



# Informal Settlement; Concept, Challenges and Intervention Approaches

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**Abstract:** Suburbanization or as it is called today, informal settlement, is the consequence of rapid urbanization and transfer to socioeconomic paradigm of industrialization. Swift and unbalanced physical development of cities has been followed by undesirable economic, social and skeletal consequences. One of the effects and consequences of inharmonious urban physical development includes suburbanization and informal settlement. Nowadays, thousand million people of the world especially in developing countries live in unauthorized and disturb residences and under poor economic, social and environmental conditions. According to the report released by the UN, informal settlements (suburbanization) have been identified as the main challenge of the third millennium. On the whole, in the world one out of every six individuals lives in informal settlements. About 2 billion persons of the urban population of the world will live in such residences until the year 2030. In this research, first, the concept of informal settlement and different theories about the subject of research has been studied. Later, the corresponding problems with informal settlements and characteristics of these residences will be explained in detail. At the end, the approaches for intervention with informal settlements are studied from the beginning through the present time. The main goal of this research is to describe the respective problems with this type of residences and recognition of the intervention approaches.

## Introduction

One of the backgrounds for unsustainable urban development especially in the developing countries is a certain type of residence with serious problems known as informal settlement. This type of residence requires unity of specific policies for organizing the current condition and prevention of its extension in the future (Firouzi et al, 115- 2011). Suburbanization and informal settlement in self-grown residences are the words that are increasingly used today in urban planning, urbanization, geography, urban sociology and the ones. Informal settlement is one of the consequences of the modern life and extensive urbanization that is considered as one of the most important problems of metropolitans (Khazaei et al, 91- 2012). During the recent years, for the first time, number of residents of cities has equaled to those of nonurban regions (Egger, 2005- 2). As it was announced by the Head of Informal Settlement Program of the UN, the year 2007 is the first year in human history when over half of the world population lives in cities. In the said year, we have witnessed that number of population living in the poor regions has exceeded 1 billion persons. According to predictions made by the UN, it has been revealed that more than 60% of world population will settle in cities until the year 2030 and the developing world will enjoy an urban rather than rural characteristic until the year 2017 respectively. It may be understood that such urbanization and poverty will be regarded as the greatest world challenges (United Nation, 2004). In case of persistence of the present undesirable condition, number of villagers residing in poor urban regions will be increased to 2 billion individuals within the next three decades.

### **Definition and concepts of informal settlements**

The phenomenon of informal settlement is among the phenomenon arising from swift development of urbanization and one of the evident manifestations of urban poverty appeared in an unplanned and self-grown forms inside and around the cities. It enjoys an unpleasant appearance and uncommon texture to the city. Titles such as suburbanization, dysfunctional texture, informal and self-grown settlement, unplanned and unregulated settlements are used for them. Informal settlements where low-income and poor groups of people with high informal jobs are considered as a method of unsustainable urbanism and creates suitable grounds for appearance of social abuses (Sarraf, 2002- 115). Informal settlements encompass self-grown housings without legal identity that are haphazardly spread around cities (Hadizadeh, 2002-15). Its lodgings have been built by using cheap and less durable and worn-out materials and its equipment and urban services are inefficient. These settlements are mostly developed outside the legal urban areas, swiftly and illegally (Kalhor Nia, 221- 2003). They enjoy the least life essentials (Sadeghi, 22- 2006). Informal settlements refer to residential areas where a group of residential units are developed on lands without legal ownership or resided illegally (Bego, 2003- 11). According to definition of human settlement released by the UN, informal settlements are identified by using criteria for multitude of poverty for basic services, improper building structures, unhealthy and dangerous environmental conditions, unsafe residency right, poverty and social deprivation. The world percentage of families residing on these slums is being doubled in number (Un-Habitat- 2005).

