

Globalisation, Urbanisation, and Informal Housing for Poor People in Developing Countries: Some Challenging Issues in Urban Policy and Planning

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Abstract: A discussion is raised on positive and negative relationships among urban sustainability, tenure security for poor people informal settlements, and some effects of globalisation on activities localization and a new urban geography - with recommendations for policy and planning. The paper reviews some questions about legality and legitimacy of tenure, and socio-economic and spatial changes of the last decade in the primate world cities, examining their eventual impact on development and planning, according to or criticizing some contributions from the most recent non-academic and non-periodical literature, and the last UNCHS book on the world urban condition at the starting of the third millennium.

Key Words: Urban Policy; Urban Planning; Land Development; Informal Settlement; Land Tenure; Upgrading Empowerment

Introduction

Tenure condition of poor people in informal urban settlements of developing countries is showing nowadays a very complex and differentiated picture, with different degrees of ownerships, leasehold or planning and building legality and regularity, and/or of legitimacy, and with a state of great confusion about official registrations. This condition is characteristic for its dimensions and concentration in the biggest cities, yet not peculiar of these ones only. If in towns even the 60-70% of the population usually lives in informal settlements, some countries (like Nicaragua; UNCHS, 2001), can have an almost 30-40% diffused elsewhere. While no more than one decade ago the term "informal" was not in use (if not in economics or social sciences), or it was a synonym of illegality, with a more or less high risk of eviction, today we usually refer to something real and with a certain degree of legitimacy (an acquired, but perhaps actually still unstable and not official or legal right of non eviction from the place we live in). Moreover, according to some authors (Durand-Lasserre, A. and Tribillion, J. F., 2001), this means "a semantic slide" from the previous definition of "illegal", that is "a change of attitude by the public authorities that consider today as informal, therefore tolerable, settlements qualified as illegal yesterday".

In current literature, this complexity and the relevant differences among local situations - together with many failures of local policy-makers and planning in dealing with them on an institutional basis and/or in using traditional instruments for control and Government - have raised as a consequence of preference for collecting and comparing cases studies and practices, instead of building on theories and codes. Moreover, if the differences and the local complexities in settlements and tenure suggest an empirical approach to planning and programming, there is an objective difficulty or

impossibility of availability of financial resources, and sometimes of capacities at the local administration level, in order to face by planning the huge dimensions of the phenomenon and the continuity of its growth and spreading (Gilbert, A. 2001; Payne and Associate, 2001).

Despite the fact that researchers' attention seems to be in some ways sceptic about coping with complexity and conceiving more general and holistic schemes for analysis and practice in that context, some connections or eventual positive or negative relationships could be found among recent changes in cities due to globalization processes and diffused settling practices, and some new and old issues for urban planning and policy making.

Some of the most recent readings on these subjects - and particularly the ESF/N-AERUS Workshops contributions (and in some ways the related cases collection by Payne and Associates), or of the last book on Cities in a Globalizing World (by UNCHS/Habitat, 2001) - give some implicitly or explicitly good suggestions about apparent paradoxes in settlements characters and dilemmas for planning. All together, both dueing to what they tell or don't tell, they give a new incentive for focusing again on some issues and tasks for policies and urban planning.

So this note will particularly refer to some effects of the inclusion of cities economy in world globalisation circuits on delocalization and more or less secure tenure (a), and to some issues for urban sustainability, according to current practices of informal settling and to a general lack in urban planning and governance (b).

Finally we shall try to draw some recommendations for urban policies, planning tools and procedures, which must be supportive, adaptive and both timely and spacially flexible, according to needs and resources available for urban poor (c).

