The Beauty of Slums

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Abstract   A huge amount of the world's population resides in the slums around the globe, and this number will increase to three trillion in the near future, which will lead to the finding of cities within cities. These settlements are the result of the gap between demand and the legal and formal supply in the housing market, as well as the enormous differences between the economic status of the city's population and the overcrowding of these cities. Thus, this paper has presented a brief overview on the condition of slums within the cities. The research method used in this study is the review method, in which data are collected and analyzed from previously published articles. The aim of this study was to explore and uncover all aspects of slum life from the point of view of its existence, the different types and its social and architectural aspects, in addition to examining its evolution. The different types of slums are optimistic slums with escalator groups (A), optimistic slums with non-escalator groups (B), miserable slums with escalator groups (C) and poor with non-escalator groups (D). Meanwhile, the social and architectural aspects of slums cover the urban development cycle. Furthermore, this paper has also discussed regarding the future of slum life, its hidden beauty, and tried to change people's perspective on this unique way of life.

Keywords   Slum, Area, Urban, Architecture, Condition, Improvement Demolition, Building, Structure

1. Introduction

In developing countries, the term slum has a derogatory meaning, simply referring to low quality, feelings of poverty and insecurity. The acceleration of urbanization is the main concern in less developed countries because they lack the infrastructure and basic services needed to support a growing population. When the needs of the growing population cannot be fully met, slums will appear and continue to spread in many underdeveloped countries [1]. The existence of slums has regional and global implications, affecting education, health and child mortality, as well as political and social exclusion [1]. Besides that, factors affecting the growth of slums include location selection factors, rural-to-urban migration, poor urban governance, and poorly designed policies. According to Hélène Tabèze [2], countries suffer from slum issues because their policies do not prioritize housing issues. In addition, due to government instability, corruption, and insufficient capacity, their support and planning for solving slum formation is ineffective.

The uncontrollable growth of slums has also led to the problem of solid waste. In most cases, inefficient and inappropriate waste management methods can lead to many adverse environmental, social and sustainability impacts. Also, the lack of a vision of sustainable development, the accumulation of waste, especially the formation of construction waste and slums, may have long-term effects on the economy, environment and society [3]. Indeed, Elgizawy, El-Haggar, and Nassar [3] have realized the concept of zero waste and proposed a Learn to Earn Model (LEM) to improve waste management and create jobs for slum dwellers. A zero-waste strategy requires that waste such as construction waste to be transformed from a linear system to a more circular system based on a cradle-to-cradle approach for efficient use of materials [3]. Hence, this turns slums into catalysts for the economy rather than a burden

on a country.

Slums have become part of the history of most cities, especially in the early stages of urbanization and industrialization, when the population surged. In cities, competition for land and profit is fierce, and slums are usually the only type that the poor can afford and enter. Attitudes towards the slums are generally negative due to unsanitary conditions, poverty and the presence of unwanted individuals [4]. Slums are generally located in a crowded district of a city or town inhabited by lower-class citizens or by extremely poor people. In recent years, the term 'slum' has been changed to more positive terms such as 'low-class neighborhood' or 'deteriorated area' [4]

Despite being the most unhygienic and poorest place for people to live in, these communities come together with strong ties of love and a desperate need for support from one another, as well as the presence of a will to make the community better, and that is where the beauty of the slums arises [5]. There are more than one billion slum dwellers around the world, and the UN estimates that the number will increase to three trillion over the next few years, which will lead to the discovery of cities within cities [6].

The biggest slums in the world are found in different areas of the country, such as Khayelitsha, South Africa, Nairobi, Kenya and India, situated in Mumbai, Dharavi [7]. Moreover, the Middle East is not in a stronger situation because it has 1.5 million people in Manshiet, Egypt, and there are 34,000 people concentrated in Al-Ruwias-Jeddah, and many more [7]. Such settlements are the product of the disparity between demand and the legal and organized availability of the rental sector, as well as the immense discrepancy in the economic condition of the city's inhabitants and the overcrowding in these towns [7].

Despite advances in urban infrastructure, employment, and health, slum management is the fastest-growing form of human settlements problem in the world, especially in developing countries. Thus, this paper presents a brief overview on the situation of slums within the cities. The aim of this study is to explore and uncover all aspects of slum life from the point of view of its existence, the different types and its social and architectural aspects, as well as to examine its evolution through history. The main objective of this study is to discover the future of slum life, its hidden beauty, and to try to change people's perspective on this unique way of life.

