

DIVERSITIES AND TYPOLOGIES OF INFORMALITIES IN NAIROBI

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of informal urbanization has become the single most pervasive element in the production of cities in developing countries. The city of Nairobi represents such a paradigm, with an area of approximately 690km² and a population of over 4 (four) million people, of which about 60% live in informal settlements.

Informality has been the dominant mode of city making in Nairobi since the early 1970s. This process is however not homogeneous as alluded to by most literature, but rather heterogeneous or diverse. Similarly, the phenomenon of informality with regard to city making has been associated with the urban poor, based on ecological theories as espoused by the Chicago School. On the other hand, evidence from Nairobi shows that informal practices and processes cut across all strata of society.

Quite often the phenomenon of informality with regard to city making has been addressed through legal and economic models. This chapter will emphasise the spatial dimension of informality in city making, as informal urban processes and practices occur in space and not in a vacuum. In addition Nairobi's informal practices and processes are diverse, ranging from the low end survivalist to the high end affluent practices and processes.

The chapter further argues that diverse informalities are not necessarily illegal, but occur as a default solution to failed formal processes and practices. There have been some attempts at formalizing these informal processes. In this regard various policies have been tried since the 1960s to date. However, these policies that were based on global development paradigms have not been successful. Currently strategy for urbanization being tested is the private-public-partnerships. At the same time while attempts at formal urban processes are being made, informal processes and practices have increasingly created an urban sprawl in Nairobi that is becoming unmanageable.

KEYWORDS: Informal, Diverse, Spatial, Sprawl, Policy