### **Theories of finding the reasons of informal settlement**

Various theories have been presented to find the reasons and identify the grounds for informal settlement. The phenomenon of informal settlement has been studied from different viewpoints such as social characteristics, urban ecology, land utilization, shortage of housing, land price and the ones. Marshal Clinyard has viewed the informal settlement from ecological aspect and considered the stages of urban growth as the result of its economic role and the main cause for separation of ethnic groups and development of slums. Hemomer Hoit has presented the theory of sectional form of his city based on the said view accordingly. Rovenstine and Ortleee believe that the main cause of immigration from one place to another is the positive elements of destination and negative elements in the origin that cause immigration. Most of suburbanites are the migrants who have been attracted to the city of destination due to positive elements. Todaro also defines the economic motives of migrants and expected income in cities are main causes of immigration. From another viewpoint, informal settlement is the consequence of general problems of the global system and has emerged due to specific conditions. However, what has occurred in most of the countries of the third world is not only the result of international work division but it is also the consequence of their unbalanced social and economic systems ([www.seppidar.ir](http://www.seppidar.ir)).

### **The most important criteria for identification of informal settlements**

#### **Lack of services and facilities**

One of general and significant characteristics of suburban and informal regions and neighborhoods refers to lack of welfare services and facilities of the said regions. In these neighborhoods, residential utilization is dominant and share of welfare services and facilities in the said regions as compared to urban areas is very low.

#### **Area of lots**

In self-grown settlements, area of lots is mainly less than other areas of city.

#### **Occupied area**

From among the housing characteristics in the self-grown settlements, one may point out that the occupied area in the lot is higher than common and standard level to a great extent and eventually open space of residential unit is so trivial.

#### **Building quality**

The neighborhoods of informal settlements are the neighborhoods where wear out is seriously underway. Although its buildings enjoy short life, all of them have low quality.

### **Building façade**

One of the dominant characteristics of informal settlements includes buildings with no façade.

### **No. of storeys**

In their textures, residential houses are mainly single-storey thanks to poverty of residents and also considering the materials used in the building and uncommon construction procedure.

### **Geometrical shape of parts**

Houses in these settlements have generally been formed organically without any pre-thought geometrical order and based on the ability of each family in occupation of land and also under the influence of characteristics, natural bed and topography.

### **Formation in poor urban lowlands**

The lands near urban bothersome utilities such as troublesome industrial centers enjoy a poorer quality for urban development and they suffer from environmental problems and different pollutions. Therefore, they are considered as a good potential for attracting informal settlers.

### **Type of title deed**

One of the most important features in the areas with informal settlement is the lack of official title deeds for the residents. In these areas, residents mainly enjoy illegal and informal models for possession of lands and residential units.

### **Municipal permit**

The most important feature of informal quarters is their illegal nature and their formation out of urban development programs. In these quarters, construction is usually performed without any permit.

### **Antiquity of settlement**

Feeding from the main city is the requirement for formation of informal quarters. These quarters are formed once the flow of money, capital and economic growth in the main city is high and immigration attractions have been created there. This process requires passage of time. Therefore, these quarters have a shorter life than other urban regions. (Shieh et al., 2010: 79).

### **Characteristics of informal settlement area according to UN**

Poor urban appearance

Low quality of public, physical and mental health

Lack of any suitable job and sufficient income

Special subcultures in these regions

Population density

Low or lack of educational and welfare facilities and low level of literacy and education, lack of any school

Extensive poverty

Abundant drug and high level of addiction

Source and center of social perversion (un-habitat 2005)

### **Review of viewpoints of theorists in the field of informal settlement**

In this section, the thoughts of influential people in informal settlement are reviewed and mentioned based on a historical process:

#### **Oskar Lewis**

In the 1960s, research experiences of Oskar Lewis the American anthropologist resulted in his presentation of theory of culture poverty that highly influenced on current views and policies in relation to poor communities. He believed that poverty culture includes a various series of values and beliefs in poverty among which a kind of subculture is formed. Lewis argued that in a culture, the poor are inevitable and poor groups generally enjoy features such as reluctance, determinism, immediate satisfaction and social disorder. In addition, Lewis believed that the subculture is transferred from one generation to another in terms of a

lifestyle in the family and it makes it impossible for the poor to go out of poverty cycle. Theory of Lewis and similar theories resulted in description of urban slums by programmers and directors as urban cancer, festering wounds and similar features.

