RETHINKING URBAN INFORMALITY AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS GROWTH IN URBAN AFRICA: A LITERATURE DISCUSSION

Seth Asare Okyere and Michihiro Kita

Division of Global Architecture, Graduate School of Engineering, Osaka University, Suita, Osaka 565-0871, Japan.

ABSTRACT

Recent estimates indicate a steady growth in urban informal settlements as part of the urbanization and urban growth process occurring in most cities in Africa. In spite of the reality of this situation, the common understanding of urban informality is varied and often negative. This paper, through a literature study, discusses general perspectives on urban informality in developing countries. It then focuses on urban informal settlements, reasons for its growth in African cities and what urban planning in Africa can learn from its persistence. We also argue that such learning can influence urban sustainable urban development. The paper emphasizes the need to reconsider dominant and conventional thoughts on informal settlements to embrace its inherent patterns and processes in Africa. The paper concludes that urban informal settlements, in spite of dominant negative narratives it has received, can offer important lessons for responsive, inclusive and effective sustainable urban planning strategies in African cities.

Keywords: Informality, Informal Settlements, Urbanization, Africa, Urban Planning

INTRODUCTION

In several developing cities, where there is still rapid urbanization and urban restructuring, demands for housing and land is high but the capacity of government systems are relatively weak. Informal activities therefore dominate every aspect of social and economic activity (Jenkins, 2006) in urban areas. In Africa and much of the developing part of Asia, informality has been identified as the main mechanism of urbanization and urban growth. The phenomenon of informality as a form of urbanism has been confined to the urbanization process of developing countries (UN Habitat, 2009).

The degree of informal activity across the world is changing and there are differences between and within countries in terms of size, location and characteristics, and why people live in them; although they share similar characteristics such as not entirely conforming to law, emerges outside official planning framework, lacks initial servicing and is built by occupants themselves (Gilbert 1981 in Gelder, 2013). In spite of the ever-growing presence of urban informality within cities of the developing world, it is widely acknowledged that there is a poor understanding on the process and existence of informal settlements (Roy, 2005; Smit 2006 in Huchzermeyer, 2009). Again, urban informality in urban planning research has not been well understood and poorly neglected (Revell, 2010). However, within the current trend of urban growth and the fact that projections indicate a steady growth in urban informal settlements in developing countries, it is important to properly understand informal settlements and identify ways planning can learn from it in addressing urban socio-spatial problems. This is exceptionally significant, as the proper conceptualization of urban informal settlements do not only impact urban planning and policy, but also the extent to which cities in Africa can make significant progress towards sustainable urban development, in light of the current discussions on the global sustainable development goals (SDGs) or the post-2015 agenda.

In view of this, with this paper as a first part of an on-going research on learning from urban informality, seeks to review the changing perspectives of urban informality and informal settlements, some of the issues behind its growth in urban Africa and what planning can learn from its persistence. The paper is divided into three thematic sections. First, it looks at the conceptual roots of informality, changing perspectives and new thoughts on emerging practices. Second, it looks at urban informal settlements and the factors behind its growth in urban Africa. The final part of the paper focuses on what informal settlements, in light of new perspectives, mean to inclusive and contextually relevant urban planning.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

In the 1970s and 80s, scholars such as Hart (1973) and Castells (1983) enhanced understanding on urban informality in Africa and Latin American contexts. However, their research focused on the differences between formal and informal settlements and in most situations descriptive and economic oriented. Again, De Soto (1984, 2000), a leading scholar on informality and property right, whose work has received several awards, focused on legal and illegal aspects of informality, but also reinforces the dualistic framework (of formal/informal) through economic analysis.

Recently, scholars like Roy (2004, 2005), who has researched on urban informality and poverty in India, have emphasized how informal settlements need to be understood in a different way, calling it a 'new knowledge to planning'. Roy therefore offers a new perspective, but her views focuses are built on philosophical and knowledge patterns that is southern Asian oriented. In 2014, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED; Brown et. al., 2014) produced a working paper on informality and the green economy. Highly significant in providing perspectives and arguing for a new framework, they focus much on economic and sustainability aspects but exclude the key social issues and the lessons for urban planning in Africa cities.

What is missing in informal settlement research is a systematic review about perspectives, emerging paradigms and the lessons it has for urban planning particularly in Africa. This paper is therefore a conscious attempt to provide a trend of perspectives on urban informality and informal settlements, to review its emerging dimensions in relation to urbanization and most importantly outline the lessons it offers sustainable and inclusive urban planning and development in African cities.

