

Concept of Non-Institutional Housing

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Abstract:

The major characteristic of the contemporary urbanized world is informality, particularly urban informality, which is a crucial notion to describe an act or spatial reality that operates outside the institutional laws of a country. The development of housing complexes in urban areas, outside the framework of construction laws, is a global phenomenon, especially prevalent in most countries. These are individual initiatives that grow to form entire neighborhoods, making this phenomenon a global trend. These developments, composed of housing, outdoor spaces, and commercial areas, do not follow institutional rules or top-down funding. They respond to personal needs and desires related to the life of the inhabitant, their family, their integration, and their settlement, often built without construction permits. The terms used to describe these areas in different languages are numerous and can refer to very different realities depending on local urban situations. This phenomenon exists under different names in various countries. The U.N. provides a list that includes: favela (Brazil), morro / cortiço / comunidade (Portugal), villas misérias (Argentina), chabolas (Spain), slum or squatter settlements (English literature), precarious or spontaneous housing, irregular or informal neighborhoods (French literature), bidonvilles of Rabat (Morocco), encampment (Haiti), gecekondu (Turkey), kampung (Indonesia), and the list goes on. This list is not exhaustive, as other names are attributed to these non-institutional sites: self-built housing, insalubrious, non-regulated, popular, dilapidated, illegal, marginalized spaces, gourbivilles, musseque (slums of Luanda – Angola), hámichi (marginal) or ghayr rasmi (unofficial) (Egypt), and the term almanatiq al ghyer mukattata (unplanned zones) used by the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP), the body responsible for urban planning. These densely populated clusters of shacks, installed for years with assemblages of tarps, sheets, and poorly consolidated cement walls, are set up in the smallest vacant spaces: wastelands, flood-prone areas, ravines. This category represents informal slums. There are also non-institutional zones built similarly to institutional zones with plots and the use of reinforced concrete structures and construction materials: concrete blocks, hollow bricks, bricks. This category represents permanent informal housing. In each location of non-constitutional housing, the terminology provides insights into living conditions, a relationship to the site, culture, and history.

Keywords: concept, non-institutional housing, formal, slum, informal

Introduction

In spatial development and numbers, cities worldwide have never reached such an exponential curve. This constitutes the major phenomenon of our era. This sprawling and rapid urbanization is global and can be understood in two waves. The first wave affected developed countries alongside industrialization. The second wave, currently underway and yet to come, concerns developing countries in Africa and Asia, which are the most populous regions in the world.

In this context, two types emerge, specifying two opposing faces. The first is institutional, fitting into urban and architectural laws, while the second is embedded in the urban fabric of the city but uncontrolled. This urbanization is a complex phenomenon that covers extremely different

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situations depending on the country, making it difficult to control, understand, formulate, and even more so to define.

Initially, this urbanization was primarily expressed through slums, but its current manifestations are different; it has evolved and taken new forms, integrating into the institutional while practicing the same procedures, such as construction materials, alignment, sanitation, electricity, gas, etc.

Given our research and after extensive exploration of the various works dealing with this theme of the different names given to non-institutional urbanization, a main question arises:

What common concept should we attribute to this non-institutional housing?

From there, we attempted to analyze all the concepts used in different countries, to see their development and the characteristics they present. This will allow us to extract categories that will lead us to a unifying concept for different researchers.

