Parallel session 3C-2.3
Beyond informality
Tuesday 12 November, 16.00 – 17.30

Chair: **Dr Catalina Ortiz**, Associate Professor, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL
Discussant: **Dr Tatiana Thieme**, Associate Professor, UCL Geography

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Towards More Responsive Urban Governance: Embracing Informality in Times of Uncertainty
David Corbett, PhD candidate, Queensland University of Technology

Rapid urbanisation puts pressure on infrastructure, natural resources and space. In-migration and increasing contestation for a decreasing pool of resources contribute to uncertainty and insecurity. Conventional forms of governance and planning, which assume predictable patterns of growth, have been found wanting in contemporary cities. Those neglected by city governance processes are, by necessity, taking matters into their own hands through informality, appropriation, insurgency and improvisation to meet their needs and improve their daily lived experiences. These forms of agency contribute to the 'grit' and micro-level dynamism of cities. As a valuable resource for collaboration and instigating change, these processes are misunderstood and rarely harnessed successfully. Responses to context-specific challenges and engagement with these responses to marginalisation are inhibited by top-down and inflexible governance structures and approaches.

The expansion of informality and other forms of citizen agency internationally has given rise to new avenues of research regarding local governance capacity (Hodder 2016; Jaffe and Koster 2019). This paper explores an alternative approach to urban governance and institutions that engages more effectively with emerging local issues and alternative expressions of agency. To achieve this, existing models of governance are critiqued to identify flaws resulting in the perpetuation of marginalisation. Insights from this inform suggestions for more responsive approaches or possible amendments to existing ones. The lead author conducted semi-structured interviews with built environment professionals from Cape Town, South Africa and Logan, Australia. The findings offer insight into how context shapes the structures of urban governance in two very different urban contexts. Through the identification of similarities and differences, it is proposed that current governance approaches, which align to a greater extent with either bureaucracy or informality, exist along a dynamic spectrum. The paper employs this spectrum as an analytical tool to discuss the reconsideration of governance practices to better respond to hyperlocal challenges, collaborate with local citizenry and effect long-term, inclusive change.

Experiencing urban shrinkage in a declining historical neighbourhood: The role of social capital in inhabitants' trajectories and perceptions
Solène Le Borgne, PhD candidate, University of Amsterdam

Shrinking cities can be defined as urban areas "that have experienced population loss, economic downturn, employment decline and social problems as symptoms of a structural crisis." (Martinez-Fernandez and al., 2012). Urban shrinkage is a global phenomenon, although very diverse in its forms, and it is particularly widespread in Europe (Pallagst and al., 2013, Martinez-Fernandez and al., 2016). In France, 20 % of 354 urban areas have experienced population decline between 1975 and 2007 (Wolf et al., 2013). This phenomenon affects medium-sized cities located in the North-East of the country in particular. Central cities encounter this phenomenon either earlier or in a stronger form than their agglomeration (Cunningham-Sabot & Fol, 2009; Wolff et al., 2017; Guéraut, 2018). Much literature on the topic focuses on the economic and spatial manifestations of shrinkage, such as the degradation of the built environment. Despite the reconfiguration of the social structure facing these cities (Ročak, 2018), less is known about the social consequences of shrinkage and how such impacts are perceived by residents. This presentation intends to investigate this aspect by focusing on the influence of sociability networks, utilising a qualitative analysis based on 40 interviews realised as part of an ethnographic study conducted in Nevers (France) in 2018. My analysis shows the logics behind the success or difficulties in individual trajectories, and in particular the (in)capacity to arrange favourable living conditions, focusing on the role of social capital. This discussion draws on two cases: young residents settling in the city for professional reasons at an early-career stage, and an older group moving to the city centre after their retirement. Comparing the trajectories of households who are satisfied or dissatisfied with their situation reveals the importance of social capital, whether related to local rootedness or to social class.

Conceptualizing the 'Spatial Status' of Groups
Dr Yosef Jabareen, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion – Israel Institute of Technology

The integration of immigrants in host cities is not only related to employment, health and education systems, but also to spatial realms, mainly housing and living environment. Studies suggest that spatial conditions of immigrant are poorer than host societies, immigrants live in poor-quality housing environments, face discrimination in access to housing notably in Europe and the United States. Yet, while scholarship from other disciplines conceptualize the legal, cultural, social, or political statuses of immigrant groups, the planning scholarship is still lacking a theorizing of the overall spatial conditions of immigrants and the role of planning in this context. Thus, this paper aims to conceptualize the spatial conditions, what I will call the spatial status of immigrant groups. Building on Laclau & Mouffe's (2014) theory of discourse and Rancière's (2010) politics of consensus, this paper conceptualizes spatial status as a discursive social reality, which reflects the differential position of a group within a system of social and ethnic relations with regard to the dominant consensus in the spatiality and planning context. This consensus determines the nature of 'proper' and 'improper' in regard to spatial policies, and what and who is included/excluded, We/Others, citizen/alien, privileged/unprivileged, legal/illegal,

majority/immigrant and so forth. As such, spatial consensus reflects differential distributions of resources, allocations, qualities, access, and 'rights' among different groups. Respectively, some groups have a privileged position and others, such as immigrant groups, more distanced and deprivileged. Spatial status allows us assessing the spatial conditions of immigrants, and based on that, to figure out what planning policies are needed to transcend the antagonism towards immigrants and change their spatial situation. Future research is required on planning and its practices for changing the discursive and reality of immigrants in western cities.

A Decolonial Critique of Critical Urban Theory in the Andean Region
Martin Mejia Tamariz, PhD candidate, Nottingham Trent University

In times where current trends of globalisation and localism are challenging urban studies, my approach departs from a decolonial perspective which challenges Eurocentric research. The idea of a Latin American Urban theory is contested and confronted with the historical identity formed within the specificity of ethnic groups. The aim is to challenge the generalisation of urban studies within Latin American countries, since it is possible to distinguish identity regions that could comprise one or more countries. Therefore, this research focuses specifically on the Andean region, which historically comprised Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia – countries that have had a shared history since the times of the Inca Empire. The research intends to address Informal Urbanism in the Andean region as a response to the lack of understanding from formal urban planning institutions. It will attempt to answer one key research question: Since, in the late twentieth century, the Post-structural and Post-colonial, Epistemological paradigms in Urban Studies had proven to be insufficient to generate solutions within Andean formal urban planning institutions – which are subsumed by the condition of coloniality – in what way could the Decolonial Gnoseological paradigm provide an alternative interpretation of the reality to therefore co-produce native alternative solutions to the challenge of urbanisation? In responding to this main question, the research aims to analyse a comprehensive body of critiques of the emerging decolonial Latin American Urban theoretical discourse during the latter quarter of the 20th century, in order to identify factors that were underlined by native theorists as foreign and incompatible with Andean urban culture, and hence have contributed to perpetuating the status quo in the informal communities of Andean countries.