UNDERSTANDING URBAN INFORMALITY

Informality or the informal sector emerged as a concept in the early 1970s through the work of Hart (AlSayyad, 2004). Hart developed the concept in relation to employment in Ghana in the early 1970s and was later adopted by the then International Labour Office (Jenkins, 2006). According to AlSayyad (2004) the roots of this concept was based on employment, as to whether wage earning or self-employment with a degree of rationalization. The main principle in Hart's work was a dualistic differentiation between formal and informal based on labor and employment in city. Since then, Hart's concept has been widely used in a lot of fields including urban planning and development studies, building

understanding of urban informality on the dual model: a distinction between formal and informal. This section briefly discusses the various ways urban informality has been conceived or constructed across different but related fields.

Earlier Dualism Concept

Reynolds (1969) developed the two-sector (dual) model for understanding activities in the city as the 'state sector and the trade service sector'. The state sector is the organized sector (the formal). On the other hand, the trade sector (informal sector) refers to multitude of people seen in in the visible parts of the city (such as streets, sidewalks and back alleys), specifically including petty traders, street vendors, porters and artisans. This, he also geographically positioned as being in developing countries (Reynolds 1969 cited in AlSayyad, 2004). In line with this and based on economic analysis, scholars proposed a dual conception of organization of activities within the city: one that was organized under the state (formal) and the other outside the state and largely without a regulated system of organization (informal). Similarly, Portes (1987) associated informality with the status of labour, integrated in what is termed the 'black market': where work contracts, insurances, recorded payments among others does not practically exist. The separation of the formal-informal in understanding activities in the city became popular in developing countries through the work of International Organizations (ILO, 1972 in AlSayyad, 2004). For instance the ILO adopted this concept and used it in classifying activities for most intervention programs in towns and cities in developing countries in the 1970s (See Moser 1978, Hart 1973).

However, this model of understanding organization in the city has come under much criticism in recent decades. Particularly from urban scholars emerging in the 1980s (See Porters, Castells and Brenton, 1989; Meagher, 2007). They argue for the need to move beyond dualism to understand the social institutions and socio-cultural practices that influence the organization of activities in towns and cities. Nonetheless, the separation between the formal and informal has not only been associated with organization of cities but also terminologies such as First/Third World, poverty/richness, developed/developing and traditional/modern among others (Aramburu Guevara, 2014).

Perspectives on Urban Informality

Beyond the concept of dualism in understanding informality, different perspectives have emerged over the years. Thus, even though informality has been generally acknowledged as the set of activities that do not generally follow the law or formal planning regulations (Duminy, 2011), there are different perspectives. This section, in no way assuming the points to be exhaustive, presents some of the dominant perspectives about urban informality beyond the traditional dualism framework.

Economic Perspectives

This perspective is much similar to earliest origin of informality in terms of production and economic organization in the city. Fundamentally, as Aramburu Guevara (2014) indicates, it relates to 'a range of behaviors and practices unfolding within cities: the underground economy'. It therefore refers to income generating forms of production, workers, technology, services or settlement practices that are relatively unregulated by the state or formal institutions. The informal city, as perceived within an economic perspective, is therefore a constitution of 'unregistered economic activities (Tranberg, Hansen and Vaa 2004).

Legal Perspectives

The legal perspective reinforces the formal/informal separation with an added element of legal and illegal. In principle, the legal perspective underpins the traditional theory of dualism by placing activities within urban settings as either legal or illegal. It therefore refers to unofficial modes and strategies, a collection of processes that are not formally regulated as part of a predefined rule-based procedure. These may include illegal land transfers, casual or spontaneous interactions, informal occupation, or informal 'behind the scenes' negotiations between developmental actors (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004). What is observed here is a sort of regulated system and framework, codes and norms that define a formal system of activity perceived as the 'legal'. Hence, any activity, be it practices or behavior existing outside the 'planned system' of regulation is seen as lacking a legal logic and therefore better represented as informal. One prominent scholar within this area is Peruvian economist Hernando De Soto (2000). In his view, informality is a natural response to legal barriers, bureaucratic procedures and also to real market forces (De Soto 2000; Roy and AlSayyad, 2004).

Social Forces Perspective

One of the critiques of the traditional view of informality is that it is constructed within a purely economic view without consideration to social and cultural context within which it exists. In effect, other authors (Castells, 1983, AlSayyad, 2004 and Huchzermeryer, 2008) from planning and urban studies argue for a social forces perspective. Within this perspective, researchers reveal the complex social forces at play in the concept of informality and that this phenomenon is a product of the intricate social activities and actions. For instance, Friedman (2006) explains that the social force of informality is a notion of empowerment, manifested by the self-organization for collective survival of the poor, a sort of opportunity-creating tendency. He also observes an actualization of the principles of the 'moral economy' (reciprocity, voluntarism, etc.) and social power (associations, events, social networks, tolls of production) as a means by which informal settlement dwellers organize and improve their living conditions. In other words, this perspective demonstrates

the survival and coping strategies of urban residents, who under the limitations created by the 'formal systems and elements' within city, rely on the power of collective action and individual creative abilities to develop avenues and mechanisms for habiting and benefiting from the city. The principal idea here is that a mere classification of separation of formal/informal is not sufficient to comprehensively conceptualize organization within urban areas without particular attention to the social actions and forces that underpin such organization.

