**LONDON’S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY**

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**Workshop Report**

**Comparative Approaches to Informal Housing Around the World**

**Annual FRINGE International Workshop**

## Organizer: Dr. Udo Grashoff When: 22-23 June 2017

## Where: University College London (UCL)



**Conference Report**

Research on informal housing is still fragmented.  Several factors impede a more systematic approach to the topic. The variety of notions used for housing strategies that do not (entirely) comply with the law, such as squatting, illegal housing, informal housing, unauthorised housing, unlicensed housing, self-help housing, to name just a few, is indicative of a fundamental heterogeneity.

Aside from the language used to frame the phenomenon of informal housing, further complexities appear to impede the study of informal housing as a global phenomenon; for example, in each case study we discover different dimensions, actors, motivations as well as different social and political contexts.

This workshop aimed to understand informal housing as a global phenomenon in a way that does not diminish local complexities. We set out to open up new perspectives and to develop *meaningful* comparisons on informal and illegal housing in distinct geographical regions and contexts.

As Professor Alan Gilbert (UCL) stated in his keynote lecture, comparative approaches to informal housing discourages over-generalization and facilitate intellectual rigour by highlighting which features of the practice are unique to a region, time period or political context and which features transcend these. Indeed, the challenges engendered by comparison forces us to think harder than we would have done otherwise about the applicability of our models and the generality of our analysis. Comparative research can thereby provide a rout to deeper insights, research innovation and future discoveries.

It was with this aim, to gain deeper insights and to shape the direction of future research on informal and illegal housing, that we began our workshop in the Common Ground of UCL’s Institute of Advanced Studies.

The first panel explored the relationship between informal housing and the state.

By comparing Rio de Janeiro’s formal and informal housing (asfaltos and favelas), Theresa Williamson (Catalytic Communities, Rio de Janeiro) illustrated how favelas were thriving by means of local organization. On Theresa’s analysis, disillusionment with promises of state support that had not materialised propelled social coordination by members within favela communities, leading to community-led structures that were able to maintain favela settlements and, crucially, the culture within favelas. It was suggested that this bottom-up, local organisation offered a model for how to develop and renovate favelas without compromising or exploiting favela culture (a real danger once the state becomes involved in such settlements).

In contrast to the case of favela inhabitants in Rio, whose attitude towards the state was sceptical at best, Eliza Isabaeva (University of Zurich) explored the attitude of squatters in Bishkek towards the Kyrgyzstani State. Eliza challenged the common perception of squatters as protesters, concluding from the perspective of the squatters, the ‘state should be analysed as an object of appeal, desire and negotiation’ rather than confrontation and resistance. In the follow-up discussion, Eliza noted that there lies a rewarding prospect of comparing Kyrgyzstan with another developing country where the same phenomenon occurs and researching the rationale behind different attitudes of squatters towards the state.

The second panel aimed to challenge a series of stereotypes about squatting through comparative study. For example, that squatting in always political or is always resisted by the state.

Manuel Lutz (Technische Universitaet Berlin) compared three cases of legalized tiny house villages in the US and the trajectories of their evolution. He looked into the methods of state management applied to each case and suggested that the state encouraged such spaces in order to excuse themselves from a range of responsibilities relating to the provision of adequate social housing.

Dr. Baptiste Colin, on the other hand, challenged stereotypes about squatters in Paris and Berlin (West) in the Early 1980s by showing two videos filmed in the respective cities. His comparison challenged the media stereotype of West Berlin squatters as being militant and political, as well as the image of Parisian squatters as apolitical, atomized individuals. In reality, Baptiste concludes, political and apolitical squatting was a feature of both Paris and Berlin throughout the relevant time periods.

The third and final panel of the first day of the workshop featured the study of alternative housing practices in Mexico City.

