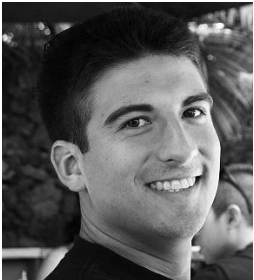




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UNCONVENTIONAL URBANIZATION

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This provocative essay discusses slum cities around the world through three case studies: Dharavi in Mumbai, India; Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and Sultanbeyli in Istanbul, Turkey. BCRP students Chad, Mark and Marco discuss how each of these settlements is a self-sustaining community and a legitimate form of society in an increasingly urbanizing world. They take some lessons from the Third-World to the present housing situation in the United States.

Slums, squatter settlements, and favelas spread out all over the world and are becoming growing centers of resourcefulness and innovation that are, according to Neuwirth (2005), "the cities of tomorrow, [in] the new urban world." Somewhere around 200,000 people a day migrate from rural areas into more urban areas. This is almost 1.4 million people per week and 70 million people per year moving into urban areas (Neuwirth, 2005). Today, there are approximately 1 billion people living in squatter settlements -one in six people living in urban areas; by 2030, almost one in four human beings will be living in a squatter settlement (Neuwirth, 2005).

In Brazil, illegitimate housing, or squatter settlements, is called a favela which is "an unauthorized group of self-built dwellings, often devoid of urban infrastructure and official streets, and basically occupied by low income populations" (Duarte & Magalhães, 2009: 267). The residents living in these dwellings do not have legal property deeds to their homes. Most of these homes are basically shacks and can be improved over time, and some even house businesses with electricity and running water. According to Duarte and Magalhães, squatters are usually among the lowest-income groups and most live in these settlements because they have nowhere else to live. On the other hand, some have chosen to live in squatter cities because of their close proximity to work and can even profit from renting out portions of their land.

There is an infinite number of these settlements around the world and they are continuously growing and multiplying. Many see them as problem areas, and even wish to eradicate squatter settlements as a whole. When looking at this issue from another angle we can see that these places are thriving with culture and activity. Squatter settlements are not places to be discredited or removed, but instead researched and replicated. Whether the world likes it or not, these are the cities of tomorrow, and they provide a valuable insight into how a self-reliant and sustainable community can really be achieved.

For this paper in particular, we have studied various squatter settlements that demonstrate the importance of community and the creativeness in a self-reliant population to build successful economic environments. We focused our attention on Dharavi in Mumbai, India, Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Sultanbeyli in Istanbul, Turkey. Each of these squatter settlements helps to prove the importance of their existence and how they cannot just be fixed or demolished by those from a higher power. We have given a brief summary of each of these places and compared them with readings from class lectures. In the end of this paper we conclude with lessons learned and how to apply them to areas in the United States. To begin with we will explore the world in the Dharavi slum in Mumbai, India.

Dharavi

Dharavi has been noted as being one of the largest and oldest slums in Asia. It is located in the heart of India's financial capital in Mumbai and can be seen as a juxtaposition of neighborhoods, each with their own unique character, which have been shaped by waves of migrants who came from the four rural corners of India.

Note: Essay based on the authors' final paper for the class Urban Design in the Americas (CRP 402), fall 2009.

Many have described Dharavi as being an eyesore, but the residents here call it home. Once one can see beyond the slum stereotype it is apparent that Dharavi is a successful economic and self-sustaining hub of Mumbai.

Dharavi (Figure 1) has an official population of more than 600,000 residents and more accurately around one million who live in 100,000 plus makeshift homes. Prakash M. Apte notes that Dharavi is in fact a self-sufficient, self-sustaining village community that Mahatma Gandhi even wrote about in his books on India's path to development (Apte, 2008). Dharavi's core population has achieved a unique "informal and 'self-help' urban development without any external aid and has become a thriving and successful economic engine" (Apte, 2008). The slum's economic base can be described as being decentralized, human-scale, low-tech, and labor intensive.

