

# From Prejudice to Systemic Exclusion: How Slum Stereotypes Deepen Injustice for Residents

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**Abstract:** This paper critiques the harmful effects of the "slum" stereotype, arguing that it perpetuates the marginalization of informal urban settlements. Contrary to their negative image, these areas are a normal and inevitable stage of urbanization, driven by migration and economic necessity. The stereotype leads to government neglect, inadequate infrastructure, and undervalued land, worsening living conditions. Using the case of Mumbai, the study demonstrates how this stigma reinforces inequality. It calls for destigmatization by recognizing the value of informality and proposes interventions such as regulating the informal economy and improving infrastructure to integrate these areas equitably into the city.

**Keywords:** slum stereotypes, informal space, urban inequality, stigmatization

## 1. Introduction

The word "slum", which has long represented the worst housing conditions and the most unsanitary environment, "may be derived from 'sdown,' meaning 'swamp,' or it may be an accidental mixture of 'feces' and 'scum,'" said the late American urban planner Charles Abrams observed.[1] The imagery of slums is often dark, gruesome and immoral. The classic slum is characterized by dilapidated housing, overcrowding, disease, poverty, a mixture of drugs and vice, and the irredeemable image of the "dregs" of society degenerating in an orgy of debauchery. The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT) defines it as "a continuous settlement that is not physically, spatially, or even socially recognized by the authorities as an integral or equal part of the city" and "characterized by a continuum of inhabitants whose housing and infrastructure services cannot be met".[2] Many city builders, therefore, tend to keep quiet about the informal areas of their cities, but this too is often a cover-up. These "slums" lurk beneath the glamour of the city, facing problems of overcrowding, poor or irregular housing conditions, lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and insecurity of tenure. This paper focuses on the negative effects of the "slum" label and how to treat the informal area of the city equally based on this status quo.

## 2. The origin of the "slum" stereotype

Rome was not built in a day, and neither was the informal city. Davis painfully points out the paradoxical reality of Third World urbanization: we tend to think that a boom in urbanization means a boom in the city itself, but the leap in urbanization that many Third World cities experienced at the end of the last century went hand in hand with a decline in the city itself - as evidenced by the proliferation of slums.[3] Tracing the history of urban development, it is easy to see that informal areas are a long-standing social phenomenon that seems to grow with cities. As long as urbanization takes place, informal areas are an inevitable phenomenon, and therefore a necessary and unbridgeable stage of development in the urbanization process. The existence of these settlements, which are outside of modern management, is in fact justified - the migration from rural to urban areas is unstoppable, due to the combined push of the difficulties of making a living in the countryside and the pull of the opportunities of making a living in the city. The vast flood of "low-end" industries and "low-end" living spaces converge to create the expansion, vitality and prosperity of the city, while these newly migrated people at the bottom may not be able to quickly adapt to the rhythm of urban life and survival in a short period of time. This inevitably makes them choose the "slums" where the cost of living is relatively low.

## 3. The danger of "slumming" stereotypes

Allport's 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, introduced the concept of stereotypes. Stereotypes are impressions and attitudes that arise when people assign individuals or groups to a category based on their characteristics without fully understanding or taking into account other factors. Such impressions are often discriminatory and prejudicial, affecting people's perceptions of others and their understanding of social phenomena.[4] It is this very stereotype of slums that effectively stigmatizes both these neighborhoods and their inhabitants, thereby reinforcing their marginalized and

disadvantaged status within the urban context.

In the case of Mumbai, for example, Mumbai's Dual City Binary consists of The Static City and the Kinetic City together. The Static City is composed of orderly, modern housing, and its formal areas are planned and managed by the government, resulting in more efficient allocation of resources and better protection of the city's infrastructure and public services. The kinetic city, which has 60% of the city's population but only 8-10% of the city's land, consists of temporary, transient slums that are always in motion.[5] Such stereotypes can have a number of harmful effects on the residents of slum areas. For slum dwellers, internal and external slum stereotypes can lead to feelings of self-doubt, self-limitation, and barriers to self-fulfillment, making them doubt their own abilities and values, and making it difficult for them to pursue their personal goals and dreams. For the government, this stereotype can lead to laxity and neglect in government management, resulting in a lack of government management of slums, which can lead to greater constraints on slum development, especially in terms of infrastructure, such as toilet facilities. The government may fail to provide adequate public toilets, or the lack of maintenance and management of public toilet facilities in slum areas may lead to poor sanitation, spread of infectious diseases, personal safety issues, and invasion of privacy in slum areas. More importantly, the slum stereotype affects the value of land, although informal housing has been recognized as having not only a use value but also an exchange value, and it is a unique type of market.[6] Land values are supposed to be equal and do not change with the influence of the occupants, but slums are often undervalued or underestimated because they are an informal area. When assessing urban land values, factors such as location, land use, and planning constraints are usually taken into account, but slum areas have a particular set of problems, such as high residential density, unclear land ownership, lack of infrastructure, and poor environment, which can negatively affect land values.

#### **4. How to de-stigmatize the "slum" stereotype**

Based on this phenomenon, it is crucial to de-stigmatize it. The informality of the urbanization model is not useless, and in this case, we need to face up to its value, as the informal city and the formal city are equally important. "But however deadly and unsafe the slum may be, it has a glorious future". It is especially important to confront urban informality. Urban informality is relative to urban formality. In "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning," co-authored by Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad, the issue of informality in the city is addressed, and informality should be seen as a mode of urbanization, an organizational logic, a normative system that governs the process of urban transformation itself. A system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself. It is not opposed to the formal sector, it is a form of existence that exists alongside it, a transaction that connects different economies and spaces.[6]

On the economic side, the government should address the regulation of the informal economy, as suggested in The Informal Economy, where the lack of institutional regulation may affect various elements of the work process, such as undeclared labor, lack of social benefits, payment of wages below the minimum level or the scope of employment that is socially inadmissible. Therefore, the government should effectively and actively intervene in the process and outcome of income-generating activities based on enforceable legal rules, so that the basic right to work of slum dwellers can be guaranteed. In terms of infrastructure, the government and related agencies should provide sufficient funds and resources to improve the infrastructure of slums, including water safety, electricity and sanitation, so as to ensure the basic rights and health of the people. This will also allow for effective defense, control and isolation in the face of serious infectious diseases such as the new crown. In addition, it is important to promote public transportation and infrastructure connections in the slums. By building and improving roads, bridges and public transportation, it is possible to facilitate more communication between the residents of the informal areas and the formal areas, to ensure easy access to other parts of the city, and to increase employment and communication opportunities.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The existence of slums is justified and needs to be taken into account. It is an inevitable, normal and unbridgeable stage of urbanization. Any neglect, disregard or contempt for slums is unacceptable. If slum dwellers are not properly resettled, they will only stimulate a rebellious mentality and will not solve the fundamental problem. Through appropriate government intervention, the environmental problems of slums are improved, the quality of life of the residents is enhanced, and slum dwellers are accepted and recognized as part of the city, recognizing the fact that the informal city and the formal city coexist.

#### **References**

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