(a) Urban Globalisation, Delocalization and Secure Tenure for Urban Poor:

"Why do people risk investing in an activity which many urban authorities seek to prevent or remove? The answer is partly that most have little choice (or that they are not acquainted with many legal and formal aspects of official planning, building and ownership systems, but they rather rely on customary or religious tenure systems, which are often more ancient than those adopted more recently in a statutory way). Land acquisition in urban areas tends to be expensive, especially in areas near employment centres where the very poor need to live. Globalisation has accelerated the commercialisation of urban land markets in developing countries to the point that in the mid 1990s, land in Mumbai, India was the most expensive in the world, despite the fact that a large proportion of the population lived below the official poverty line. The only practical answer for many people was therefore to occupy unused Government land, or purchase agricultural land from farmers and build a house without permission to meet their immediate needs, improving it over time as resources permitted." (Geoffrey Payne and Associates, 2001) Actually the effects of the globalisation processes on the so-called informal market could also be of different nature from that of raising prices, which is in this case a general result of the relocation or new localization of more rich and costly activities, but which not necessarily directly affect the informal settlement.

Rising prices can be only a symptom of what will happen afterwards. Risks of eviction and displacement are higher in the case of a redevelopment project, but more than ever in the absence of any legal title, or with no security which can be assessed by some other official acts, or without a wide support by a community, by local organisations or political parties, etc. Moreover, despite the fact that people have or not some legal titles and free holding, one could raise money and capitalise this opportunity - a result which may also be appreciated for its redistributive effect on richness (Bottari, A. 1994; Durand-Lasserve, A. and Tribillion, J. F. 2001), apart from the effects on social geography and the community compactness and identity. Equally strong pressures will intervene in the case of renting.

Among other factors all this is due to one of the most visible characters of the globalisation process, particularly to the tendency that international corporations have of looking around the world for places where settling new initiatives for producing and /or commercializing goods and services with the highest profits and image return, and where many other profitable opportunities are very convenient - such as land costs, communications and infrastructures networks, hub structures, servicing, leisure and environmental quality, housing, low-cost manpower not excluding high level of human and social resources, and local planning policies which may range from the most liberistic *laissez-faire* to the design and Government of strategic guidelines.

In the last fifteen years, and according to these tendencies, many of the greatest world cities (like Sidney, Singapore, London; cfr. case box in UNCHS,

2001), while a bit more recently many European cities too, are competing for attracting these investments and growth opportunities. This means e.g. that they are designing and implementing both development and redevelopment projects and programmes, and their planning systems, in order to marketing themselves and offering to world corporations a good range of the localisational opportunities they are looking for.

From a general physical and spatial point of view, redesigning and restructuring the city means to create a sort of new zoning system, for privileged and rich people, with higher costs for housing and servicing, and the evident segregational and polarisation result of a division between upper and lower income population - and of a new social separation, at an urban level. Apart from the case of many European towns - where a plenty of released industrial areas are available - frequently eviction and displacement of the local population are inevitable (e. g. let's think of China urban growth, as in Shanghai or elsewhere). Proximity too is often refused by near upper classes settlements, for economic and image depreciation, and/or for religious or cultural reasons (Kundu. A. 2001). These all are situations where often the local "patronage system which prevails in most parts of Asia, (and) directly or indirectly connects the urban poor and the powers-that-be, and allows the urban poor to live and work in an informal setting with a minimum level of security in exchange for either money and/or political support for those in power" (Savant Mohit, R. 2001), has to give up facing more powerful and not local networks of interests and of patron-clients relationships.

Mega-projects of development and the use of spectacular architecture (UNCHS, 2001) not only provide physical and spatial opportunities for global activities, but they also contribute to the image and the marketing of the city. New projects and international mega-events "may worsen city residents' quality of life through increased noise or congestion, loss of opportunity to use limited supply of key urban sites for other uses", while all this sort of glamorous urban restructuring and events will result in "an expected displacement of poor households", due to the coming of new and more affluent people, new facilities and new money to the cities (UNCHS, 2001). Beneficial fall-outs for urban population are at least controversial, if not negative (as Britain experiences of the first '90ties have shown) especially for poor people, unless some big and strategic investments in infrastructures, services and housing are provided, so generating some planned and governed positive fall-outs from these mega-projects and events.