Behavioral Perspective

This perspective is quite unique among those discussed. It relates to the emerging behavioral patterns of individuals that are constantly changing and non-static. Here, informality is not the opposite of formality, as the traditional scholars argue, but 'a mode that results from the interweaving of the formal and informal, a sort of mobile and elastic way between legal and illegal' (Roy, 2009). In other words, the 'new' patterns of informality that relates to human behavior cannot be associated with a specific group, area or phenomenon but that which involves a higher degree of mobility where people switch between formal and informal or are interwoven at different situations and circumstances. Gilbert (2003) writes that the new pattern of informality is 'ephemeral' (temporal) and that its contemporary manifestation is shown in the situation where individuals or groups switch between the formal and informal and have both characteristics at the same time. For example, living in an informal settlement but working in a formal sector. This situation is found in both the poor and those in within the higher status of population. Thus, human behaviors manifest in certain activities that prevent a permanent categorization of formal and informal. Hence, the situation that emerges is that both the formal and informal are interconnected: a dynamic relationship where behaviors are not static (or permanent) but evolve through time depending on changing conditions and circumstances.

Sustainability Perspective

Even though the coupling of informal settlements and sustainability dates as far back to the post-WWII recovery and its associated policy of eradication and eviction to address both environmental and social conditions in certain parts of cities (Cheung, 1979), it has recently surfaced under the new discourses of urban sustainability and sustainability development. Again, in spite of the confusion surrounding the actual meaning of sustainable development due to its broadness (Devuyst, 2001), researchers within this perspective imply no confusion in their strict view of urban informality as an issue of urban sustainability and sustainable development. Within this perspective, urban informality is perceived as a container for the urban poor who are vulnerable to the harsh effects of climate change (Alam and Golam Rabbani, 2007, Huq and Reid, 2007, Nchito, 2007) with limited economic output critical for inter and intra generational equity (Fekade, 2000, Ueta, 2003) as well as exercising practices, activities and growth patterns which are seen as detrimental to the

environment and agricultural and industrial land use, thereby affecting sustainable development (De Risi, et al, 2013, Napier, 2007, UN Habitat, 2003, United Nations 2006). Succinctly, scholars within the field of environment and development studies as well as environmental sustainability emphasize location, land use, unplanned growth and vulnerability as a sort of socio-environmental space within which urban informality is constructed and defined. Although the sustainability view overtly avoids the formal and informal dualism, it implicitly associates informality as a socio-spatial phenomenon that is intricately embedded in environmental and physical activities that affect advances towards sustainable development and sustainability of places and spaces.

Urban Informal Settlements

If (urban) informality is a general conceptual framework that defines organization and regulation of activities within an area, then urban informal settlements may be properly perceived as a socio-spatial application of the concept on informality. However, urban informal settlements, in urban planning and development literature have received very negative reviews. Often, it is associated with popular terminologies such as squatter settlements and unplanned towns. These terminologies according to Hague (1982 cited in Nguluma, 2003) are used to describe those identifiable parts of urban areas perceived to be outside the scope of state planning regulation and laws. Even though he argues that such descriptions are debatable, he also cites the association of urban informality with spontaneous settlements, shantytowns and slums.

Gilbert (2007) highlight such theoretical postulations, indicating that it has increasingly been considered as 'bad shelter', often associated with slums, used at various scales to refer to anything from a house to a large settlement considered to be substandard and inhabited by the poor. The UN Habitat (2003a) defines it with the following characteristics: inadequate access to safe water, inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding, and insecure residential status. The UN Habitat definition is perhaps the most popular is defining and classifying urban informal settlements spatially in several developing countries where she operates. This may be attributable to its ever-increasing role in urban intervention programs and periodic reports offering information of the state of cities across the world. However, her definition has been criticized as over simplistic and assuming an unusual commonality across spaces and places. In fact, Gilbert (2007) contends that the UN Habitat ignores the complex social dimensions and over relies on physical and legalistic connotations. Moreover, Dovey and King (2011) imply a sort of theoretical confusion surrounding informal settlements and its equation to slums and squatter settlements; asserting the need for clear distinction between two the distinctive urban features. Informal settlements, they opine, are urban neighborhoods or districts that develop and operate without the formal control of the state, co-existing but are not the

same as 'squatter' settlements and 'slums'. Stated differently, all slums fall into the category of urban informal settlements but not all urban informal settlements are slums. Even in terms of contextual significance, the relevance of the traditional view of urban informal settlements as dirty and illegal is debated in Africa. For example, Okpala (1987 in Nguluma, 2003, Gilbert, 2007) reveal in their research that the complex system of land ownership, the customary and traditional access to land makes the issue of illegality and informality alien and imported.