2. The Nature of Slums

2.1. Definition of Slum

Slum is the part of a community where the impoverished stay, a heavily inhabited, typically industrial region characterized by cramped, filthy, and run-down homes [8]. In addition to low-quality shelters, it is also known for lack of water, electricity and sanitation, which is reflected in

poor health practices among slum dwellers. Characteristic attributes of these inhabitants include deviant behavior, social isolation and a negative connection to the outside world, and are usually avoided in return. For example, slums in Nairobi, Kenya (Figure 1), provide low-quality but high-cost shelter [9].

Figure 1. Slum in Nairobi, Kenya

While slum tenants spend lots of money in rent yearly, in comparison to low-priced units paying higher rentals than others, relatively limited has been redistributed to increase sustainability. Mahabir, Crooks, Croitoru, and Agouris [1] have proposed a framework as shown in Figure 2 to further understand the background and concepts of slums and the dynamic and complex interactions in the urban environment.
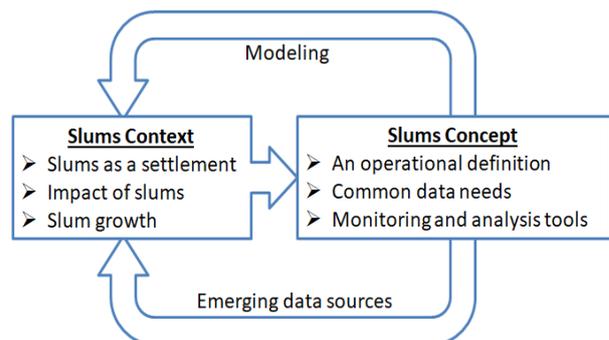

Figure 2. Framework slums context and concept [1]

2.2. Characteristics of the Slum

There are several specific forms of slums, but they generally follow common criteria. Many of the common features include pollution and overcrowding, insufficient infrastructure and accommodation, which are also more than these things [10]. This is a way of existence, a subculture with its own collection of beliefs and customariness, isolated from the encircled ruling forces and civilization, the slum dwellers are treated as inferior people, and they distrust all visitors. While, according to the United Nations definition [11], the definition of slums has five characteristics, including lack of safe water, lack of sanitation and infrastructure, poor housing structure,

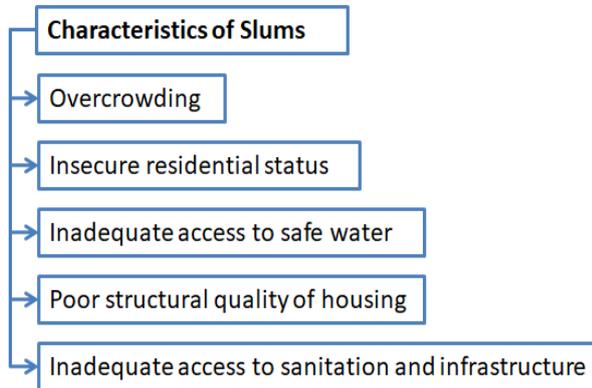overcrowding and unsafe living conditions (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Features of slums defined by the United Nations [11]

In fact, the physical condition of the slum became one of the major features of the slum. Defined as areas of cities where housing is depreciated, overcrowded and neglected. Inefficient living environments are the product of insufficient ventilation and movement, poor construction structures, overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and lack of sanitary facilities [10]. In addition, the slum is an environment filled with construction materials, materials congested by the residents, or both. Density will not necessarily contribute to poor societal outcomes; the key problem is concentration, measured in terms of concentration per road, acre or square mile. In comparison, unsafe infrastructure, municipal programs, insufficient park amenities and low-quality schooling are typically synonymous with slums [10]. This unhealthy condition is the product of the poor upkeep of the roads and the highways, and the garbage is typically collected irregularly. At the same time, the inefficient and inadequate waste management creates many adverse environmental, social and sustainability impacts [3].

Throughout developing countries, water scarcity, electricity lighting and sanitary infrastructure are essential. Lots of households use one water tap that renders it difficult to maintain healthy as well as using mulch soil collections that are extremely contagious, resulting in pollutants [12]. As a consequence, rising mortality and disease levels stem from typically unsanitary living environments and a shortage of sufficient services, such as latrines and sanitation. Even overcrowding and the emergence of rodents and other animals contribute to the environmental and sanitation issues within the slum areas. Moreover, there is a large rate of violence, depression, youth delinquency, adultery, drunkenness, substance consumption, illegitimacy, and social maladjustment in slum existence [12].