While the costs of urban life are generally expected to rise, the highest impact that this phenomenon will have on urban poor seems in some ways to be paradoxically alleviated by the need for the process of raising money and richness profiting also from an abundance of low-cost manpower easily available. In developing countries local-proxy removals are only apparently in contradiction with the reality of a city which is in itself a huge low-cost labour market, due to migration and natural demographic trends. Moreover the same evicted people will sooner or later be re-included in the informal cycle.

(b) Globalisation, Urban Sustainability and Governing Urbanization and Informal Settling:

Nowadays a more diffused attitude in public administrations in accepting urban poor settlements with no legal titles, instead of ignoring or trying to eradicate them, often legitimates informal settlements in many ways and acts. But it usually seems to happen in an almost total absence of any meaningful strategic views or special cares for physical planning- which obviously need to be realistically connected with actual institutional roles and powers, financial resources availability and programming capacities, and with administrative and technical abilities in dealing with urban policies. A renewed focus on a more systemic and holistic view of the dynamics of urban problems and on the problems of their governance, should help for instance to take into a due account the need of preserving some essential natural resources - e.g. agricultural soils - which are particularly affected by urban growth.

Both at an individual level, like in Turkey in the case of gecekondu (Bulamir, M. and Payne, G. K., 2001), or in some more organized initiatives with the consensus of the local rural communities, like in Perù (Kagawa, A. and Turkstra, J. 2001), or in the case of Cairo (Sims, D. 2001) with the "patronage" of local officials, even many appreciated agricultural soils have been very often sold for informal settling. Unawareness or disinterest of local administrations and Governments for medium and long-range economical impacts, in terms of basic environmental resources loss, some times have been counterbalanced by "ex-post" planning prescriptions and policies. This seems to be the case of Hyderabad, in India, where existing informal settlements have been classified "objectionable" and "non-objectionable" - but it is doubtful that what is eventually recovered, in case of eviction in an "objectionable" case, will still have some productive value for agriculture (Bulamir, M. and Payne, G. K. 2001).

The unbalanced development of Manila's mega-urban region can be assumed as a case for giving some more pictures evidence of the possible consequences of a lack in planning and policies of Urbanisation processes (UNCHS, 2001). One main weaknesses in the rice sector which characterize Manila's agricultural region has been the difficulty or impossibility for properties to resist the speculative pressures on land caused by their urban value's rise - due to the rapidly expanding need of sites for infrastructures, housing, industries, commerce and services raised by new and powerful political and economical stakeholders and by demographic pressures. The relatively low profitability of rice farming cannot face the competition with the higher wages of the industry and commerce labour markets, with a growing difficulty in keeping young people in farms. Moreover urban development has not been associated with environmental cares, so causing a progressive infilling of the vital water canalisation system with solid and liquid refusals, also increased by soil erosion along the not protected settlements' borders. Even official codes, rules and

planning provisions are very often by-passed by political and economic pressures.

It must be said that this lack in policy and control is going to raise longtime some heavy consequences and burdens for countries where foreign debt also depends on food import (e.g. the case in Egypt). In this sense the role of periurban areas looks even more crucial, in the role of periurban areas, in and around cities where a high concentration of food demand is located, considering the possibility of intensive agricultural development and of the ecological role of these areas for the future. At the same time it must be recognised that globalisation is a politically and economically long lasting process, since economic dependence of the less developed countries from the more advanced ones has historical roots. Apart from the colonial period, first food aid projects and then structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund have had a strong influence in destructuring many rural economies and in creating food dependence. It may also be assumed that these policies have been in some ways also responsible for some negative attitudes, in urban and regional planning and Government, towards environmental problems and the need of enhancing local natural resources.