1. Research Methodology

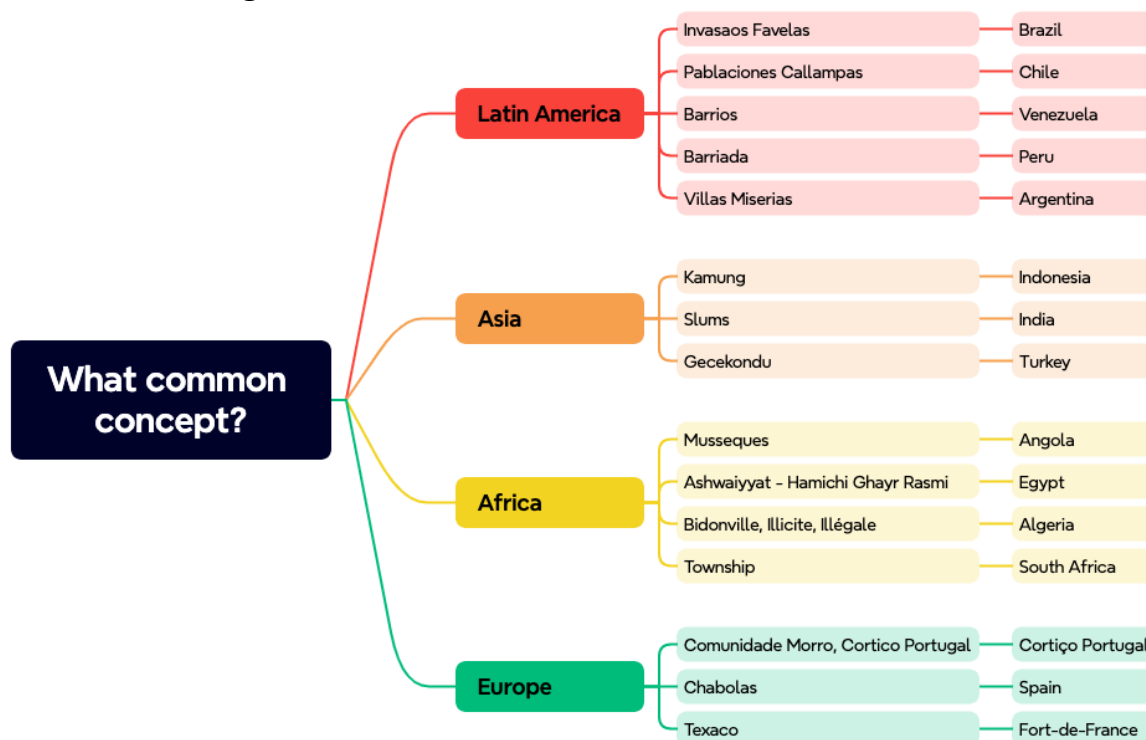
To conduct this study, an exploratory approach was adopted, having monitored these urbanization categories for a quarter of a century. Terminology related to land, materials, structure, and other aspects was extracted from various countries. These terms were sourced from a range of academic works, journals, theses, and other relevant literature.

Photography played a crucial role in enabling the comparison of the diverse landscapes of this housing, allowing it to be contextualized within a representative framework.

2. A Common Concept of Non-Institutional Housing

From the investigations conducted, an attempt was made to gather all the lexicon used in different countries into a diagram, which was intended to facilitate the reading process (Figure 1).

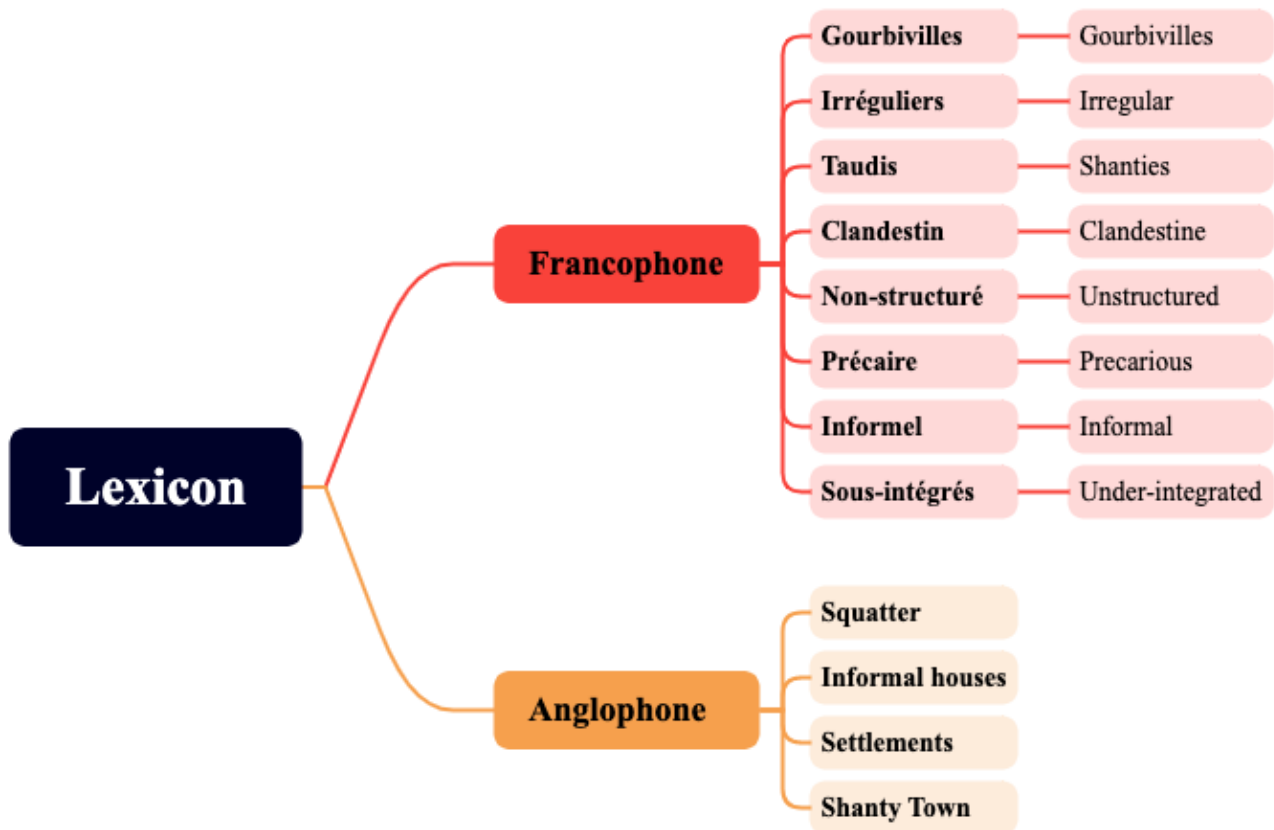
Figure 1: Lexicon used for non-institutional urbanization.



