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**LIFE OR DEATH OF URBAN SLUMS
DIFFERENT URBAN MANAGING POLICIES**

Abstract | The constant expand of urban population, specially due to migrations, forms city slums, the settlements of urban poverty that cannot comply with official standards of construction, safety or hygiene. The dualism of the city, its bright lights, power and world of opportunities on one side, and distress and misery on the other, sometimes is obvious, neighboring each other, meeting on everyday bases. Fifty years ago, informal dwellings of poor were perceived as transitory, it was assumed they would become unnecessary with economic "take-off", but slums continued to grow. According to UN Habitat, about 840 million people lived in slums in 2005 and the figure will likely grow to 2 billion by 2030. The poor habitants are often completely excluded from access to basic services like health care, education, employment or right to vote. They are forced to gain a livelihood in hard and usually illegitimate way, associated with criminal act of trafficking. The concept of slum (favela, shanty town, tent city, township, ghetto etc.) is considered particularly as broad range of dwellings, from those made of cardboard, wood and shed metal to several stores abandoned tenures occupied by squatters. However, managing slums all over the world's cities differs, from eviction and cleansing, to good governance that provides public housing scheme and working together with citizens on upgrading the living conditions. Some of the poor suburbs became popular tourist destinations; they mapped themselves by offering totally new and exciting experiences, tasty cuisine, vivid club life and creative cultural events.

Key words | slums, poverty, migration, exclusion, eviction, upgrading

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1. INTRODUCTION

The basic characteristics of the settlements categorized as slums, according to UN Habitat, are their temporariness (the use of material and structures that are not durable), insufficient housing space, i.e., over-population, lacking of the fundamental sanitary and hygienic conditions of life (drinking water, sewerage, electricity, garbage disposal and removal) and the uncertain issue of ownership. The habitants of slums belong to the poorest parts of the society, pushed back and cast out from regular urban life, most often having no education, permanent employment, dreaming of deserting the poor man „shantytown“, however, mostly without any abilities to do something and improve their position². The increasingly accelerated urban development [1] affects the emergence of such settlements, and the condition becomes aggravated if the establishment is not able to face this issue, by providing a timely adequate accommodation or improved basis conditions of life through diverse strategies programs and action. The additional problem is in that the squatter settlements are usually on the high risk terrains which are not convenient for dwelling (for which reason they have remained vacant), close to city waste disposal sites, at the steep terrains prone to erosion, landslide and land-slides, in regions subject to periodic inundations, endangered by fire hazard, alongside the motorways or railway lines [2]. Lacking of urban infrastructure additionally makes the existing natural conditions more aggravated, pollutes the environment or causes catastrophe [3]. On the other part, communal equipping is often impossible or complicated and expensive, and the slums habitants are in no way able to pay for the services. Given that these settlements emerge without any plan, that it is almost impossible to survey the demographic movements and requirements of the habitants, it is obvious the lacking of the fundamental public services, particularly schools and health and social care institutions, and which are directly the ones mostly needed.

It appears that the social issues of the substandard settlement are universal, although from the technical standpoint they rather differ. Even in the richest countries and cities in the world one encounters the “labeled” communities, great urban divisions and differences [4], ghettoization³ of certain districts, run-down condition, issues of homelessness, growing insecurity and criminal [5]. Whether it concerns classic slums of the developing countries, the trailer settlements and ethnic districts in the USA cities, so-called urban villages in China or European squats, they all have isolation, exclusion and accompanying “bad reputation” in common. However, there is no universal strategy for resolution of their problems⁴, and the attempts are within wide range, from dislocation, economic and political reforms, upgrading and improvement, as far as public art and redesign [6].

² The life in slums and the destiny of their tenants have become known also to the wider public owing to literature and cinematography. The 'Slumdog Millionaire' novel and the same titled movie have achieved great success, and deal directly with the topic of 'exiting' the poverty milieu of Mumbai (Vikas Swarup, 'Slumdog Millionaire', New York: Scribner, 2005. The movie from 2008). The 'City of Gods' novel and movie depict the life in the favela of Rio de Janeiro, rich in violence, criminal and drugs (Paulo Lins, 'Ciudadé de Deus' São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997. The movie from 2002). The similar topic has been also tackled by the Brazilian movie "The Elite Troop" ("Tropa de Elite", 2008).