(c) Some Recommendations for Urban Policies and Planning:

Informal settlements involve many complex legal, institutional, financial and planning problems, apart from the need of their physical improvement in building and infrastructuring (Durand-Lasserve, A. and Tribillon, J. F. 2001). The study of these problems has been more and more enriched by academical and professional researchers, and the results have been widely published and diffused, some programmes and projects have reported a good success especially at a single country level, when based on the inclusion of customary tenure system in the official one, and supported by the initiatives of community-based organisations, or by innovative planning and building- and often on the acknowledgement of the value of some autonomous processes of legitimisation (Balamir, M. and Payne, G. K. 2001).

While it is true that a programme's efficacy for secure tenure and settlement upgrading is highly relying and depending on a deep acknowledgement of the political, historical and cultural local background and context, we have to remember that this is only one of the most dramatic and urgent aspect of a more general need for improving urban planning and policy-making. We believe that a more global scope in designing policies must be taken into account for the many reasons we dealt with before, while at the same time some general lessons can be drawn from the existing experiences on the field.

Some simple recommendations will follow now, which have not been assumed as exhaustive or too much original, but which are useful in tentatively dealing more systematically with the problem of defining some strategic and operational statements for urban policy and planning, with a peculiar attention to the problems we

raised of secure tenure and sustainability in a global context. We organise them according to main issues and objectives, while assigning some key-words as headings.

(A) Legitimacy and Community Development:

1. Accepting de-facto an informal settlement as a stable component of the city involves the assumption of the opportunity of investing in upgrading and housing improvements, as a main policy objective.
2. Settlements upgrading and consolidation must originate a set of political actions (e.g. a local community has to grow and find an identity, mainly in participating to decision-making about the on its environmental socio-economic perspectives) and of physical projects (infrastructural and building improvements).
3. Households and single people's roles are crucial for consolidation, and this is mainly evident while improving their houses.
4. Secure tenure seems to be usually efficaciously guaranteed by a complex system of or by different forms of legitimacy, instead of legalisation (De Souza, F. 2001; Gilbert, A. 2001; Balamir, M. and Payne G. K. 2001; Payne and Associates, 2001; Calderón Cockburn, J. 2001 and Durand-Lasserve, A., Tribillion, J. K. 2001).
5. According to many researchers, legitimacy can be based on different personal and Collective conditions and situations, such as,
 - (i) A set of interwoven environmental, historical and cultural shared conditions, which is what some authors define as call "background legitimacy" and "existence legitimacy" (Balamir, M. and Payne, G.K. 2001), and which public administration may apply to with a policy of indirect acknowledgement, e.g. giving them voting rights, so raising a "political legitimacy";
 - (ii) The long-term impact of individual and collective voluntary actions performed along the settling process, to which we may refer for the effect of a concepts of "community legitimacy" and of "patronage legitimacy" (which we have seen to be rather unstable), or for a so called "acquired legitimacy" (Balamir and Payne, 2001) due to the long lasting settlement's story, or for a "market legitimacy", to be connected to the possibility of commercialising their houses and plots by selling or renting in the informal market (Durand-Lasserve, A. and Tribillion, J. F. 2001);
 - (iii) Public projects and their implementation in for infrastructuring and servicing, together with some taxations when connected to individual plot and house's conditions, resulting in assigning a kind of "planning legitimacy".
6. Legitimacy also relies on surveying by the public administration for good systematic information both about the de-facto and genetical characters of local tenure and the housing conditions, in a given settlement; community conflicts on rights and with institutions should be governed by means of a global revision and/or the drawing up of new registers and

of cadastre, to be built in cooperation with people, in such a way that intitlement will in some ways implicitly result by acting, with no need of any further official acts; negotiation, mediation and participation should be a strong tool for building on local identities and for raising empowerment looking at future policy-making processes, building processes, both at the local and at the urban level.