Source: Saidi, 2024.

In addition to the lexicon that is specific and used in different countries, it was observed that it is linked either to French literature—precarious, spontaneous, irregular housing—or to English literature—squatter, settlements (Figure 2). These different non-institutional zones were found to use names related to the language of the colonizing country.

Figure 2: Francophone and Anglophone Lexicon



Source: Saidi, 2024.

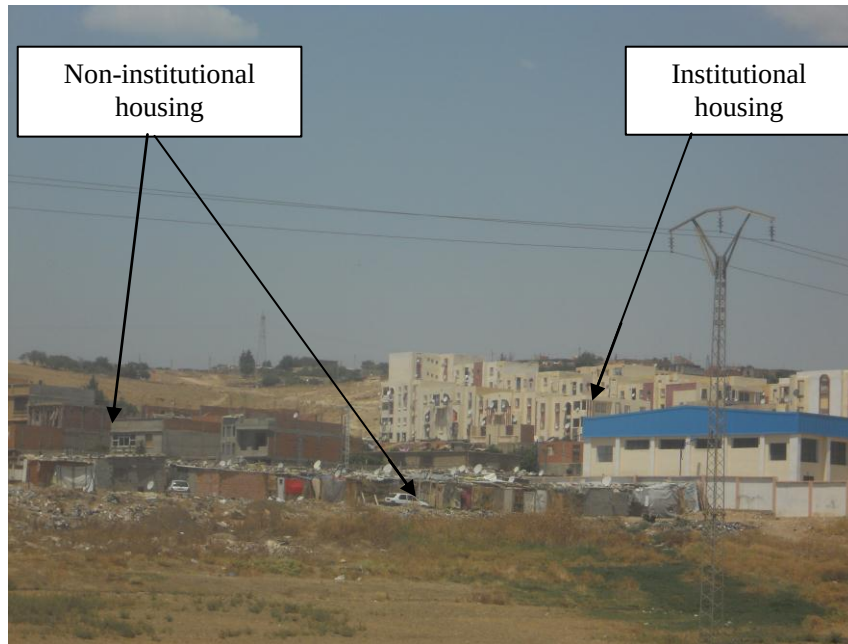
3. Results and Discussion

Faced with a lexicon that is more popular than scientific, an attempt was made to approach this landscape to observe, discover, understand, characterize, explore, and ultimately draw conclusions. First, the development of the city over time is characterized by the juxtaposition of institutional housing (individual or collective) and non-institutional housing (slums and permanent structures). This situation, which is very common, particularly in Algerian cities such as Sétif, where these coexist, live together, and share resources, is not isolated (Photo 1). It is also observed in major Algerian cities like Annaba (Photo 2).