The seeming contradictions and confusions surrounding urban informal settlements unequivocally necessitate the need for critical considerations that properly comprehend current situations and emerging practices. Fortunately, recent research, though few, in planning and urban studies is beginning to provide important hints to better understand urban informal settlements. For instance, Huchzermeyer (2007) insists that informal settlements should be understood not as permanent actions but fluid, since these settlements are in a process of constant change. Thus urban informality responds to changing structures and pressures and hence, best described as a relative than absolute concept. This corroborates the need to understand urban informality as a process than an output. Hence, too much emphasis on physical appearance and aesthetics in describing informal settlements (in both the scholarly research and media) may induce an action or response, but it rather makes the concept 'political than science' (Yelling, 1986 in Gilbert, 2007). Again, the need to re-understand urban informality presupposes that the dynamics of urban informal activities and practices have changed or evolved, making earlier conceptualizations insufficient to capture current processes. In line with this, the next section discusses emerging views and postulations that accentuate the evolving patterns of urban informal settlements as a socio-spatial phenomenon that requires rethinking traditional perspectives and the need for appropriate conceptualizations that reflect current situations.

Re-understanding Urban Informality

Here, an attempt is made to draw on new paradigms emerging from urban planning literature on understanding current dynamics of urban informal settlement practices. The argument presented in this paradigm, as shall be illustrated, is that there are new patterns and processes at play in cities in developing countries that demand a review of the way the inherited concept of urban informality and informal settlements is understood. Several authors (Governeur, 2015; van Gelder, 2013; Gilbert, 2007; Friedman, 2006; Roy, 2005) have hinted on this point. In specific terms, they argue that urban informality is '*a mode of urbanization*' (Roy, 2005); the *informal provision* of basic facilities and services in settlements (Gilbert, 2002) and *socio-spatial qualities* (Governeur, 2015) —all of which defy conventional thought on urban informal settlements practices and activities.

<u>Informality as a 'Mode of Urbanization'</u>

The proposition of urban informality as a mode of urbanization is based on two main emerging situations: (i) that metropolitan expansion is being driven by informality in several cities of the global south and (ii) urban informal activities can and does occur in formal settlements as well and therefore, cannot be considered as an opposite sector (in the traditional formal-informal separation). By *mode*, Roy (2005) refers to urban informality *as the means or the process* through which urbanization is occurring in developing countries. Mode of urbanization, therefore suggests that informality is the main process of urban growth. Specifically, she explains that even though towns and cities are growing, there is not adequate government support in terms of housing and public infrastructure for new urban populations. Moreover, most people moving into urban areas do not have the economic and social resources to live in the planned and formal parts of the city. Consequently, they settle in unplanned parts of the city, where land is cheap or abandoned and public services are poor. This often is the only option and remains the main mechanism of urbanization in developing cities. For instance in Southeast Asia, Roy (2005) citing McGee (2001) labels similar expansion of Metropolitan areas that signals a complex hybrid of rural and urban functions and forms. But this expansion, occurring in many parts of the world, is occurring through forms of informality that includes labor flows, housing types and other activities that represent life for those at the lower level of society (Breman, 2003 cited in Roy, 2005).

Another situational element that Roy (2005) uses to justify the claim of informality as a 'mode' of urbanization is the existence of informal activities even within formal settlements. For example, in her research in India, she records situations where people living in 'formal' parts of the city undertake informal activities: subdividing their land, adding room spaces, adding lots and modifying buildings without planning approval. Surprisingly, she even adds that in formal settlements like gated communities, informal subdivisions occur (Roy, 2005). Thus, informality cannot be simply associated to the lower and poorer class as it crosses class and social boundaries, occurring even in areas considered of highly formal urban structure. What is evident here is that the binary conceptualizations that define formality and informality as opposite processes cannot be justified in contemporary practices occurring in cities and towns in emerging and developing world. The conceptual boundaries are transcended, dualistic framing is evaded and urban informality is neither the preserve of a social group or delineated space.

In addition to this, Kriebich (2012) argues that to better understand the new paradigm in Roy's position, it is important to put it in the context of the weak situation of local or state planning in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia; where state activities are unreliable and public policies are ill-informed. So, urban informal practices, as social-spatial process of organization in urban areas, is not simply a natural process of social survival but a complex mechanism of

institutional weakness and limited capacities of government and spatial development which contribute to such patterns of physical development.

Roy's contribution must therefore be seen as a progressive attempt towards a shift from the traditional view in the 1970s-1990s of informal-formal separation—which of course has become less useful in contemporary urban settings—to understand the complexities that characterize the nature of urban formation and urbanization especially in growing cities in developing countries. Thus, the process of urban informality is occurring within the urbanization process or perhaps, it is even the *means of urbanization* in itself in many cities in the developing world.