(B) Financial Support and New Political Subjects:

1. Many authors explain how the economic and financial sustainability of the settling process relies on the relationships between households and the banks, but they all observe that it is more dependent on household's income entity and stability than on legal titling (De Souza, F. 2001; Calderón Cockburn, J. 2001 and Gilbert, A. 2001), apart from the guarantees which a mortgage has to be supported by.
2. So preferably public administration's resources and policy efforts must be raised for supporting labour markets and the development of new economic opportunities and professional skills in the city, more than for diffusing legal titles (which has been widely demonstrated to be in itself a costly charge).
3. Looking at physical and spatial planning policies, the localisation of productive industrial, commercial and service activities has to be studied and governed in order to find some compensations for the less positive, or negative impacts (such as urban polarisation, fragmentation, physical and social segregation, etc.) on land and labour markets and on inhabitants.
4. Direct subsidies and indirect incentives (like detaxations), or local planning policies and urban improvements projects, have both a result in supporting individual housing improvements and as a form of legitimacy.
5. Communal and shared ownerships, instead of individual ones, can be also a guarantee for loans. But policies have to encourage any new or existing associational initiatives mainly because they result in raising or reinforcing the range of new political subjects and/or of stakeholders on the local and urban scene, with more democracy for the decision-making system and also with moer stability in policy implementation.

(C) Urban Planning and the Environment:

1. Priorities have to be reassessed stating some guidelines and objectives for regional and urban planning and policy, especially focusing on the need of a strategic vision and on some structural spatial choices,
 - (i) Controlling and governing the globalisation's effects on city's organisation, in trying to reduce the risks of eviction or segregation, instead of only profiting from any direct or indirect advantages.
 - (ii) Reducing and rationalising the consumptions of agriculture and land resources, which are fundamental for sustainability.
 - (iii) Adapting technical and legal planning tools, and

building codes, to the need for flexibility which is necessary for facing so many evolutionary characters of the physical, social, economic and political components of a settlement, along the fragile path from marginality to integration.

- (iv) Preparing professionals and officials to deal with a new policies where acknowledgement, support, educating, and technical consulting capacities are determinant for their implementation and success.
2. Urban planning needs a formalised frame of strategic choices, whose stability must be assured for at least 10-20 years, picking out the areas which have to be continuously monitored due to high pressures for their development, and considering what forecasting tendencies and projects suggest.
 - (a) Limiting land uses in order to guarantee a sustainable amount of primary resources (first of all for in agriculture production and water provision, with their related infrastructural systems and in forestry).
 - (b) Defining areas whose environment, cultural heritage and landscape values are important resources both for determining a higher quality of life and for servicing local populations, and for future projects of a city's image enhancement, in order to attract new initiatives and tourism.
 - (c) Providing essential space for main urban circulation channels, public transportation and services.
 - (d) Providing sites for industrial and commercial development.
3. Policy implementation by means of operational decisions and tools, and building activities, has to be adaptive, flexible, applying to action planning and to monitoring projects updating; it has also to rely on urban evolutionary developments and give some main guidelines instead of some pre-dimensionment statements.

According to these principles some aspects of this tool-kit could include:

- Fiscal compensations, and/or building supports, in case of plot readjustment due to new roads and infrastructures.
- Cumulative and transferrable building rights and quantities, and some financial supports, in case settlement upgrading (arterial or services building) needs some households displacements on new plots.
- Similarly, the possibility of raising local densities, eventually resetting some locational advantages connected to servicing and land appreciation factors.
- Giving up from the start the assumption of some rigid rule or quantitative standards for planning and building, in favour of a minimum of performance, to be redefined according to further settlement's development phases.

- Rediscussing the minimum "evolutionary" performances with people, not only according to a technicistic approach, but to some more shared diffused perceptions.
- Redefining building codes according to common and best local practices, and to a minimum accepted for performance criteria.
- Adopting participative procedures and practices, which have to be easily intelligible, simple and rapidly implementable, both for problems identification, getting informations, defining objectives and solutions and for individuals and groups involvement in projects, and for their evaluation, focusing on public or private upgrading initiatives, technological innovations, or anyhow.

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