accommodate the poor in the formal city.

It should be noted here that on their own, architects and planners cannot address the issues of urban poverty, nor can they solve problems that are rooted in structural economic inequality. The self-integration approach to housing, similar to that pursued by Architecture for Humanity, may be viewed as a form of philanthropy at best. However, it is also being incorporated into policy solutions which isolate the housing issue from the structural conditions of capitalist development. The issue at stake here is not design per se, nor the intentions of architects and planners, but rather the fact that what they seek to address tends to go far beyond their professional capacity. Chronic poverty is far more than a lack of public space that architects and planners can address with design solutions. Bottom-up planning is not an entirely comprehensive vision. It can, at best, remedy the deteriorating conditions that already exist, but it cannot eradicate the root causes of poverty, which include a structure that must be addressed in its entirety, and from all angles.

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41 Architecture for Humanity, *Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Responses to Humanitarian Crises* (New York: Metropolis Books, 2006).

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