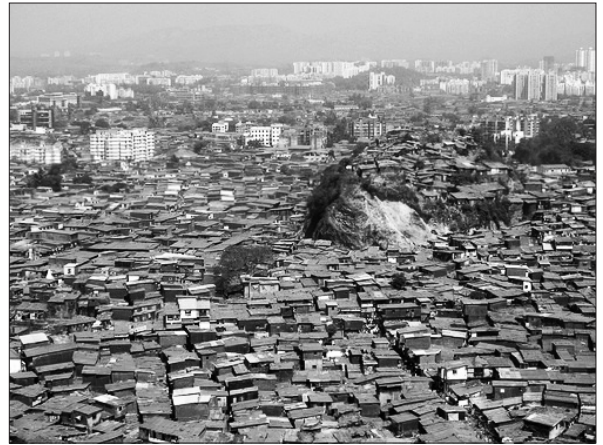


Figure 1
Dharavi, a squatter settlement of 600,000 residents in Mumbai, India. (source <http://blog.propertynice.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/dharavi.jpg>)

Apte also notes that the close proximity to jobs and the mixed-use of high density, low-rise streetscapes results in an organically developing urban form that is walkable, community-oriented, and network-based. This slum is the type of model many planners have been trying to create in cities around the world. "A re-zoning and segregating of many of this slum's activities would hurt the urban form here" (Apte, 2008). Although Dharavi has achieved a thriving and compact community, it still lacks basic sanitation and necessary infrastructure that government entities in India have been trying to address by redeveloping the area for some time (Figure 2).

According to Fernando (2009), since 2004 the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) designed by Mukesh Mehta and headed by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) has been a controversial scheme formed with a goal to rehabilitate the entire slum and to re-house all of the residents (72,000 families) whose names appear on the voters' list prior to 2000, in Dharavi itself (Figure 3). The SRA had an initial program to redevelop the area and provide each family with a 250 square foot apartment, which, however, would not allow residents to carry out their businesses due to such small of space. This program would also require the resettling of residents on the outskirts of the city. The result would give property landowners the right to build new apartments and commercial developments on this land that has been freed up by the slums and sell them at higher market prices, thus allowing them to reap profitable rewards (Fernando, 2009). Although this plan would help to clean up the area, many residents and professionals have widely criticized this project.

Figure 2
In Dharavi the community still lacks basic services such as garbage collection and dwellings are built unsafely over on top of service lines. (source: http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3433/3314013339_d3aa8d0d1b.jpg)

One of the main criticisms noted by Fernando is that there is an "absence of any real consultation between the property developers of the Dharavi redevelopment project and the Dharavi residents" (Fernando, 2009). In her article, Fernando discusses how the DRP is a typical plan that is implemented by a technical professional and imposed with a top-down approach onto a population that is actually for the idea of redevelopment, but not if it disagrees with their needs and values. Dharavi will then become what Mukesh Mehta and the government of Maharashtra likely want: "a neighborhood for the middle class who will benefit from all of the basic and luxury services close to home" (Fernando, 2009). This type of redevelopment would only result in the residents no longer being able to carry out their business activity, and their maintenance costs will be so high that residents would have no other choice but to move to another slum. In order to find a way to address this issue, it is helpful to compare this situation in Dharavi with how favelas are being addressed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Since the mid 1980s, the removal of favelas in Brazil has not been politically or socially viable, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. There, in the early 1990s, the city government inaugurated a new vision

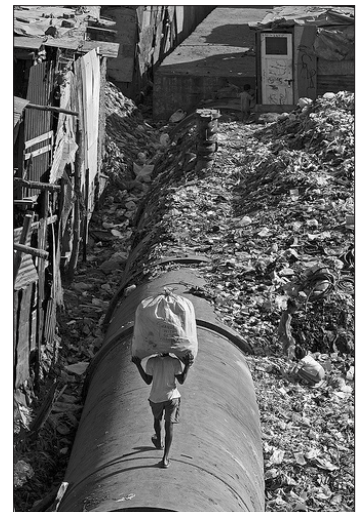




Figure 3

The redevelopment project for Dharavi. (source: Dharavi. Org. at www.dharavi.org/ What_Was_New)

toward the favelas and “recognized that favelados (favela residents) had a right to urban land and turned to programs to regularize property rights, legalize favelas, and provide more socially relevant public housing” (Duarte & Magalhaes, 2009: 269). The government aimed its policies to upgrade existing squatter settlements in such a way that would integrate them into the formal city with programs and projects providing these illegal subdivisions with infrastructure and public services like garbage collection.