Informal Provision of Basic Services and Facilities

Another area that has appeared in contemporary scholarly research to emphasize new patterns in urban informality is the informal provision of basic facilities and services. Traditional perspectives indicate that informal settlements lacked basic services and facilities for survival. However, recent empirical research is indicating an emerging paradigm: an informal provision of basic facilities and services required for improving living conditions by organizations in the informal settlements. Moreover, these services are being provided in a market-oriented system, flexible and efficient way (Gilbert, 2002).

Aramburu Guevara (2014) in her case study research in Lima (Peru), Johannesburg (South Africa) and Cairo (Egypt) reveals that most informal settlements, have organized through informal ways to provide basic services like water, sanitation, electricity through support networks and associations. Other researchers have observed similar results (See Gilbert, 2002; Biesinger and Richter, 2007). Jonathan Silver (2014) uses the term *'incremental infrastructures'* and *'material improvisation'* in his Accra case study to explain how informal settlement residents creatively improve access to infrastructure services to meet daily urban needs. Similarly Lombard (2014) in his paper on 'constructing ordinary places' reveals that in the absence of the state, residents in *'colonias populares'* in Xalapa, are able to secure gradual provision of social facilities and services though informal networks and associations. Together, these authors claim that such informal services are not only efficient and effective, but also offer livelihood opportunities for informal settlement dwellers. This situation illustrates that informal settlements can open up to formal processes of services and facilities that support their daily livelihood and overall welfare. Consequently, it can be reasoned that the traditional perspectives of lack or absence of basic facilities as a universal generalization of informal settlements ignores the social context, uniqueness and the dynamics at present in contemporary urban informal settlements.

<u>Qualities in urban informal settlements</u>

Socio-spatial qualities in informal settlements are largely ignored in research relative to the physically oriented negative descriptions it has received since the 1970s. However, some researchers are highlighting certain positive elements as another avenue within which urban informal settlements need to be understood and/or re-understood (See Benton, 2010, Caves, 2005). The most recent of these is David Gouverneur (2015), who in his book *planning and design for future informal settlements* proposes the 'Informal Armatures' approach that ingeniously acknowledges socio-spatial qualities inherent in informal settlements and build on them as starting points for improving their conditions. He indicates that the informal settlement carries within it the transformative energy, velocity, adaptability, resilience and ingenuity of communities, absent in 'formal settlements' but a necessity for establishing effective spatial and performative links in cities (Gouverneur, 2015, p. 130). Similarly, Ejihu (2011) in his study on formality and informality in Africa states that even though there are obvious problems in informal settlements, there exist many positive elements that have not been understood, thereby critical in any discussion on re-understanding urban informal settlements. He further states that informal settlements have shown to favor the poor and contribute to their livelihoods than the 'formal' city does. Moreover, he reveals that several qualities found in informal settlements are even missing in the formally planned housing areas. Some of these as he identified include:

a. Qualities in the process of formation that involves successful layers of negotiation, appropriation and efficient utilization of spaces, innovative approaches inherent in the designing of smaller detail

b. Compactness, environmental qualities, flexibility of design and use of spaces, hierarchy and flow of spaces,

c. Diversity of spaces for specialized and temporal uses,

d. Diversity of housing in terms of size, architecture and methods and materials of construction,

e. They are built by dwellers and hence responds accurately to their needs,

f. Continuous process of transformation (and flexibility) makes them adaptable to changing life and economic situations,

g. They are integrative since it accommodates social and economic mix of residents,

h. They include rich network of social interaction among residents and hence a high social capital.

The recognition of such socio-spatial qualities has been boosted by recent research underscoring how collective informal strategies are key to advancing urban sustainable development and environmental sustainability at the local level. Kusakabe (2013) notes that substantive informal networks and social capital, which is very common in informal settlements, are critical to engagement in reviving community management especially in situations where communities

are at a social, economic and environmental sustainability risk. LA 21 approaches, have been noted to be successful in areas where social cohesion and solidarity are high, where people have strong attachment to their neighborhood and communities, especially in informal settlements with significance local governance (Evans, 2002). Again, contrary to common perspective of informal settlements activities as impeding progress towards urban sustainability and sustainable development, Jabeen, Johnson and Allen (2010) note urban informal dwellers are continuously adopting strategies that enhance sustainability, support sustainable development and improve resilience to hazards and vulnerabilities through social networks and assets, economic diversification and physical adaptations. Thus, one of areas that have been grossly underestimated in informal settlement narratives is what informal settlement dwellers offer in improving local urban sustainability and resilience—which provides hints for a proper understanding on the sustainability paradigms in informal settlements.

