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Informal *but* planned settlements – The case of Guayaquil

Abstract:

Urbanization has been very strong since the middle of 1900s and from 2007, 50% of the population in the world became urban. Today almost one third of this urban population, around 1 billion, are living in areas classified as slum areas with substandard housing and lack of land rights. In some cases more than 50% of the growth of cities in developing countries has been implemented by the informal sector. The development process of those settlements, seems to follow an irrational pattern making legalization and consolidation very expensive and within a process that can take several decades; when comparing with the logical process of planning settlements in the formal city.

This study deals with an informal settlement in Guayaquil, Ecuador and the main objective is to understand the logic and virtues behind informal *but* planned settlements focusing on community management, and land occupation strategies; and to extract lessons from them to achieve a more harmonic urban legalization for governments and societies in developing countries.

The case studied shows an informal settlement which is the result of an organised and collective management, planned in advance and accomplished in a manner of precision and discipline. Observations, deep interviews, with municipality town planners, land dealers and community leaders and questionnaire surveys with residents show that in only 4 years, 1,500 families classified as poor and very poor, established their neighbourhood, behind the back of the authorities and outside of the urban line border. Leaders and communities developed their own fragile management system; including sub-leaders, committee leaders, sector coordinators, security guards and informants. Together they planned around 60 hectares with more or less consolidated street, established and managed transport infrastructure, developed an alternative credit system, established work sources in the cooperative and are delivering free assistance in land tenure and family legislation and are building and managing schools.

Keywords: Informal settlements, community organization, land use planning, land dealers, Guayaquil