³ Ghetto is a confined space in which the dominant social majority forcefully separates, accommodates and limits a certain minority community, treating it as inferior. This notion appeared for the first time in Venice, it was mostly used in Europe for isolation of the Jewish population from the 15th till 20th century, to acquire its tragic proportion during the WW2 as part of the Nazi politics. Nowadays this notion has by far broader, sometimes completely beyond the context use (for instance Monte Carlo is described as a: voluntary ghetto of the rich people” and BBC presents their concern about the possibility of the existence of the “Muslim digital ghetto”).

⁴ The United Nations, within the 8 UN Millennium Development Goals [7], also stated the upgrading of the conditions of life in slums, having in view number of population and the graveness of their position.

2. DRASTIC MEASURES

The number of the homeless persons is on the upscale, particularly in the conditions of the economic crisis and unemployment, and as demonstrated by the researches, they are progressively more the children - the minors or entire families. Those are the individuals having no officially registered residence, i.e. they live in the street or at the place which is not suited for human dwelling (under the bridges, in the abandoned buildings, in the underground tunnels – railway, sewerage, etc). In the social sense, such life represents a form of radical exclusion from the social service, process of work and earning, consumer culture and political choice, as well as loss of identity, and thus they do not substantially differ from the position of the poorest dwellers of the slums in the developing countries. Squatting⁵ is taking possession without the owner's permission, and most often vacant and run-down spaces become taken possession of [7], which are in public ownership or the ownership situation of which is unclear. This may be the means of survival equally as a political action, since some squatters believe that by taking possession of the vacant apartments they enforce their fundamental human right – dwelling, which they need not pay for. Squats are most often used for dwelling but also as public space, i.e. public centers, and it is not rare that their functions overlap. Formerly anonymous buildings, by squatting become cult places for the youth, in which initiatives become revitalized such as free of charge lodging and food, alternative library, computer center, magazines publishing, liberal radio, political collectives, space for meetings and gatherings, place for “music playing”, noncommercial coffee bars, cooperatives, art galleries, theatres, cinema theaters, immigrants legal counseling places, women center, diverse workshops, support groups and therapy groups, kindergartens, alternative schools, etc. Yet, each squat, sooner or later, ceases to exist (either by eviction or legalization), and therefore temporariness is an essential characteristic of squats. Many squatters oppose the legalization since in that case squat must adjust to the given frames, an additional expense is incurred and some dwellers must move out or work for their rent, and squatter activities must be conformed to. Lately, squatting has been understood less progressively as usurping, and more as space recycling, i.e. transformation of neglected or unutilized space into a living space.

Social cleansing is the term for the measures imbued with meaning the goal of which is removing in the sense of relocation of the part of population, which is undesirable in a certain urban zone, usually the homeless, the criminals dealing with drugs distribution or prostitution, alcoholics, or lower social classes, the poor population (with rather low earnings or dependable on social services), certain racial or ethnic groups [8]. Various societies, regardless their degree of development, richness or level of democracy, decide on taking up this measure. The examples are numerous, from destruction and relocation of entire urban districts in Chinese cities (for instance in Beijing during the phase of preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games), relocation of favelas from the center to the periphery of the South American cities, “erasing“

⁵ The word squatter originated in North America in the 19th century, and was used to denote the pioneers settling the remote countries, without permission and tax payment. Nowadays, it is a broad notion comprising landless peasants from South America who took possession of the uncultivated land in order to survive but also the West European squatters fighting for autonomous zones in the urban environment. Squatters are usually divided into two basic groups: squatters from necessity, existentially endangered, having no roof over their heads (the homeless, subtenants, refugees...) and squatters from conviction (the activists, artists, the workers active in culture...), who require the space for realization of their concepts. They believe that by opening up the buildings which were abandoned, they offer the public good, do not occupy the space in which someone already lives or is used by someone, but re-arrange and revitalize the spaces abandoned by the others. The idea of squatting implies the revision of the private property concept, which does not mean its abrogation, but implies abrogation of its omnipotence and introduces the obligations of the property owners in respect to the community. Also, it provides an opportunity for establishing diverse initiatives, without excessive resources and unnecessary bureaucracy.

