



## Regeneration of informal areas: An integrated approach



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### ABSTRACT

Living conditions in informal areas present a severe problem to the development of society, particularly to public health and the respective socioeconomic context. People in these areas have no viable alternative to solve this problem themselves. In this study, several successful approaches are surveyed and new methods are developed to design a holistic process capable of not only tackling the issue of informal settlements, but doing so in a way that is cognizant of the current global economic reality and that integrates all the dimensions of sustainable development. In this study, an integrated regeneration strategy for Luanda's metropolitan plan in Angola is developed. The methodology is supported by a social context analysis and highly participative design process. The informal settlements vary in type and structure, urban patterns, and their social and economic structure. These factors have been taken into consideration in the approach advanced in this study, as they are deemed key aspects for the fine-tuning of the final approach. Hence, a partnership model is presented, where the public sector provides development conditions for the private sector. The model is supported by regeneration mechanisms that establish the roles and procedures of each stakeholder within the process. Multiple criteria for rehousing as well as guidelines for social and affordable housing are used to create an integrated approach.

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### 1. Introduction

The global population has shifted in recent decades from a predominantly rural population to increasingly denser urban context. Developing countries have stood at the forefront of this shift as economic opportunity, due to globalization, has created an unyielding pressure on the existing urban and economic hubs. Economic development in urban centers causes massive migration and, consequently, expansion of informal settlements or slums, as there is no viable alternative for low-income migrants (Todes, 2012; Njoh, 2015). These settlements have become the “primary place” of these populations (Rapoport, 2003), where, in an informal manner, they have managed to build a place to live, work, and socialize. “Place” is largely understood as the space that people use (Cresswell, 2004). Urban planners have advocated that it has become a reality that people, with their ways of socializing, are responsible for the construction of places, and it may also be said that places construct people (Holloway & Hubbard, 2000). In a sociospatial form, “place” can be defined as location, locale, and sense of place (Cloke & Johnston, 2005). Location is related to the “where” of a place, often referred to in the use of the word; however, places may also be mobile or transient, such as public transport and markets (Lombard, 2014). Locale refers to the result of “(...) the material setting for social relations – the actual shape of the place in which people

conduct their lives.” (Cresswell, 2004), Sense of place is described as “(...) the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place.” (Cresswell, 2004), supporting the social element of place, which has led research to create regeneration strategies (Flores, 2003).

This “new” urban population, in developing countries, has migrated at such a pace that the sometimes weak or unstable governments have been unable to cope with the influx.

Living conditions in slums have improved significantly over the last 15 years in almost all regions. However, approximately 55% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa was still observed to be living in precarious conditions in 2014, which was considered as the most severe situation (Way, 2015). Even so, informal settlements are still growing, partly as a result of accelerating urbanization, population growth and a lack of appropriate and adequate land tenure, housing policies, and sustainable urban planning, supported by a long-term strategy.

These informal settlements are marked by not only unhealthy conditions and overcrowding (leading to public health and social issues), but also unsafe and dangerous contexts, that is, vulnerability to environmental issues such as natural disasters and climate change (Güzey, 2016), mostly due to an absence of regulation and urban planning coupled with rapid urbanization and growing demographic pressure.

Governments often lack the necessary funding and resources to implement a long-term strategy, and the population deficit in terms of formal employment (economic stability) and education further aggravates the situation. The ineffectiveness of some governments in their social and regulatory roles is yet another problem. The State is commonly

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seen as a provider rather than facilitator, and the absence of a system based on the consumer-pays principle hampers an effective solution (Shannon, De Meulder, & Lin, 2014).

Several authors have offered differing perspectives (Abrams, 1964; Payne, 1977; Steyn, 2003; Turner, 1968) on informal settlements, namely in terms of the main aspects of their creation and features. Abrams (Abrams, 1964) argues that the growth of such settlements is due to the quest for shelter in urban areas, that is, the need to find shelter given the lack of efficient formal channels to such end. Furthermore, the same author claims that this conquest is accomplished by the “law of force” (squatters) or the “force of law,” the latter related to the absence of an alternative solution provided by governments. In the same vein, Payne (Payne, 1977) states that the growth of informal settlements is inevitable in developing countries.

Hence, both authors perceive this as a closed-loop problem. On the contrary, Turner and Steyn (Steyn, 2003; Turner, 1968) adopt a positive perspective toward informal settlements. Turner claims that informal settlements may be regarded as a successful solution for the shelter problem of the urban poor (Turner, 1968). People have managed to create minimum living standards (shelter and employment) with few resources. Sharing this view, Steyn states that, in addition to low-quality buildings or uncomfortable configurations, informal settlements are a viable response to the socioeconomic conditions of the poor, and, moreover, the solution reflects its identification of the positive values (Steyn, 2003). Both agree that one of the main sustainable outcomes is the building process, based on a self-help scheme with the application of the available resources (Steyn, 2003; Turner, 1968).