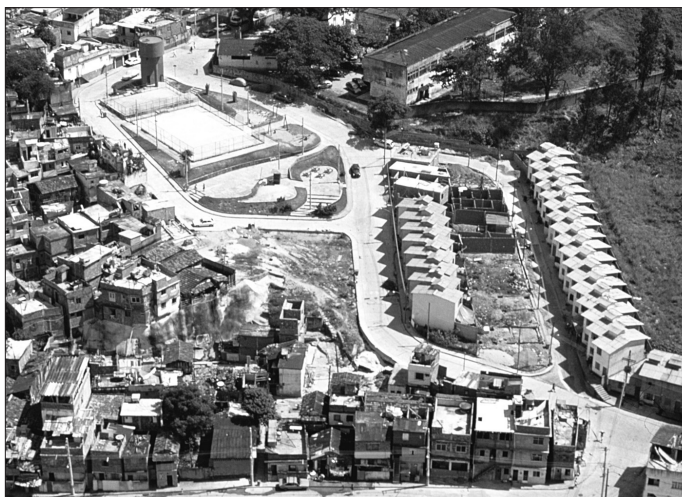
The housing problem in Rio was recognized as a social problem whose solution required implementing realistic policies that foster better housing conditions and more access to public services (Duarte & Magalhaes, 2009). Among these programs, which could be replicated in other squatter settlements, is the Favela-Bairro.

Duarte and Magalhaes note that this was an innovated program as a public policy for poor populations and its understanding of the social, cultural, and political contexts of favelas.

The main goal of the Favela-Bairro program was to upgrade the physical infrastructure of certain favelas, but it also responded to the community’s “basic social needs through projects such as health clinics, day-care centers, schools, and clinics for vulnerable groups” (Duarte & Magalhães, 2009: 272) (Figure 4). This program also created many recreational facilities, environmental rehabilitation, and income-generation programs. It is interesting to see how these projects avoided disturbing the existing houses, which are important to the community, and only removed them if absolutely necessary such as when they were located in dangerous areas prone to natural hazards or for a new road. Another important action in Favela-Bairro was the implementation of social activities that helped to develop young leaders, provide tutoring, and the construction of community libraries (Duarte & Magalhaes, 2009).

Figure 4

The Favela Bairro program in Rio de Janeiro upgraded this squatter settlement without disrupting the existing community. (photo by F. Silva in Duarte & Magalhães, 2009)



Another useful sub-programs in the Favela-Bairro that could have been applied to Dharavi was POUISO (which in Portuguese stands for Station for Urban and Social Orientation): an on site office staffed by architects, engineers, and social workers which ensured the governmental presence inside the favela during implementation of the projects (Duarte & Magalhães, 2009). The staff was prepared to assist the community, and orient them in any new remodel and construction, making sure that they did not occupy public or high-risk areas. Unfortunately like the DRP in Dharavi, there were also some negative aspects in Favela Bairro.

A major problem in favelas receiving the Favela Bairro has been increased gentrification. Because of the new benefits and the consequent rise in land and rental costs, many residents moved out because they cannot afford to live there or are being pushed out by wealthier citizens. Evidently, one single program will probably not be able to fix all of the housing problems in Rio de Janeiro, but fortunately it resulted in creating a new type of philosophy and governmental policy toward favelas. The Favela-Bairro created concrete social benefits that have made it an international model, repeatedly cited by the Interamerican Development Bank, for public policies developing countries with similar housing problems.

Using programs similar to Favela-Bairro can help to make squatter settlements like Dharavi more livable with new infrastructure and social inclusion programs to address the needs of the slum's residents while protecting their safety and human rights. Development in Dharavi should benefit the people there and provide them with more business and employment opportunities. The residents of Dharavi have worked extremely hard to turn the Dharavi marshland into livable land and should have a say in what the outcome of redevelopment in their community takes. Providing residents in places like Dharavi with access to politics and guaranteeing property rights will make residents much stronger. Whether we like it or not, squatter settlements are in fact becoming the cities of the future, and we have to address them in a thoughtful, non-biased, and strategic way to provide them with what they need in order to continue their way of life. It needs to be understood that squatter settlements are legitimate forms of urban development and should be treated that way.

Rocinha

As we discussed above, in Brazil a squatter settlement is called a favela. Favelas have become a great social and housing problem in Brazil throughout the past fifty years. As the country's population has become more and more urbanized, millions find themselves in these slum settlements due to a lack of convenient, affordable housing. Of these favelas, Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro, located between the beaches of Ipanema and Leblon, near Gavea and the luxury residences of Barra da Tijuca, has become one of the most popular (Fabricus, 2008) (Figures 4 & 5).