the poverty districts in the African countries (for instance the largest slum Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, when part of population was “turned out” due to construction of the traffic routes), as far as the example of eviction and expulsion of squatters and the homeless in the cities of Europe and Northern America. This action has ultimately been guided by the belief that the life of those habitants provided a bad image of the neighborhood, and that the government/administration taking care of a certain area of the city was inefficient and non-prospective. Quasi moral character attributed to the habitants is also associated to the space they inhabit. Unlike gentrification⁶ which may commence spontaneously or be initiated by the private or public sector, social cleansing has always been initiated by the government [9]. It most often causes protest of the habitants who are the victims of expulsion from their homes (no matter how modest and without livable conditions they might be), eviction/relocation and evokes rather bad associations. Even though drastic measure are not deemed acceptable, they are still enforced, their brutality is more so greater as they do not offer an alternative to the evicted habitants, and are justified by the need for development or embellishment/beautification of the city [10]. It would be desirable to adopt the principle according to which all plans implying bulldozer as the only means should be reconsidered and applied only when absolutely necessary, along with the compulsory elaboration when and how the issue of the squatter settlements dwellers will be solved.



Fig. 1, 2. Bangkok, Thailand, the life at the Chao Phraya River. It has been planned to evict over 100.000 people, since the local government has plans for “cleansing and re-arrangement” of the city.

⁶ The term gentrification was used for the first time in 1964 by the sociologist, Ruth Glass. It can be considered as the first big manifestation of the postmodern city, associated with revitalization of the run-down central urban zones, along with the inevitable elitization of space and change of the district social image, eviction of the working class or some ethnic group and settling of the middle or upper middle class (usually young experts, yuppies). For that reason numerous theoreticians consider it a negative phenomenon, and these processes are often accompanied by demonstrations and protests of the population and small businesses owners, who because of “upgrading of the quality of life” and price increase, are forced to abandon their homes and shops (relocation process). It can be considered as the consequence of re-discovery of the urban life by the middle class (following the process of abandoning the city and the life in the suburb), which pays attention to where and how it lives, i.e. which activities and functions it has in the neighborhood, as well as who the neighbors are. This phenomenon is independent from the condition of the buildings, their vintage and initial price, although the new dwellers mostly renovate the buildings. This is the way that the process of physical transformation of no prospective neighborhood commences.

3. THE MODERATE APPROACH FOR CONDITION IMPROVEMENT

Urban revitalization as the process of change of physical, economic and social components of the neighborhood and future prospects for those region habitants, through the efforts made by the public and/or private sector, could be one of the more essential strategies also for solving the issue of substandard settlements. Physical components comprise upgrading of the communal infrastructure, building pool and public spaces, economic components relate to creation of the diverse activities, business operations and servicing as well as increase of employment rate and the social components comprise building of unity and mutual trust of the community, development of “self-help” programs and minimizing the rate of criminal within the community. The term of urban regeneration is often used by the planners but also by the politicians for reconstruction of the run-down urban zones (for instance, the abandoned industrial locations – brownfield). This notion covers a wide spectrum of social measures and may be used as euphemism for gentrification⁷.