Slum dwellers follow a set of values that differ from the outside world, and these unconventional values result in delinquency and deviance [12]. Furthermore, the individuals who reside in these colonies do not always obey such ideals and become societal outcasts or slip into deviance. Conventional belief structures are practiced by those residing in these regions, and are enforced or operate due to the existence of colleges, religious institutes, police and other persons [12].

3. Types of Slums and Slum Dwellers

There is a significant contrast between one slum and another, with variations in the permanence of its inhabitants, the degree of organization, the kinds of issues present and the physical environment of the slum. Slums may be legal or illegal, rented or occupied by owners, covering a wide range of building types, including encampments, bullpens, cottages and shacks. Slums may also be classified in terms of socioeconomic development for the inhabitant and in terms of the key justification for the inhabitant to choose a slum [13].

Slums may be categorized as either slums of optimism or slums of misery, characterized by the behavior of its residents, based on whether the people perceive their conditions to be improved and whether or not there are ways to migrate out of the slums. Immigrants and refugees in the city typically live in slums of optimism, whereas longer-stay communities generally inhabit slums of despair [13]. Under rising group of slums, there are sections named "escalator" and "no escalator." In general, the escalator groups occupy the slums of optimism, where they are supposed to climb through the social hierarchy and where the citizens plan to better themselves, whilst the non-escalator community, deprived of the ability to escalate, usually belongs to the slums of despair [14].
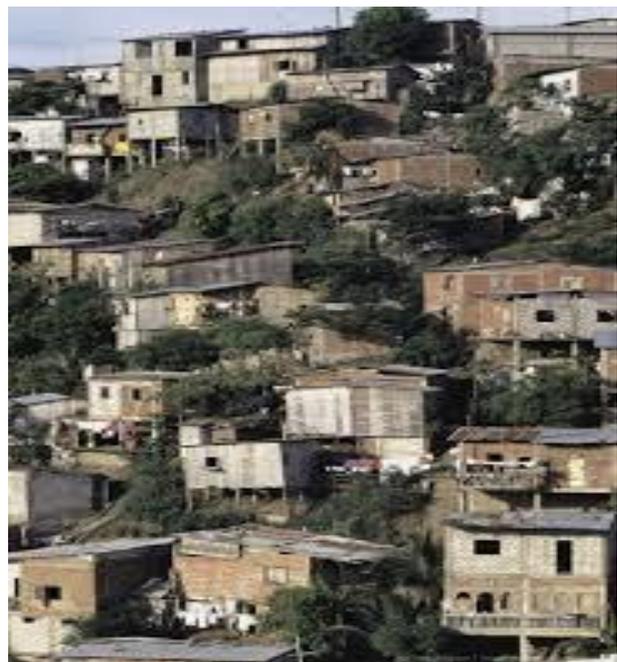

Figure 4. Slum in Nairobi, Kenya

Such variations define four types of slums: slums of

optimism with escalator groups (A), slums of optimism with non-escalator groups (B), slums of misery with escalator groups (C) and slums of distress with non-escalator groups (D) [14]. An illustration of form (A) is a slum situated in the largest city in Ecuador, Guayaquil (Figure 4). The "A" slum is typically the least desirable of all slums, because it is the most transient as well as the most changeable.

An indication of form (B) is found in Chicago's south side, mostly African-American slum, where resilience, ambition and ferociousness occur, although the possibility of moving to a better community is minimal, varies from form (A) in that there is a nearly full obstacle to acculturation (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Chicago's south side

Boston's South End, situated in the United States, is an example of category (C) slums. Such styles of slums are typically established in a wealthy environment that would then become the residence to many that do not want or are unwilling to integrate with the local populations. It is known to be more attractive than the type (A) slum, but the presence of decay and a sense of helplessness permeate the environment considerably less progressively. The (D) type of slum is seen in Lima, Peru, where residents of Indian shack settlements are not accepted despite their peaceful nature (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Lima, Peru

4. Urban Community and Architecture

When users look at the slums, the first characteristic would be the congested urban population with informal settlement and squalor, as well as the lack of facilities such as safe water, sanitation and energy [15]. Slums are a big health, violence and poor infrastructure issue created by the disparity in demand for accommodation and traditional market availability. As was the case before the rise in slums is projected to hit three billion over the next few years [15]. As a consequence, a variety of organizations and societies advocate contributing and bringing services to the slums and learning from their way of life and problem solving [15].