Originated in the 1920s, Rocinha has been resilient to political opposition, continuing to exist as one of Rio's largest neighborhoods. It was originally a trading post for farmers that travelled to and from Rio de Janeiro for business. During the 1930s, infrastructure in surrounding neighborhoods improved, and, as Rocinha became more accessible, the number of dwellings increased immediately. By the 1960s, Rocinha's population reached 15,000 and continued to grow until the 1980s (Fabricus, 2008). During the 1960s and 1970s the city's housing programs concentrated in destroying favelas and displacing their residents to affordable housing projects located in the peripheries of the city. However, despite a small drop in numbers during those decades, much of Rocinha's community remained intact, and the favela grew significantly given its location and easy access to jobs. Today, Rocinha's population is estimated between 150,000 to 200,000 residents (Mundo Real).

Part of Rocinha's resilience has been its flexibility in design and construction. A favela, by nature, is organic in design – there are no building codes to stop people from designing and constructing what they want. Change occurs as it is needed with negotiation between neighbors, or with the intervention of the residents association. In Rocinha, as in all squatter settlements, once residents manage to build their homes in brick and mortar, they make it in such a way to leave the concrete structure and the top slab prepared for a new storey

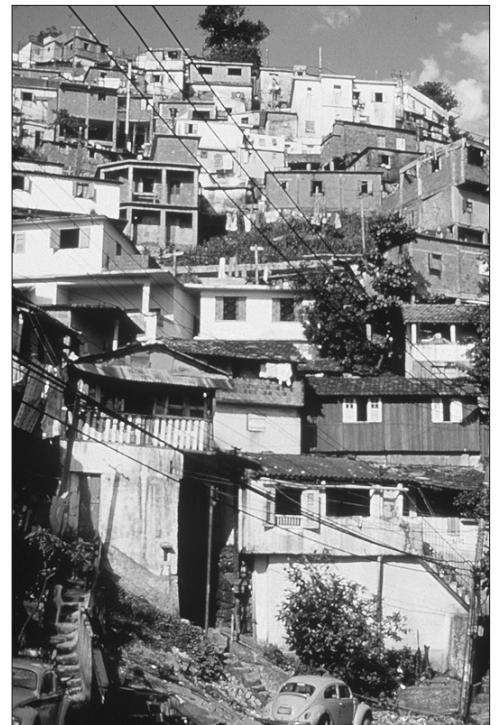


Figure 4 & 5
A detail and an general view
of Favela da Rocinha, Rio de
Janeiro, a squatter settlement
with over 150,000 residents.
(photos V. del Rio)



–what they do when the family expands or when they need extra income from a room to rent. If this process does not occur through self-help, the only negotiation there is between owner and contractor is the exchange of money. This has allowed Rocinha's population to explode during the last couple decades. The need for homes has far exceeded the supply – as Brazil's population has intensely urbanized the last half century, affordable homes have not been provided for this growing trend. As Duarte and Magalhaes state, “the majority of favela residents are among the lowest-income socio-economic groups, and many live there simply because they do not have other options” (Duarte & Magalhaes, 2009). Yet as Rocinha and other favelas throughout Brazil remain poor, they have been able to adapt the environment for their needs and to a changing culture.

As society and the rest of the world have changed to a technological era, Rocinha has been able to adapt throughout the past couple decades. Defined by a lack of formal infrastructure including electricity, sewage, and water, Rocinha has been able to access these commodities through *gatos*, the local term for illegal connections to public utilities (Fabricus, 2008). *Gatos* are used to pirate the infrastructure and connections that the city does not provide for these illegal settlements. These systems bring services to favelas for a far cheaper price than the services provided by electric, cable, and public works. While someone living in a legal neighborhood may pay a large portion of his/her wage on these services, a *favelado* pays a fraction of the cost for the same provisions.

Though illegal and a burden to the rest of Rio de Janeiro, Rocinha could not be ignored any longer and needed to be recognized as a legitimate neighborhood. In 1986, sixty years after being established, Rocinha was finally recognized by Rio as a legitimate neighborhood and later gained nomination as an administrative region in 1993 (Fabricus, 2008). Just like any legitimate district or neighborhood, Rocinha is home to many businesses such as McDonalds, and three of Brazil's largest banks have locations within the favela. It proves that these neighborhoods can support and have a need for these establishments. They are becoming more and more like any city throughout Brazil. Today, there is a complex system of political, economic, and social zones within Rocinha. Church groups, political parties, and all social networks that exist in formal society have a home in this favela.