The question is whether these terms could be used also in the cases of upgrading the level of equipment and arrangement of the settlements of the urban poor? In principle, the answer is yes, and depending on the condition, different methods are applied, first of all upgrading the housing conditions by introduction of the infrastructure, repair or reconstruction of the buildings, regulation and standardization, then social programs associated with strengthening and recovery of the community⁸, providing of employment and final legalization and introduction into the regular urban courses⁹. It is believed that the process of upgrading and rendering of the necessary assistance, providing the conditions allow for its implementation, are more effective than provision of alternative accommodation and relocation, since that way the self-awareness and confidence of the habitants is built, their trust acquired and integration implemented, and the feeling of force and rejection is avoided [11]. Such projects require great engagement of urban resources, patience and negotiation skills, time and money. In the slum type settlements or parts of urban zones which have been occupied by squatters or the homeless, it is necessary to provide integral action of numerous public forces, for instance, social and communal services, police, as well as collaboration with the non-government organizations and informal representatives of the habitants. The results may be expected, however not immediately, therefore for that reason many city governments are not willing to undertake such actions in the course of their short (usually four-year long) mandate. On the other part, if the settlements occupy the territory which in some aspect is required and valuable for the city, it is almost certain that the decision will be passed in favor of more drastic measures. Yet, the moderate approach is still recommended as a long-term solution, which

⁷ Many cities, aware of the changes borne by gentrification and wishing for the urban development and growth in certain zones, provide grants for the projects, participate in converting the abandoned buildings into public and commercial functions, arrange and equip the public spaces, taking more or less care of the social (dis)balance. In these spaces new activities emerge soon (erasing the old memories at the same time): galleries, shops with designers products, ethnic restaurants as the proof of globalization's determination and awareness, and one of the “certain indicators”(at least in the American cities) that gentrification has taken hold are the shops from Starbucks coffee chain (company mission: "To inspire and nurture the human spirit— one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time"). Over time this process has been changing, from pioneer and individual cases to in terms of space large, commercial and profitable undertakings.

⁸ Community is a group of people sharing certain geographically defined territory, and they can also have common habits, affinities, customs or experience, ensuing from the origin, culture, religion and/or life style, as well as using the same institutions and having common interests. Since 1990s this term has often been used and glorified in the process of urban movements understanding, however, at the same time has been criticized by some authors as insufficiently precise or overrated. In the sense of the community living within a narrower spatial unit the term neighborhood is used.

⁹ Legalization does not relate only to the buildings, but also to the population, their census, issuing of the documents, providing of social and health care, enrollment of children in schools and similar.

offers a complete program of rehabilitation, application of compulsory hygienic and safety measures, along with some benefits for the habitants. In perceiving the issue and necessary steps to be implemented, some specific characteristics of the location, dominant habits of the habitants and their modes of survival have to be taken into account (for instance, life in the proximity of the city waste disposal since it is the source of income – collecting raw materials for recycling), the aspect of internal settlement organization (common areas, communication, hierarchy, human resources), maybe some characteristics of construction, orientation and building grouping. In this manner, over time, these parts of the city would be incorporated on the maps and in a positive manner could become a part of the urban planning process.



Fig. 3, 4. Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa. The slums settlement which is still rather modest, however, the efforts to equip it are visible (to the left: kindergarten building, to the right: dwelling building)

4. CULTURE, TOURISM AND AESTHETICIZATION

When and (whether) the proposed measures of urban revitalization and regeneration are implemented and the basic living conditions in the run-down city zones are improved, it is possible to apply also other means, which would aestheticize the space and in that way, by building the image the habitants would be given an incentive to undertake care of their environment themselves or with the help of the professional services. Searching for and finding own potentials might be the best and most effective approach, but it does not only depend on the conditions the settlement is in, but also on the willingness of the community to confront the negativities such as poverty, criminal and violence. To initiate the change is not easy, however, culture, in its versatile manifestations, has proved to be an excellent trigger. Carnival events and other spectacles, written word, special music styles, dance, street art in the form of graffiti, simple but tasty culinary specialties, fashion trends, certain public figures, all that has emerged from the poverty urban districts, and forever branded some enclaves¹⁰ and became universally known and accepted in the world. Opening up towards exterior, organizing tourist visits and giving offer which is not within the sphere of criminal, prostitution and drugs, but education, culture and entertainment, takes off the stigma/brand from these settlements and provides a significant economic stimulus.

¹⁰ Enclave might be a “politically more correct” name than the term ghetto. It is defined as space in which the members of the certain social group are concentrated, which is linked by their ethnic, religious or social affiliation, cultural development and status.