The aforementioned also suggest that informal settlements possess the capability to accommodate relevant qualities and these can be observable if analytical frames will go beyond physical visibility to better understand them as socio-spatial processes of settlement organization within the city. Mills (2014) concurs, proposing that there is the need to understand the socio-spatial dynamics of informal settlements and to formulate a workable vision of what they can become. This can only be ascertained by moving beyond conventional thoughts to accommodate the need for unlearning to re-learn the appropriate ways for conceiving urban informality.

In summary, the first part of this paper has attempted to explore the conventional thought on urban informality and informal settlements and the emerging patterns that necessitate the need for a theoretical rethinking in an effort to provide a better understanding of current practices; which is essential to induce appropriate strategies and actions for settlement improvement. Admittedly general, albeit concise, it has aimed at revealing some of the relevant postulations on urban informality and informal settlements. However, it is not simply the theoretical framings that require reconsideration but also the very factors driving the phenomenon in urban Africa. Subsequently, the second part of this paper turns attention to informal settlements in urban Africa, as the continent with the largest composition of urban informal settlements and at the same time involved in a rapid urbanization process, to understand the factors and agents driving urban informal settlements formation, and what lessons this current situation offers urban planning on the continent.

THE GROWTH OF URBAN INFORMALITY IN AFRICA

In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 60 percent of urban population lives in informal settlements and about 75 percent of basic needs are met informally (UN Habitat, 2009 in Revell, 2010). Predictions even suggest that the number of informal

settlements will increase in the coming decades (Neuwirth 2006; Revell, 2010). Why is the phenomenon of urban informality enduring or re-appearing (if it really ever diminished) on the urban landscape in Africa? Several factors have been cited in literature for this situation including urbanization, local planning capacity, planning ignorance and the formulation of irrelevant policies (See Davis, 2004; Gilbert, 2002; Hall 2000; Watson, 2008; Roy, 2005, UN habitat, 2014). This section identifies some of the factors contributing to the growth of informal settlements in urban Africa.

Liberalization and the housing sector

Emerging research in urban planning and development studies in the 21st century is creating links between liberalization, liberal institutions and the growth of urban informality in African cities. Branwen (2009) indicates that the realms of housing and urban development have both been affected by specific strategies of liberal institutions (e.g. World Bank, UN Habitat) in African cities including: the support for the market and private sector, promotion of state control (*governmentality*) as a characteristic of neoliberal urbanism and the focus on financial valuation (*financialization*) of cities. For instance in the 1980s, many African countries implemented the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) that was meant to address economic problems by the World Bank group. In terms of housing, it included support for the private real estate sector and incentives for social housing, liberalization of industry (building materials and land markets) and the withdrawal of direct state support (Afenah, 2009). From an economic perspective, this was very successful in terms of economic growth. However, the private real estate sector, due to their profit motives, created an overproduction of housing for high-income earners and underproduction for low-income earners (Afenah, 2009 in Okyere et al. 2012). A sort of housing boom ensued which was skewed towards the higher income group, largely beyond the economic and social capacities of the majority of the urban population (including new urban migrants), who in turn had to resort to alternative means of habitation that includes informal housing practices in cities. In effect, there was and still is, a continuous dependence on informal means of housing production in urban Africa.

Thus, a deliberate housing bias emerges from liberalization strategies that work against low income and lower middle class groups. Again, rising living and housing costs, increases in real estate investment even though wages remain frozen make the cities expensive for the low-income majority. This leaves the lower class to what Bayat (2004) terms 'a quiet process of land encroachment': where people challenge established structures through informal activities for survival (AlSayyad, 2004).

Colonial and Post-Colonial Planning Policy

Colonial planning policies and its continuum in postcolonial planning practices of local authorities have impacted informal settlement growth (See Kombe, 2009, Branwen, 2009, UN Habitat, 2014). Watson (2008) shows a connection

between the urban situations in Africa and colonial planning systems. She points out that the colonial governments used their colonies as 'laboratories' for testing ideas about planning. She further mentions that colonial authorities transferred planning models, ideal processes and regulatory measures from UK, Europe and the US to Africa—a process that was supported through colonization. But what to what purpose was this? Quoting Huxley (2006), Watson (2008) answers that in the context of the colonies, they were used to create acceptable urban environments for European residents and also extend administrative control and sanitary conditions of the increasing urban poor. Branwen (2009) explains this, indicating that during the colonial era in Africa, towns were founded on the colonial logics of economy, dispossession and accumulation. Again, residential segregation policy, where foreign and/or European settlements were given utmost planning attention (Njoh, 2008; Mabogunje, 1990), while native population areas were neglected, led to their disorganization and poorly planned settlements (Myers, 2009) driven by informal spatial, social and economic activities.