However, although Rocinha is well established as a large community, it suffers from drug related gang activity. Armed gang members patrol the streets, often times in places where police will not go, either due to the difficult accessibility or because of the strong power of the gang network that exists in Rocinha (Pearson, 2009). Duarte and Magalhaes state that “in the 1980s... the city of Rio de Janeiro was suffering from the deepening national economic crisis and experienced a surge of street and drug-related crimes. Consequently, residents of the formal city continued to associate favelas with crime regarding them as ‘enclaves of criminality’” (Duarte & Magalhaes, 2009). Yet, in spite of all the crime occurring in Rocinha, its residents would not choose to live anywhere else – location, sense of ownership and ease of access to the rest of the city seems to be stronger than any danger.

Sultanbeyli

Geçekondu is the name given to a squatter settlement in Turkey, a word that roughly translates to landed or placed at night (Neuwirth, 2005). They are present in many Turkish cities –half the residents of Istanbul dwell in *geçekondu* homes and they blanket the hills around Ankara, the capital. Although on the surface these settlements may seem similar to other slums, “the Turks do these things differently” (The Economist, 1991). The one feature that truly differentiates *geçekondu* from other slums around the world are the laws set in place to protect squatters.

Geçekondu developments are still illegal in Turkey but squatters have rights: if one builds overnight without being caught, he/she cannot be evicted without due process. If the land chosen to build on is disused or neglected, there is a good chance nothing will happen to the squatter (Neuwirth, 2005). Also, whenever the population

of a *gecekondu* reaches 2,000 it can apply for recognition as a *mahalle*, an Arabic term for a city administrative unit. With this recognition comes the chance for elected representation and municipal services such as police, fire, and public transportation.

The first *gecekondu* appeared in the 1950s when Turkish metropolitan areas saw a rapid increase in urbanization and population growth. But the government could not respond to this rapid transformations with adequate housing, and was forced to condone illegal housing solutions (Turker-Devecigil, 2005). In Istanbul, *gecekondu* developments did not truly form until the 1970's. At this time, an increased number of migrants from the eastern provinces of Turkey began colonizing undeveloped land on the city's east side. The first few settlers lived in small open huts with pirated electricity and survived without water or sewer. These early primitive huts would be the foundation for Sultanbeyli, a shining example of a thriving squatter settlement (Figure 6).



Figure 6

Sultanbeyli, originally a squatter settlement in Istanbul, grew into a formal administrative city unit with 300,000 residents. (source: www.oyunbeta.com/members/gorimali/albums/istanbul-resimleri/342-istanbul-sultanbeyli/)

By 2005, Sultanbeyli had grown to 300,000 people and can now be considered a city with a popularly-elected mayor, planning, public works, and sanitation departments, and a municipal bus service (Neuwirth, 2005). The city also has stores, offices, restaurants, banks, Internet cafés, and a post office located in its downtown alone. The article "Cities of the Night" gives a description of life in Sultanbeyli: "The place is dusty, but not dirty; it has schools and mosques; there is space, sometimes a small garden, around each home; the children's clothes are clean; people are poor, but not desperately" (The Economist, 2009). A description like this stands in stark contrast to what would be expected from a squatter-slum.

Gecekondu developments such as Sultanbeyli prove that squatter-slums are a true form of urban development. If given the right protection under law, these places can flourish and exist as legitimate cities and homes; squatters are simply people looking for places to live so they can work and provide for their families.

Lessons Learned

Even though the types of settlements discussed in this paper are not similar to the impoverished slum communities in the United States, several main key conclusions can be made on how to address those who are less fortunate in this country. Here, there is a significant population that is looked down upon or whose needs are not addressed solely on the basis of their socio-economic status. What must be understood is that housing must be made affordable and easily accessible to accommodate the poor, and that they cannot just be moved to the unappealing corners of already developed areas.

As the world's population continues to urbanize, the need for housing in cities and urban environments will continue to increase. Most of this urbanization will occur in underdeveloped countries, but America will, too, face similar conditions. America is facing tough economic times, and the need for affordable housing and the number of homeless are increasing. The Tent city in Sacramento, California is an example of a large squatter settlement in America: in 2008, hundreds of homeless people settled in the American River Parkway until the city government cleared the area, disbanding all squatters from the parkway. This is not the proper way to handle this situation, as these citizens had no other option due to the tough economic conditions.

The most significant lesson gained from programs to end squatter settlements, is the importance of providing those who are under-represented and not well-off with opportunities to be heard, access to politics and leadership, and tools to change the communities that they live in, in a positive way. We agree with O'Meara (2002) who point out that the three most important components to provide this at-risk population in the United States and around the world are: home security, employment opportunities, and government representation. The poor deserve a comfortable living environment to call their own, and that can provide them easy access to work and all city services, as well as the same quality of life as those who are wealthy.

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