Second, by considering the characteristics of institutional housing, such as location, materials, sanitation networks, electricity, water supply, telephone services, municipal management, population, and planning, it was deduced that two primary types of non-institutional housing or unplanned urban housing (Boulahbel, S. 2005), exist (Figure 3):

- Informal slum housing (Abdekafi, J. 1991 – Alves, G. 2018).
- Permanent informal housing (Prenant, A. 2002. – Chiodelli, F. 2019).

Photo 1: Housing: Institutional, slum, and permanent structures coexist.

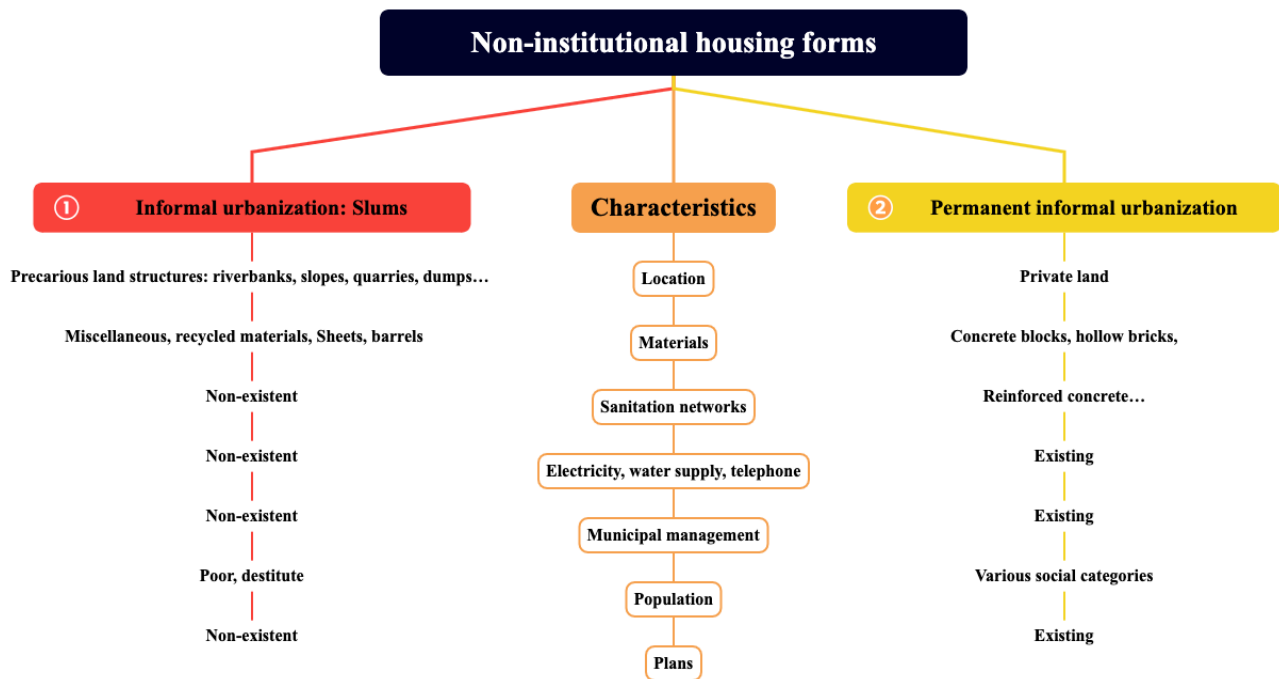


Source: Saidi, 2010.

Photo 2: Public housing (HLM) in Annaba alongside a slum.



Source: Saidi, 2010.

Figure 3: The two forms of non-institutional housing.

Source: Saidi, 2024.

To support this classification, a series of representative photos of each typology were compiled (Photos 3A ~ B).

Photo 3: Permanent informal housing

A. Cherarba Eucalyptus in Algiers, B. Ain-Fakhroune Algeria



Source: Saidi, 2015.



Source: Saidi, 2014.

Permanent informal housing has become a significant part of the Algerian urban landscape, integrating into the institutional urban fabric and gaining recognition by the state. It is often described as non-regulated (Tanguy, P. 2003), non-structured, illicit, or illegal (Hafiane A. 1989), among other terms. Across different Algerian cities, this type of housing presents a nearly identical landscape, typically featuring reinforced concrete structures, unfinished reinforcements, and infill materials such as concrete blocks and bricks.