This pattern still continues in several post-colonial planning agencies. For example, in many countries in Africa, planning legislation is still built on British or European Planning Laws from the 1930s and 1940s, which have not been revised in post-colonial governments (Njoh, 2003 cited in Watson, 2008). The UN Habitat (2014) reports that most post-colonial African leaders embraced planning models from Europe, without due understanding of their local contexts and that most were incompatible to the African situation. In effect, most of these models failed to achieve the planned objectives, rather creating more urban problems. These failures, in addition to the neglect of urban poor, led local people to seek their own solutions in various activities and practices which mostly did not conform to standard planning regulation (Branwen, 2009). It therefore becomes apparent in this situation that the lack of adequate planning strategy and policy, that is situated in the peculiar context of African urbanity, offers no innovation, rather creates urban complications and aggravates existing socio-spatial problems including the 'normalization' of urban informal settlements.

The State as a Producer of Urban Informality

Roy (2005) suggests that informality must be understood not as an object of state regulation but rather as produced by the state itself. By implication, urban informality is an urban challenge resulting from the actions and inactions of local government.   Unambiguously, she asserts:

> "The planning and legal apparatus of the state has the power… *to determine what is informal and what is not*, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear. State power is reproduced through the capacity to *construct and reconstruct* categories of *legitimacy and illegitimacy…*" (Roy, 2005 pp.149, emphasis added).

Watson (2008) makes this clearer through her research in African cities such as Accra (Ghana), Nairobi (Kenya) and Kigali (Rwanda). She indicates that city governments themselves are producing social and spatial exclusion due to

inappropriate laws and regulation. Recently in Sub-Saharan Africa, the local planning agencies have started introducing huge urban redevelopment projects under the rhetoric of global competitiveness. Watson (2008) refers to this as '*Urban fantasies*'. Such projects include urban renewal projects of all or parts of a city, characterized by the rhetoric of city modernization and technology with high private sector partnership and investment orientation. These projects, she argues, are ideologically influenced by projects in Shanghai, Dubai or Singapore with no regard for the local context within which such projects are planned. In effect, land is seized; people are sometimes evicted with no compensation. The big winner's mostly political elites and their business associate with the losers being the poor or residents who have been evicted for such projects to be constructed (Watson, 2008). Consequently, a vicious cycle occurs, where these projects with the goal of revitalizing and promoting city image, push large proportions of urban population out of the project site. These people with no alternative, move into other parts of the city and live in or establish informal settlements as the only choice to live in the city. In a continuous process of urban informality and informal settlements, the state becomes an agent that initiates it growth through political and development goals of competiveness and modernization, yet without any alternative for mitigating the consequences of her own actions.

The Urban Poor

Even though it is quite over-simplistic and misleading to equate informal settlements to the urban poor (Roy, 2004), it has also been proven by the dynamics of urban poverty that most often informal settlements provide the cheapest alternative for the urban poor to survive in the city. Thus, pushed by the other factors aforementioned, including social, economic and political factors, the urban poor's daily livelihood strategies and activities contribute to the formation and persistence of informal settlements in Africa. The population of the urban poor is increasing (Ravillion, 2008), with an estimated 13 percent growth over the past 10 years (Haddad, 2012), and this is having immense implications for informal settlements in Africa. One of these has been that as the poor seek a place in the urban areas at the edge of cities, it is these territories that contain informal settlement that urban growth occurs. Again, in many poor cities in Africa, low-income households are driving new spatial forms such as securing land that is affordable and in reasonable locations mostly outside state planning regulations (Watson, 2008).

De Soto (2000) is perhaps much more assertive in his illustration of the urban poor's role in the formation informal settlements through what he calls 'survivalist strategies'. Survivalist strategies here refer to the urban poor's 'spontaneous and creative' response to government or state inefficiencies or capacities. Urban informality therefore becomes a socio-spatial phenomenon, which is the product of a complex process and relationship between people, ineffective governance and urban management, and poor planning systems.

There are two main issues that are noticeable in this discussion so far, all requiring reconsideration. First, the theoretical discussions on urban informality has showed that emerging practices are quite unique to current urban processes in developing world and therefore require postulations that are relevant to them. Secondly, the factors driving urban informality and informal settlements in urban Africa does not relate to the poor, as has been commonly understood but planning philosophy, policy and strategy, state actions and unguarded liberalization practices together produce a potent force that create the conditions for urban informal settlements to flourish. Accordingly, the obvious question that appears is how do these exigencies exert important hints for dealing with informality, especially in local urban planning and policy directions. The final part of this paper attempts to provide hints for enhancing planning relevance to urban informal settlements.

LEARNING FROM URBAN INFORMALITY

We have presented the different perspectives on urban informality and why it is appearing in several African cities. However, one of the major gaps in scholarly research is what lesson it offers for urban planning in growing African cities. In this last section, our aim is to think of urban informality as a socio-spatial phenomenon than can provide important lessons for urban planning in Africa. Hence, we identify some key issues for consideration.