Diego de Santiago Delfin (Universidad Iberomericana Ciudad de Mexico) used the squatted social centre Chanti Ollin as a springboard for a discussion of indigenous practices and an exploration of the hostility between this ‘house in movement’ and informal settlements in Mexico City. Moving forward, Diego is planning to compare squatted social centres in Latin America and Europe in order to develop a deeper understanding of squatting practices and to encourage a transfer of ideas from the global South to the global West.

The fourth panel, held on the second day of the workshop, examined case studies of squatting in various European countries, with a focus on the degree of politicisation of squatting as a practice.

Prof. Miguel Martínez Lopez (Uppsala University) suggested that a more accurate understanding of political squatting could be had by scrutinising legitimation strategies adopted by pro-housing movements and anti-capitalist activists in Madrid. Miguel concluded that political squatters are opposed to illegitimate wealth and inequality rather than to private property as such. Miguel plans to compare his case with squatting in Paris or Rome.

Moving from Madrid to Leiden, Charlotte van Rooden and Merel Snoep (Leiden University) presented their research into squatter behaviours in the Dutch town of Leiden in the 1970s. By scrutinizing media sources (combined with various other approaches such as interviews), they discovered that the public perception of squatters as politicised and militant was a gross exaggeration of a small range of cases. A more accurate picture would see that squatters in Leiden were mostly peaceful people finding a shelter and willing to put their labour into it. This observation resonated with Dr. Udo Grashoff (UCL).

In his presentation of squatting in East Germany in the 1970s and 80s, Udo discovered a strong de-politicalised conception of squatters as well as a correspondingly lenient attitude of the state to squatting. Due to the common points of their presentation, Udo, Charlotte and Merel have decided to conduct comparative research into their areas of expertise, Leiden and East Germany.

The fifth panel aimed to illuminate the frameworks and typologies used in the study of squatting.

Dr. Thomas Aguilera (Sciences Po Rennes) and Prof. Alan Smart (University of Calgary) noted the state toleration of squatting in Paris and Hong Kong respectively. They presented cases of conditional legalization, selective local council support and/or neglect and suggested possible political and economic explanations for these behaviours. They are working towards establishing a typology in which toleration is used to better understand the states response to squatting. The typology will illuminate a number of questions. For example, in what way was squatting tolerated? And, when squatting was tolerated, was it because of state neglect, state ineptitude, state support or some other reason?

On the other hand, Prof. Rachelle Alterman (Technion – Israel Institute of Technology) and Dr. Ines Calor (New University of Lisbon) developed typologies of non-compliance with planning laws in Israel and Portugal respectively and discussed the implications of a variety of possible government reactions to different kinds of infringements. In the end, they challenged the demolition only response to infringement of planning laws, and suggested a more nuanced response from law-enforcement was more frequently adopted.

In the final panel, Dr. Jakob Warnecke (University Leipzig) focused on the practices of right-wing squatters in Germany. Jakob presented many examples of Nazi squatters in Germany after 1990 and described their attempts to take hold of public spaces. It is still an open question to what extent right-wing squatters not only adopted practices from their left wing political opponents but also integrated them into their ideology. In discussion, Jakob found the suggestion of comparing his case studies with that of right-wing squats in Spain and Italy appealing..

Olumuyiwa Adegun (Federal University of Technology, Nigeria) set out to establish a comparative study both across regions and across time. Using historical and present day images of squatted spaces, he compared informal settlements and state interventions in Berlin and Paris in the 19th and early 20th century, and shantytowns in Nairobi and Johannesburg in the end of the 20th century, asking how transferable the experiences of the North are to the South.

In his introductory remarks, conference organiser Udo Grashoff had expressed his wish that this conference would encourage further collaborative work. It was the workshop character of the event with both formal and informal sessions that allowed for the discovery of new perspectives and challenging clichés on informal housing. Our lively discussions will lead the direction for further comparative research and act as the blueprint for a forthcoming book on Informal Housing from a Global Perspective, due to be published by UCL’s FRINGE Centre, under UCL Press.

