

The Spatial Dimension of Urban Transformation in slums and informal settlements: a preamble to Collaborative Transformations of Public Spaces by Christian Werthmann
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A book that draws on research and practice of urban transformations in slums and informal settlements in cities of Latin America is a must for professionals, academics and practitioners who wish to understand the deep rooted causes of informal urbanization and the different approaches to improve the living conditions of its inhabitants. The goal to integrate these areas into the urban fabric and the systems of urban governance that regulate the territory of cities is a contemporary worldwide challenge. It is part and parcel of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goal 11 that aim to turn cities inclusive, resilient, safe and sustainable, and to leave no one behind. This book on Collaborative Transformations of Public Spaces by Christian Werthmann is one of its kind that provides the reader with an exceptional compendium of cases and project experiences that aim to transform the lives of people who face the fate of social and spatial exclusion. It is a contribution to the global effort to change the fate of nearly 1 billion people living under such conditions.

Werthmann offers us not only a book with his professional and academic reflections on the theories of informal and non-formal urbanization and on the bulk of knowledge that he has acquired on the subject and that he competently cites throughout the manuscript. Werthmann also provides the reader with a deep dive into the processes and rationale of planning and physical interventions where one gets an insight of the hands-on experience of those who were deeply involved in the design, formulation and implementation of settlement upgrading programmes and projects in Latin America's biggest metropolises. Participants' observations is one of the value add of this book and Werthmann makes an effort to interview and hear what key actors and change makers had to say about their experiences in implementing complex projects in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Medellin. It is a reality check with what he observed during his visits to the sites. There is a rich amount of testimonies and information derived from one-to-one conversations, seminars and debates that he organized and participated which make this book extremely valuable for those engaged in the implementation of the SDG 11.

I first met Werthmann in Cambridge, USA, while undertaking a short sabbatical with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in 2007. After delivering a public lecture about the work I had been doing with the Rotterdam based Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, where I worked then, we engaged in a conversation that led to years of close collaboration after I took over the housing policy, housing rights, slum upgrading and capacity building works at UN-Habitat in 2008. The link of our work and synergy of our thoughts were triggered by the fact that together with the Lincoln Institute I was focusing on the nature, scale, rationale and consolidation of informal settlements and the buoyancy of informal land markets in Latin America which were central in the annual professional training programme conducted to nationals of Latin American countries that I

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have been running in collaboration with Martim Smolka since 2004 to date. Approaches to regularize and upgrade these settlements were equally important as preventive policies and strategies to provide alternatives to curb the multiplication and persistence of informal urbanization. This twin-track approach has been present in my interactions with Werthman during the 12 years of my tenure at UN-Habitat.

In our first conversation, Werthmann showed a genuine interest to go further on the knowledge of informal urbanization and revealed the perspicacity when looking with the eyes of a researcher, a landscape architect and a professional with a profound intellectual curiosity for the bigger picture of the problem of deprived neighbourhoods in the cities of the developing world. This book reveals his lens when looking at the reality of these settlements, the institutions behind the programmes and projects, the variables and the elements of different dimensions that play a role in their development, stagnation and deterioration that affect people's life.

Werthmann dared to formulate fundamental questions that drove him to design studios and research at Harvard University and the Dirty Works exhibition and continued when he moved to Leibniz University in Hannover and continued the collaboration with other universities and scholars from all over the world. I am grateful to Werthmann's decisive leadership in the Hub of Informal Urbanism of the UN-Habitat University Partnership Initiative that I led during my last years of UN-Habitat. He managed to upscale the debate, bring key universities, PhD researchers, renown world scholars to a fertile environment of thinking and action. The richness of this journey, whose beginning coincides with the period that we met, is fully reflected into this book that provides the reader with a wealth of information and references of real projects and programmes. The cases depicted in the book illustrate the places and people that make a difference in transformations, big and small, led by individual and institutional efforts to carry out ideas, under extremely difficult conditions, that have as ultimate goal the transformation of slums and informal settlements into liveable places where poor people can live in safety and dignity and access the services the city provides to its inhabitants.

The nuances of informal institutions, violence, volatility of different natures and the evolutions of approaches influencing policy decisions all come into place of this book which will significantly enrich the reader's understanding of the challenges facing city governments and the residents of these settlements alike. This makes the book a valuable asset for those willing to work with urban planning, landscape design and improvement strategies in places where people live under precarious conditions, excluded, and under insecurity of tenure. Places where very often the institutions do not have neither the capacity nor the resources to ensure continuity and long-term engagement that will make possible the integration and transformation of slums and informal settlements into neighbourhoods connected to and integrated to the rest of the city. The evolutionary character and incremental nature of the development processes triggered by these policy interventions are depicted in various parts of the book. More often than desired Werthmann comes to conclusions revealing the weakness of these projects for not being able to keep the continuity and consolidation.

What strikes in the narratives and analysis of the cases provided by the book is the spatial and urbanistic dimensions where Werthmann's landscape architecture profession comes to excel. He brings it into his views and presents the reader with subtlety the various possibilities that good quality spatial planning and meaningful design interventions focusing on the public domain of urban life, and make a case that it can trigger transformations in the social, economic and environmental dimensions of these areas. The examples in the projects in Rio, Sao Paulo and Medellin are emblematic in the sense that it elevated the importance of the urban layout and the spatial structure of barrios with the acupuncture of public spaces as part and parcel of landscape-driven

projects that enables access to services and basic infrastructure. All this are parts of an effort to (re) connect these areas to the rest of the city. This makes the book extremely useful for students of architecture and urban planning and design but also for professionals who want to engage in professional practice in cities in the developing world. The unplanned, spontaneous, unauthorised, haphazard and uncontrolled nature of informally developed settlements, be it a favela or a clandestine irregular settlement in Rio de Janeiro or a villa in Buenos Aires, challenges the fundamentals of architecture and urban planning and design education and present one of the most challenging and dynamic settings to exercise the skills and knowledge learned and developed through traditional university education. It is commendable that Werthmann explores this in his educational role bringing this reality closer to the academic universe and vice-versa and produces a book that will certainly inspire a new generation of professionals.

The scale of the problem and the severity of the present conditions turn informal urbanization, slums and informal settlements, the greatest challenges of city governments for the years to come. The publication provides us with an excellent analysis of metrics available, the challenges of land supply, the poor provision and lack of finance for infrastructure and it underscores the growth pattern if no concerted and scaled-up actions are carried out by governments. The corona virus pandemic has exacerbated the problem which jeopardizes the future sustainability and social cohesion of cities and consequently the future generation's fate. All these make Werthmann's book an indispensable publication for city government officials. It is also a key contribution to the bulk of knowledge required for moving forward the Agenda 2030 and the SDG11. Upgrading of informal settlements is one of the targets of the SDG11. Werthmann's efforts to unfold the lessons learned from a variety of projects in Latin American cities turn this book into an immeasurable contribution to this global movement towards sustainable and inclusive cities. When releasing the urban data in 2014 and the results of its mandated monitoring of slums in the world, UN-Habitat revealed that one out of every four urban residents in the world live in slum conditions deprived of adequate sanitation, water, living space, living under precarious buildings and without security of tenure. In Latin America, this is not so different. Nearly a quarter of the urban population lives in deprived conditions in favelas, barriadas, villas and other local denominations for what has been internationally known as slums. This is morally and from the human rights aspect unacceptable. I do hope that publications like Werthmann's Collaborative Transformations of Public Spaces: Informal Urbanization in Latin America will help to change the trends and give hope to real and durable transformations in cities in the developing world.