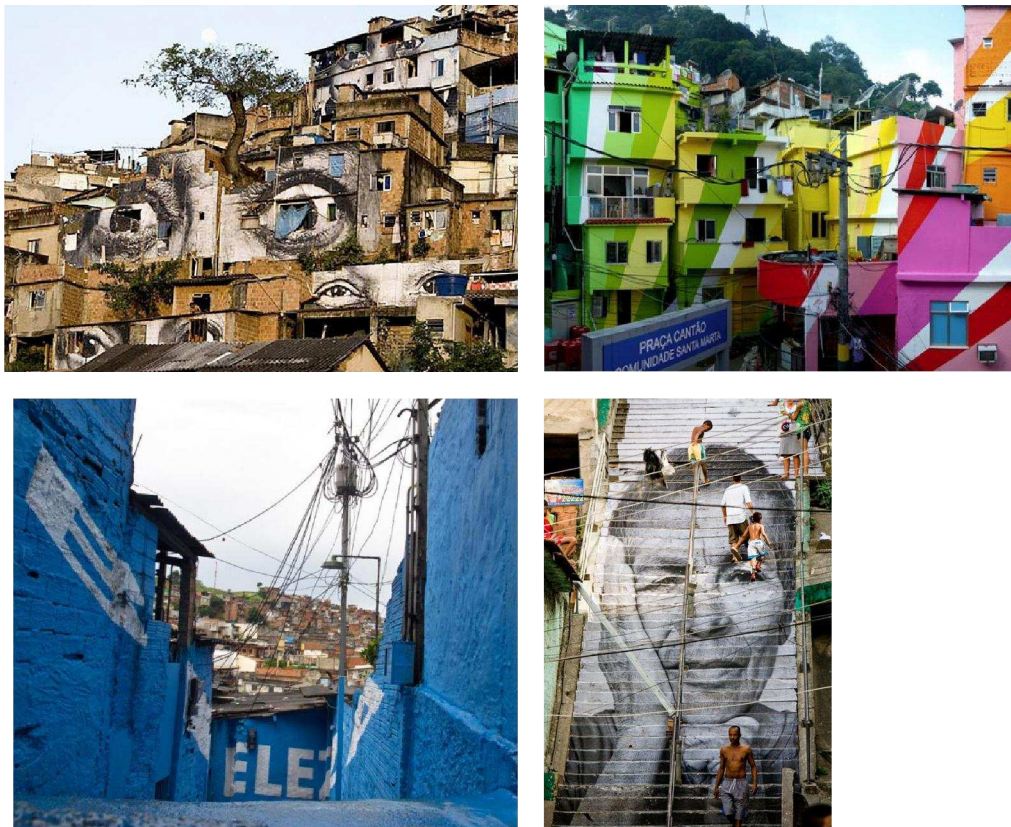


Fig. 5, 6, 7, 8. Favelas in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paolo), artistic interventions.

5. CONCLUSION

Strategic decision on which method to be used in rehabilitation of the conditions in the settlements which do not meet the standards of contemporary urban life, first of all depends on the political will to resolve the issue qualitatively and on long-term basis or on ideologically inspired need to remove, hide or temporarily relocate them. "Erasing" run-down districts and eviction of the habitants, unless having in its plan an alternative solution for resolving accommodation issues and relocation, as well as the scenario of integration into the new neighborhood, will not provide permanent results, but will only dislocate the issue, possibly also make it more complicated and greater. The awareness that slums have become an integral parts of certain cities, some of them even their most identifiable symbol, have provided them with an identity and image (whether bad or popular), certainly can contribute to the selection of the middle i.e. moderate way which comprises application of visible measures of improvement and upgrading, within technical and public spheres, until life has become bearable. Soon thereafter it is possible to work also on aestheticization of space, upgrading the quality of public spaces, as well as on identification of the potential, branding the districts and introduction of new functions. They are primarily within the sphere of culture, tourism, specialist trades, recycling industry and similar, and may significantly contribute to opening up to the visitors, greater degree of inclusion, integration with the wider urban community and could possibly create the conditions for employment and prosperity. The principle is based on engagement of the city administration against the initiate on the part of the NGO and the habitants themselves, their joint work and collaboration.

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