Fengzhuo Yang, Dr. Udo Grashoff & Akosua Bonsu

**About The FRINGE Centre**

Comparative Approaches to informal Housing Across the globe was the second annual international workshop held by the FRINGE Centre.

The [FRINGE](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/fringe-centre)Centre is UCL’s Centre for the Study of Social and Cultural Complexity. Set up in October 2015 by a group of academics at UCL”s School of Slavonic and East European Studies, it because part of UCL Institute of Advanced Studies in 2016.

The Centre focuses on complexity, ambivalence and immeasurability of social and cultural phenomena. A cross-disciplinary initiative bringing together scholars from the humanities and social sciences, FRINGE examines how seemingly opposed notions such as centrality and marginality, clarity and ambiguity, can shift and converge when embedded in everyday, taken-for-granted or otherwise invisible practices.

L**earn more about the FRINGE Centre:** [**www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/fringe-centre**](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/fringe-centre)

**Workshop Programme (Day 1)**

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| 22.06.17  **Welcome:**  Dr Udo Grashoff (UCL, SSEES) |
| **Keynote Lecture:**  Prof Alan Gilbert (UCL) |
| **Panel 1:** *Chair:* Prof Ann Varley (UCL)  *Speaker:* Dr. Theresa Williamson (Catalytic Communities, Rio de Janeiro), Could Rio's favelas offer the key to a sustainable future?  *Speaker:* Eliza Isabaeva (University of Zurich), Desiring the State? Squatters in Bishkek and their attitude towards the State in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan |
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| **Panel 2:**  *Chair:* Dr. Thomas Aguilera  *Speaker:* Manuel Lutz (Technische Universitaet Berlin), Informality fixes in the post-welfare state: Interrogating state managed persistence of informal housing from homeless tent city to tiny houses in the US  *Speaker:* Dr Baptiste Colin, Beyond Poverty: Social Exclusion and Squatting in Paris and Berlin (West) in the Early 1980s |
| **Panel 3:**  *Chair:* Dr Udo Grashoff  *Speaker:* Diego de Santiago Delfín (Universidad Iberomericana Ciudad de Mexico), Chanti Ollin: network of alternative practices through Mexico City and the world |

**Workshop Programme (Day 2)**

23.06.17

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| **Panel 4:** *Chair:* Prof Alexander Vasudevan (University of Oxford)  *Speaker:* Prof Miguel A. Martínez López (Uppsala University) Against All Private Property? On the Various Forms of Political Squatting  *Speaker*: Charlotte van Rooden, Merel Snoep and Dr Bart van der Steen (Leiden University): Who are the squatters? Questioning mediatized stereotypes of the squatter movement, 1970-1990. Presenting a Research project on squatting in Leiden, the Netherlands  *Speaker:* Dr Udo Grashoff, Informal Occupation of Flats in the  German Democratic Republic – Comparative Approaches |

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| **Panel 5**  Chair: Eliza Isabaeva  *Speaker:* Dr Thomas Aguilera (Sciences Po Rennes) and Prof *Speaker:* Alan Smart (University of Calgary), Explaining the Persistence of Squatting in the Urban World. A Comparative Political Economy of Strategic Toleration of Illegality in Paris and Hong Kong  *Speaker:* Prof Rachelle Alterman (Technion – Israel Institute of Technology) and Ines Calor (New University of Lisbon), Non-Compliance with planning laws in OECD Countries: The case of Portugal and Israel |
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| **Panel 6:**  Chair: Prof Miguel A. Martínez López  Speaker: Dr Jakob Warnecke (University Leipzig), The Phenomenon of Right-wing Squatting in Europe  Speaker:Dr Olumuyiwa Adegun (Federal University of Technology, Nigeria) , Informal Urban Housing in Europe and Africa, yesterday and today  **Final discussion**  Chairs: Udo Grashoff and Miguel A. Martínez López |

**Workshop Participants**

**Olumuyiwa Adegun (Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria)** considered in his PhD theses just sustainability in informal settlement intervention and green infrastructure in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 2013, he was an exchange scholar on the [In]formal city Project hosted by the Goethe Institut in Berlin. He also received a Visiting Fellowship at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal. His research interest is on low-income urban housing and environmental sustainability, with focus on sub-Sahara Africa.