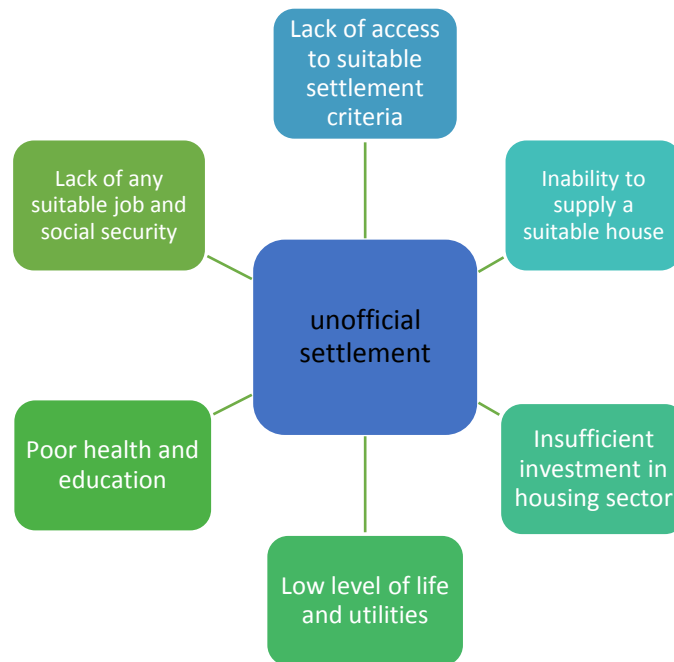


Figure 1. Indicators of informal settlements according to World Bank

### Charles Abram

By writing a book, Charles Abrams emphasized on this point that since the price of urban land has increased, the poor people have to procure land out of market norms. He believed that intervention of public sector could efficiently provide lands to the poor. Abrams' views which were quite effective on the UN views in the 1950s and 1960 supported the modification of settlements for the poor and the processes for procurement of housing for low income people as effective solutions including installment-based construction. Based on the efforts made by Abrams, urban poor residing in the poor urban settlements were considered as citizens of the cities and as a result, a ground was provided for partnership-based approaches in informal settlements throughout the world.

### John F. C. Turner

In the 1960s and 1970s, a few prominent individuals challenged the common attitudes and talked about a new plan in this field based on their researches in the developing countries and mainly in the Latin American countries. The most important individual of that group was John F. Trez, the famous British planner and architecture of MIT University. He claimed that government or municipalities could not provide housing for all classes of the society because there were various needs and the priorities of each family was different from those of another family. He believed that it was not possible to meet the needs of the public in terms of uniform houses in a desirable manner. According to him, government should provide the ground for improvement of self-assisted housing. Therefore, the most important recommendation of Trez with respect to policy making was that government should help in self-assistance of the poor so that they can improve their situations. Therefore, Trez talked about the supported self-assistance in informal settlements and provided the ground for projects of land, service and improvement of poor urban settlements.

### William Mangin

The American anthropologist enhanced Trez's view and mentioned self-assisted housing as a positive element in procurement of housing for the poor. In his works, he declared that the dominant views up to that

time were not correct. He emphasized that despite public perception; most of the residents of those settlements were employed and enjoyed a social stability. He believed that those settlements were not messy and chaotic and they did not wear out urban economy, the criminals did not dominate the settlements and a homogenous social group had not formed the settlements and their background was significant in the urban silence. Illegal domination has provided them the opportunity not to pay a large amount for housing. At the same time, such opportunity enables them to build their houses by their effort.