Therefore, informal settlements reveal several positive aspects that may be used for the creation of an integrated approach to regeneration. Some of these features rely on social and cultural aspects, and on the informal economy and self-determination. As with the construction methods, regeneration is based primarily on a self-build incremental process. This is characterized by the provision of basic shelter with very limited resources in a manner that is flexible to the household's needs. Building materials are, in most cases, supplied by local sources, to reduce costs and promote reuse. Hence, these settlements are often located close to economic areas/employment poles, which reduces the cost of commuting to and from work (Steyn, 2003; Wekesa, Steyn, & Otieno, 2011; Werna, 2001). However, such a perspective might be seen as a means of survival rather than living, given the poor quality of life in a number of domains (e.g., tenure security, education, health, and leisure).

Over recent years, progress has been made in tackling this issue in many parts of the world using different approaches and methods, which have brought about varying outcomes.

## 2. Research setting and methods

This study discusses the development of an urban regeneration strategy for Luanda's metropolitan plan in Angola. One of the main challenges of the plan is the regeneration of the city, where 80% of the urban area is occupied by informal settlements or *musseques*. According to fieldwork and local surveys, approximately 5 million people are currently living in informal settlements across the city, thus calling for an integrated and incremental approach. Within the scope of the plan, regeneration is necessary, not only by virtue of the precarious housing conditions, but also because the population resides in risky areas that are reserved for future development. Security of land tenure is also a problem in a city, where most of the population are, essentially, squatters. Lack of capital and coordination among the main stakeholders also hampers an effective regeneration process.

Roberts and Sykes state that the regeneration process is synonymous with urban rehabilitation or urban renovation (Robert & Sykes, 2000). On the contrary, according to Sahin, based on Turkish experiences of urban regeneration, it includes urban renewal and

redevelopment, urban revitalization, urban replacement, and urban rehabilitation (Sahin, 2006).

### 2.1. Urban regeneration: an overview

According to Huchzermeyer and Karam (2006), in places where development is occurring unevenly, especially due to constraints and large-scale displacement, migration, and consequent political instability, informal settlements invade the formal city, giving rise to most of the urban fabric in developing countries (Huchzermeyer & Karam, 2006). These settlements are the only currently viable shelter for those who are unable to access adequate housing through formal channels. As referred to by Turner, “The urban poor have to solve a complex equation as they try to optimize housing cost, tenure security, quality of shelter, journey to work, and sometimes, personal safety. For some people, including many pavement-dwellers a location near job (...) is even more important than a roof. For others, free or nearly free land is worth epic commutes from the city edge to the centre. And for everyone the worst situation is a bad, expensive location without municipal services or security of tenure.” (Davis, 2006).

Therefore, the development of informal settlements is inherently linked to urban growth (Payne, 1977), and after almost 60 years of debate and discussion (Abbott, 2002; Keivani & Werna, 2001) on the best solution to be applied, several regeneration approaches have been adopted. Nevertheless, despite these approaches and consensus, the resolution of informal settlements continues to be challenging (Abbott, 2002; Huchzermeyer & Karam, 2006) due to the variety of factors involved in the regeneration process. According to Roberts and Sykes (2000), urban regeneration aims to solve urban problems and find a long-term improvement of the social, economic, physical, and environmental aspects over the area undergoing regeneration. The challenge lies in the different characteristics of each area and the scale of the problem, that is, an integrated approach is fundamental, and not solely from a single perspective (e.g., land tenure, access to housing, infrastructure, or improvement of the housing stock itself).

Different principles need to be taken into account within the regeneration of informal areas: the establishment of a set of measurable objectives in accordance with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals; an analysis of local conditions and the possibility of defining a clear delimitation for future phasing; and identification of a group of more stakeholders and cooperation elements.

Several regeneration interventions have been tested over the years. Some of them have evolved and adapted, while others have emerged to resolve the shortcomings of previous attempts (Wekesa et al., 2011).

### 2.2. Public housing directly provided by the State

Public housing provided by the State is a common approach, which dates back to the 1950s. This strategy is based on the resettlement of the inhabitants of informal settlements in public housing, through housing programmes, where the main financial effort is driven by the public sector (Keivani & Werna, 2001; Mekawy, 2014).

This approach has led to severe consequences. The public sector is fully responsible for the project, that is, problems such as bureaucracy, lack of financial resources, political instability, and corruption, compromising its application (Mukhija, 2004; Wekesa et al., 2011). The financial effort of the State is also a problem, which indicates that the whole approach relies solely on economic aspects to reduce costs. These economies are reflected in the urban and architectural solutions: First, the new settlements built to relocate these populations are located in peripheral areas (cheaper land), far away from economic poles (employment) and therefore isolated from the city dynamics, resulting in social exclusion (Keivani & Werna, 2001). Second, most of the architectural solutions, usually developed by the private sector, are imported models that are not adjusted to the local features (social, economic, environmental, and territorial) and where the cost of units, favoritism, and

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