Firstly, urban areas, including informal settlements are not economic units that can simply be divided into formal and informal dualistic models. Informal settlements like many urban areas in developing countries are complex human settlements. Informal settlements are not simply made of roads and buildings or work and wages. They include people, their daily interactions with their surroundings, their use of spaces and their livelihoods that give meaning to their settlement. Hence, a better understanding of urban informal settlements will have to move beyond economic analysis and perspectives and rather consider all the socio-spatial, cultural and contextual factors that contribute to their formation and persistence. Such a move is important not only for understanding informal settlements, but to formulate the most effective planning and policy proposals for their improvement.

Secondly, it is often all too easy to describe informal settlements based on their physical appearance and conditions. Thus, most researchers and planning authorities developed their perspectives based on a superficial consideration of physical characteristics. This also contributes to the association of informal settlements with slums.   However, such a practice ignores the architectural quality of settlements, which though traditional, have been established and maintained over a long period of time. This also affects the ability of urban planning to respect existing practices and local actions in

informal settlements and even to integrate them in planning proposals. This is particularly important because the effectiveness of urban planning strategies depends on it ability to respect the local context of its development. Hence, properly understanding informal settlements will demand critical examination not only of physical conditions, but the institutional, social, spatial, political and cultural context and peculiarities that determine their formation and persistence.

Again, the social forces perspective (though not new) suggests that local institutions, events, social ties and relationships are important factors in the formation and development of informal settlements. These are very positive factors for urban planning to consider and can also enhance the sense of community and the people's connection to a place. This is relevant for improving informal settlement planning, since the more people feel attached to a place, the higher the tendency for them to collaborate with planning authorities and agencies towards improvement and development of their own settlements. Therefore, understanding the social and behavioral nature of informal settlements can support the effectiveness of local planning proposals for informal settlements in Africa. It is also being increasingly recognized that drawing on existing local social capital and livelihood strategies—both in terms of housing, physical and economic adaption—can provide significant input into local sustainability and sustainable development of urban Africa. This is because locals are using social ties, common resources, skills and knowledge to initiate actions that improve conditions and reduce vulnerability. In effect, rethinking urban informality entails building on existing local initiatives and practices, which are intrinsically connected to making inclusive and resilient urban areas—a key component of the post-2015 sustainable development goal 11 of building sustainable cities.

The last, but a very important, is in the area of urban research. The economic, social and behavioral perspectives show there is an urgent need for concrete analysis to better understand urban informal settlements. This is due to the fact that the growth of urban informal settlements is occurring within the urban growth process in rapidly urbanizing Africa. Again, informal settlements have multifaceted implications on inclusiveness, local sustainability, sustainable development, economic improvement and urban livability. The fact that the existing perspectives are inadequate to better explain informal settlement practices implies the need for a new paradigm of socio-spatial research in informal settlements. Urban research in Africa must not neglect such area of research due to the oppressive nature of local planning authorities against informal urbanism. Rather, urban informal settlements can be seen as an area to learn from the failures of the state, coping strategies of the urban poor, the interconnectedness of the formal-informal and the resilience that comes from social networking. Such learning will be key in identifying principles and actions for urban planning to be effective and responsive to the unique situational needs and challenges of informal settlements in African cities.

CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed at presenting an overview on urban informality and informal settlements with particular focus on its driving forces in urban Africa. Though the aim is not to be idealistic about urban informality nor neglect its inherent problems, it is the objective also to stress that the conventional way that urban informality has been presented needs to change to be able to deal with emerging challenges. This paper has also highlighted perspectives or the way informality has been presented ranging from the traditional separation of formal/informal to recent appropriate conception as a mode of urbanization. Critically, the position of this paper has emphasized the need for a new paradigm to better understand informal settlements from a contextual analysis. That includes understanding socio-spatial factors and embracing existing qualities and actions, emerging situations and patterns and to acknowledge that they possess significant hints for understanding the process of urban settlement formation, organization and development in Africa including significant ramifications for advancing sustainability and sustainable development within the context of the new association of human settlements (cities and urban areas) and sustainable and resilient cities. The central thought is that urban informal settlements can and does provide important learning avenues for sustainable urban development planning to be responsive, inclusive and relevant to the urbanizing situation in Africa and other developing countries—if they will be properly considered or reconsidered.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Seth Asare Okyere is a PhD Candidate in the Division of Global Architecture, Osaka University. He is currently researching the socio-spatial practices in urban informal settlements and its implications for urban development policy in La (Accra), Ghana. His research works are in the areas of development planning, informal urbanism and pro-poor urban development and policy.

Michihiro Kita is a professor of architecture and urban planning at the Division of Global Architecture, Osaka University. He is currently the head of the urban planning and theory lab in the Department of Architecture, Osaka University.