Table 1. Approaches for intervention in worn out textures

No.	Time interval	Models	Measures	Results
1	1960s	Social building construction plan	Growth of poverty, shortcoming of urban housing, adopting social building construction policy in most of the countries, construction of cheap houses	Shortcoming of financial governmental resources, intensification of village to city immigration and deprivation of poor groups (target) from high standard expensive constructed houses resulted in failure of this solution.
2	1970s	1) service land project	Providing separated pieces of land with services (serving the poor groups, enjoying financial abilities of individuals together with offering housing to construction loans and more coverage of marginalized families	Shortage of public land to be supplied by governmental authorities, problems for accessing to technical consultations and inability to refund the loans were some of the reasons for failure of the plan.
		2) Slums improvement plan	Financial constraints in the field of building construction policy and problems of land and service supply. Public authorities invested in the field of improvement of slums in the suburbs of the city and informal settlements and finalized ownership.	Insignificant effect on widespread urban development, problems arising from maintenance of improved infrastructures and problems arising from land ownership right resulted in decrease of self-assistance.
3	1980s	Empowerment	Mobilization of all potential facilities and existing resources for building construction and improvement of life conditions for poor groups, active engagement of poor settlers, prevention from destruction of minimum shelter, relying on partnership procedures to supply sufficient shelter for all people.	Lack of any guaranteed ownership right, inappropriate transaction of residential lands, inflexible financial systems in the field of housing, inappropriate regulations for construction and design are some of the problems of the plan.
4	Current process from 2000 onward	International campaign to guarantee the right of settlement and residence in slum-free cities	Guaranty of ownership right is the requirement of economic development. Engagement of poor urban class in design of procedures to solve housing problems, life housing right for all people, guaranty of ownership right, partnership as a means to guarantee sustainable development, resettlement without applying force instead of forceful evacuation, access of poor urban class to land for settlement	Making effort for empowerment of suburban dwellers and their partnership in making decisions for life

### **Jenis Perlman**

Under the conditions that conservative views indicated the widespread pessimisms about informal settlements, series of works of theorists and authorities such as Manuel Castels, Fernando Hernico and Jenis Perlman were mainly based on experiences of Latin America. They increased to the richness of these topics. They became pioneers in setting forth issues in rejecting unfair prejudices about informal settlements. The group at that time provided evidences indicating that those neighborhoods were not suburban, but they had linked to the society from different aspects. They showed that they were not actually separate from the existing system, but they had been placed inside the social system and would be reproduced by that. In the meantime, Perlman enjoys a higher reputation and had a higher influence in that field. In his PhD thesis in 1973, Perlman concluded that residents of informal settlements in Latin America were not suburban dwellers, but they were suppressed and deprived.

### **Kathy Rakovsky**

Kathy Rakovsky is one of the analysts of urban issues who have analyzed the issue of urban informal nature based on two major approaches, namely structural and neoliberal approaches. The first approach is a structure which is formed based on the thoughts of Neo-Marxism and theory of dependence and the intellectual foundations of ILO have been influenced by that. He argues that the importance of structural approach is that it justifies informal nature in the surrounding communities by the imbalanced nature of capitalism development. The second approach pointed out by Rakovsky is a neoliberal approach which emphasizes on the legal bureaucratic condition of government. Such condition in fact separates official and informal sectors. This approach refers to institutional and occupational requirements and restrictions and deems informal nature as a rational approach.

### **David Harvey**

In 1985, Harvey opposed private ownership and considered that in favor of capitalist class of society because he believed that it consisted of a lower part of labor class and classified the labor class into labors with private houses and lessees. Harvey believed that spatial form of a society is closely related with its general development mechanisms. He also believed that in order to understand city, one should understand the processes by which spatial forms are created and transformed. Architectural plans and features of cities and neighborhoods indicate campaigns between different social groups. In other words, urban environments indicate symbolic and spatial manifestations of more general social forces and the physical shape of cities are the result of market forces and governmental power. They emphasize on this point that how a created or built environment reflects the social and economic system.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the studies conducted to find the reason of informal settlements, the most important reasons for occurrence of this phenomenon includes expensive lands and shortcoming of housing, immigration and lack of any suitable employment which result in settlement in urban margins. This phenomenon is more obvious in the developing countries. Settlement in the margins of the city has faced several problems including unauthorized constructions and lack of health and security facilities resulting in several bottlenecks in social, economic and environmental fields in the margins of the cities. On the other hand, a look to the approaches for intervention in informal settlements indicates that until before 1960s, governmental investment in low income class housing sector was not often considered necessary; however, the increasing need to solve housing problem for the said class resulted in specific attention to that in terms of policies such as social building construction and empowerment throughout south countries. In 1970s, the service land project was set forth the results of which were accompanied by shortage of land and technical problems. In 1980s, empowerment policy was set forth aiming at public mobilization for improving the conditions of informal settlement which was followed by partnership-based procedures. The current procedure in intervention approaches which has been continued since 2000 is in parallel with guaranty of settlement in slum-free cities which has been formed with the goal of guaranteeing ownership and housing right for all people, public engagement in parallel with sustainable development and unforceful resettlement.

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