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In contrast, slums (Granotier, B. 1980 & Navez-Bouchanine, F. 2003), referred to various names such as "precarious housing" (Photos 4A ~ E), are characterized by their lack of legal basis for integration into the urban fabric. These areas are typically located on non-buildable land, such as steep slopes, flood-prone zones, or dumps. Despite their unplanned nature, slums present a unique landscape, often constructed from recycled materials that provide shelter for their inhabitants. In most cases, these slums are eventually bulldozed, and their residents are relocated to newly constructed collective housing. The reclaimed sites are often repurposed for urban development projects, as slums frequently occupy central areas.

Photo 4: Informal housing: Slums

A. Constantine, **B.** Arzew, **C.** Algiers, **D.** Demolished slum in Algiers, **E.** Demolished slum in Skikda



Source: Saidi, 2000.

Today, this phenomenon is widespread in developing countries. However, in some cases, slums can evolve into permanent informal neighborhoods, which may eventually be regularized and even acquire urban commercial centrality, as seen in the case of Oued Skhouné in Guelma (Saidi, 2020) (Photos 5A ~ B).

Photo 5: Radical transformation of a slum into a permanent informal neighborhood

A: Oued Skhouné slum - Guelma, **B:** Permanent informal housing in Oued Skhouné – Guelma

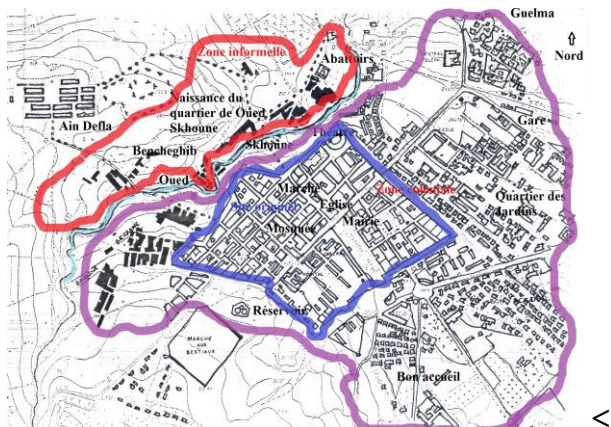


Source: Archives, City Hall of Guelma.

Source: Saidi, 2019.

An unprecedented situation, a unitary informal urbanization contiguous to the city center (Figure n°4). The creation of a large boulevard named: Boulevard du Volontariat, which takes place in the bed of the wadi. On its banks, small shanty towns have gradually transformed into a vast self-built permanent city, of such magnitude that it today represents nearly 40% of the city's population and draws the activity to itself commercial (Figure n°5).

Figure 4: informal urbanization unitary and contiguous to the city center.



Source: PUD with author treatment

Figure n°5: A slum area converted into a commercial center.



Source: Saidi, 2019.

Conclusion:

In the cities of the world, the terms to designate areas of non-institutional housing are countless: shantytown in Morocco, shantytown, the favelas of Rio, the invasões of Salvador de Bahia, the gecekondu of Ankara, the bastees of Calcutta, the ranchitos of Caracas, the mussequês of Luanda, the townships of Johannesburg, the kebés of Nouakchott, the barrios piratas of Bogota, illicit, illegal in Algeria...

Whatever their name, these have in common a set of characteristics that could be taken into consideration to determine two families that could be used as references by different researchers.

The first family would be permanent informal housing which has the characteristics of formal housing: servicing, roads, electricity, telephone... the usual outcome of this category is to be legalized and finally inserted into the urban fabric.

On the other hand, the second family would be informal slum housing: unserviced, recycled materials, no title deed, unusable land, dangerous, more or less unsanitary with a steep slope, flood zone, landfill, left vacant... generally destroyed bulldozed by municipal authorities.

Studies carried out on non-institutional housing are often fragmented and this proposal tends to propose two families, namely: permanent informal housing and informal slum housing which will serve to achieve a broader and more precise understanding of the issues raised in the phenomenon of informal housing and will enrich our understanding of this global phenomenon and allows us to identify its geographical and social characteristics necessary to formulate more inclusive urban policies adapted to the reality of all societies.

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