

13. Housing informality in the Global North: a socio-historical approach

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Housing informality, in the sense of use of land or buildings outside the legal realm, has been widespread dwelling strategy for the urban poor in different geographical contexts and historical periods. Informality crucially shaped the “hidden history of housing” (Ward, 2002), as part of what Foucault (2013) calls “popular illegality”. Still today these practices characterise the housing situation in many Global South countries, where hundreds million people live in so-called slum areas. Yet Europe is no exception: having witnessed informal housing practices in the past, they are re-emerging in present times as a diffused housing solution not only for marginalised and migrant populations, but also for the working class (see Mudu and Chattopadhyay, 2017).

This session aims to explore housing informality among urban poor, by comparing different historical periods in order to investigate the origins and developments of this phenomenon in the Global North. We believe that this socio-historical perspective can be particularly fruitful to shed light on informal housing processes that have been so far largely studied with reference to contemporary examples. Moreover, comparison of informal housing practices across different times in history can enrich the current attention to their geographical dimension, adding to the understanding of the evolution of these practices in the same cities and regions. Overall, through this approach we wish to bring to the fore the temporality of housing informality to better understand its long-lasting presence in Global North.

We welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to, the following topics:

- The transformation of materiality and everyday life of informal housing in different historical periods;
- The various forms of collective action around housing both in the present and past;
- The genealogies, developments, legacies and travelling of public policy tools to govern housing informality and control land use;
- The evolution of the relationship between the real estate market and public authorities with regard to urban planning and informal housing;
- The representations of urban informal dwellers and how they changed (or not) in history;
- The changes in global capitalism and how they affect housing informality.