**Thomas Aguilera (Sciences Po Rennes)** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Sciences Po Rennes. His research interests include public policies, urban governance, informal housing, social movements and sustainable development in Europe (France, Spain, UK). He has published articles on the governance of squats and slums, and on the effects of squatting movements on urban policies in Europe. More recently, he has opened new fieldworks on the conflicts around tourism regulation. He is member of the “Cities are back in Town” urban research program of Sciences Po Paris and participates in the SQEK network.

**Rachelle Alterman (Technion - Israel Institute of Technology)** is Professor of Urban Planning and Law at Technion Haifa. She is regarded as one of the leading scholars in cross-national analysis of planning laws, land use regulations, property rights and planning practices. She heads the research project Mare Nostrum, which focuses on improving the legal and regulatory instruments for integrated coastline management among Mediterranean countries. She has published ten books, some 200 academic papers and reports. She shares her knowledge with UN-Habitat, the OECD, the World Bank, and with Chinese, Catalan and Dutch governmental bodies. In Israel her advice is sought by Parliament, government bodies and NGOs, and her publications are frequently cited by the courts.

**Inês Calor (New University of Lisbon)** is aPhD Student in Geography and Spatial Planning at New University of Lisbon (Portugal). Her research interests are planning, control of urban operations, urbanism of law and monitoring plans.

**Baptiste Colin** finished his PhD in September 2016 in Paris and Bielefeld about the history of squatting in Paris and West-Berlin between 1945 and 1985. He is currently working as an independent historian on different projects around this topic in a broader sense.

**Alan Gilbert (UCL)** worked as Lecturer, Reader and Professor of Geography at University College London between 1970 and 2010. His research is concerned with urbanisation and poverty in developing countries and particularly in Latin America and South Africa. He has undertaken projects on housing subsidies in Chile, Colombia and South Africa; on secondary housing markets in Colombia and South Africa; on the impact of globalisation on urban life in Latin America; on rental housing in informal settlements in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He has published extensively and has authored or co-authored nine books, edited four others and written well over one hundred academic articles on these topics.

**Udo Grashoff (UCL, SSEES) is DAAD lecturer on Modern German History at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at UCL and a member of FRINGE research centre. He is** interested in taboo subjects in the context of German dictatorships, namely suicide and informal housing in the GDR, and 'betrayal' within the Communist resistance movement in Nazi Germany. He studies grey zones and individual agency in borderline situations. He has published two books and a few articles on informal occupation of flats in East Germany (Schwarzwohnen).

**Eliza Isabaeva (University of Zurich)** is a PhD student at the University of Zurich and a Visiting Scholar in the Department "Conflict and Integration" of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale, Germany. In her new research project, Eliza examines the dynamic interaction between the state and society on the example of internal migrants who reside in an officially illegal neighbourhood in the outskirts of Bishkek.

**Manuel Lutz (Technische Universitaet Berlin) is a PhD student at the** Center for Metropolitan Studies at the TU Berlin. His PhD thesis addresses the urban (financial) crisis that produced a rise in homelessness that culminates in the surge of tent cities all over the US. He responds to a recent call for more nuanced analysis of the local state and its homeless management. Drawing from state theory and governmentality studies allows navigating between generalized and idealist accounts of e.g. punitive local state and e.g. benevolent civil society.

**Miguel A. Martínez López (Uppsala University) is a** Professor of Housing and Urban Sociology at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research at Uppsala University. His research has covered in his research are urban sustainability, segregation, housing, density, globalisation, mobility and governance. These concerns were developed in different cities (mainly Porto, Vigo, Madrid and Hong Kong. In addition he has participated in various social movements. He applied Participatory-Action-Research methods to the study of citizen participation in urban planning and urban movements. In parallel to his academic career he also worked professionally at the Municipal Housing Department in Vigo and occasionally as a consultant as a sociologist in several urban plans across Spain. In 2009, he launched the activist-research network SqEK (Squatting Europe Kollective).

**Mndwamrombo Mwakera Mwajefa (Mombasa) works as a** teacher at Puma Mixed Secondary School of Likoni Subcounty in Mombasa County, Kenia.

# ****Diego de Santiago Delfín (****Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México) is an artist and student of Social Anthropology at Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México, Mexico City. For his PhD project he studies ‘urban trans-habitats’ such as Chanti Ollin in Mexico.

**Alan Smart (University of Calgary)** is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Calgary*.* Hisresearch interests include political economy, urban anthropology, anthropology of law, Hong Kong, China and North America. He is the author of Making Room: Squatter Clearance in Hong Kong. Articles on squatting, public housing, illegal economies, planning and Hong Kong investment in China have appeared in a number of academic journals, and a variety of edited volumes. He is currently doing research on social change in China, social exclusion in cities, and housing in Hong Kong.

**Bart van der Steen (Leiden University) is a lecturer at Leiden University. He** teaches Dutch and Modern History. His research focuses on the history of labour and social movements from the late 19th century to the present. Departing from more traditional political approaches to the history of social movements, his writings focus on the internal dynamics of movements and the experiences and memories of individual activists. Van der Steen’s research on social movements deals foremost with European squatter and autonomist movements. He edited a volume on squatter movements in Europe since the 1970s (The City is Ours, 2014), as well as a volume on radical youth movements in Europe during the 1980s (A European Youth Revolt, 2016). Furthermore, he published several articles on the history of squatters in Amsterdam and Hamburg.

**Jakob Warnecke (University Leipzig) researched for his PhD thesis ‘Schwarzwohnen’ and Squatting in Potsdam (East Germany) between 1980 and 2000.** His research interests are urban social movements, history of Nazi Germany and the two German states. **He is member of** Squatting Europe Kollective (SqEK).

**Theresa Williamson (Catalytic Communities, Rio de Janeiro)** received aPh.D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. is the executive director of Catalytic Communities (CatComm), a Rio de Janeiro-based organization that provides media/networking support to favela communities. She is an outspoken and respected advocate on behalf of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas to help ensure they are recognized for their heritage status and their residents fully served as equal citizens, with four opinion pieces published in The New York Times. Among other awards, Dr. Williamson received the 2012 NAHRO John D. Lange International Award for her contributions to the international housing debate and the 2005 Gill-Chin Lim Award for Best Dissertation on International Planning.

**Ann Varley (UCL)** is Professor of Human Geography at University College London. She has a broad range of research interests – from disasters to property titles and from ageing to family law – but her work has focused consistently on urban Mexico and Latin America and revolves around the central theme of housing and the home. Her doctoral thesis on informal housing in Mexico City won the British-Mexican Society Postgraduate Prize. She worked on an Overseas Development Administration-funded research project on rental and shared housing in Mexico. She has recently started working on a new line of research: industrial heritage, national identity and urban renewal in Latin America, with fieldwork to date in Chile and Mexico.

**Alexander Vasudevan (University of Oxford)** is an Associate Professor in Human Geography at Christ Church College, Oxford. His work explores, in particular, the city as a site of political contestation drawing on a range of methods (archival, ethnographic and participatory). He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Germany (most notably in Berlin) but has worked across Europe as well as North America, too. Alex has published widely in major journals and is the author of [The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting](https://www.versobooks.com/books/2435-the-autonomous-city) (2017), [Metropolitan Preoccupations: The Spatial Politics of Squatting in Berlin](http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118750594.html) (2015) and co-editor of [Geographies of Forced Evictions: Dispossession, Violence, Insecurity](http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9781137511263) (London: Palgrave). He has written for the Guardian, openDemocracy and New Left Project.