In comparison, the quality of houses is important as the dwellers often use reclaimed resources and joint efforts to construct their dwellings. They create minimal spaces inside multi-purpose roles with the flexibility to extend according to the requirements of the individual and the services accessible [16]. Furthermore, the quality of houses is important as the dwellers often use reclaimed resources and joint efforts to construct their dwellings. They create minimal spaces inside multi-purpose roles with the flexibility to extend according to the requirements of the individual and the services accessible. It is also full of life in terms of social interaction and cultural activity, as well as holy places that allow them to survive spiritually. Below are few facets of the uniqueness of the slums that have arisen in the definition of sustainable growth [16]. Moreover, the reality that the bulk of the residents of the slums are refugees from their own community due to urban development, and have also taken the role of connections in the context of an organization of proximity, which is defined by such ties, the affiliation connections relate to the popular sense of marginalization and misery and oppression. Thus, they seek to reside in less favorable areas which in turn become the slum. As a consequence, the people in control hope to provide urban development for the slum population [17]. It would encourage them to reside in healthy environments, which are plentiful in wide green fields, with gaps between houses and highways, with an eye going and focusing on one's self, improving one's personal attitude, which contributes to a healthier mindset, and growing development of all [17].
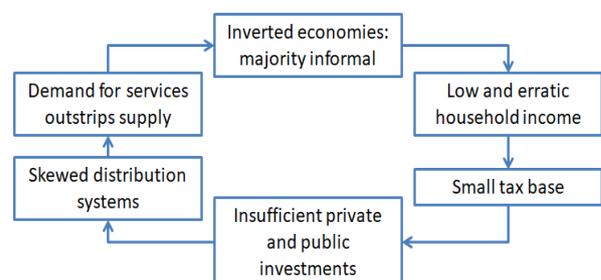

Figure 7. The Urban Development Cycle in Sub-Saharan Africa [18]

In addition, the urbanization of slums is driven by a self-fulfilling cycle that drives the urban development model of most sub-Saharan African cities (Figure 7) [18]. Therefore, with the rapid growth of the urban population, slum dwellers are expected to continue to develop their own cities because the state and the formal market cannot meet the demand for land, housing, and services [18].

5. Future of Slums

The slum has a culture of its own, a way of life handed down from one generation to the next with its own unique structure, defense and rationality, which enables the slums to overcome the hardships and difficulties they face [19]. Such intense and challenging conditions contribute to the development of modern problem-solving abilities, coping strategies, tight relations with different members in the culture, and many other cultural elements vary from the surrounding ecosystems [19]. Taking waste management as an example, modern thinking sees waste as the wealth of any country's natural resources. In addition, closed-loop material recycling methods establish the concept of using waste as an input material for another process to produce another new product [3]. This not only promotes the idea of reuse, but also contributes to the earth and the country.

Innovation and creativity will definitely be more involved in the most severe and challenging circumstances, when the means of life, company, art and social relations inside these slums have been redefined. Resident's self-image plays a key role in the process of social change [20]. This is needed to change the perception of the slum dwellers about themselves and their situation. In the beginning, they should understand the concept of self-help, and the community organizer and others should start their demonstration work here. The first step in the process is to have someone believe in them because "people come to act according to their expectations" [20]. Then get the residents involved in the process of change. Starting with the discussion, asking about their problems and how they could possibly solve them on their own. Furthermore, listening to residents is the key to changing their perception of their ability and importance.

New experiences and different patterns of living can lead them to a revision of self-perception and eventually to self-identity. There are many methods to increase people's sense of importance, such as giving them the opportunity to express themselves in a different field as an approach to self-help work in order to become better individuals and groups. Then move on to the social perception of those who live in the slums as a corrupt community [20]. The involvement of discussions and the exchange of expertise with others will help to achieve better results. Moreover, there is a need to send invitation for slum dwellers to take part in a city-wide civic meeting to mingle with the community. The commitment to change is a must because it is difficult to find self-identity and what it needs [20].

An example of future slum proposal development is the Maspero Triangle District in downtown Cairo (Figure 8) [21]. The proposal was given the third place in the competition to redevelop the slums. The purpose of the project is to create a link between the residential and mixed-use slums. Rasim Badran has planned this project proposal. His presence was one of the only initiatives that could fix the issue without demolishing the whole city.

Figure 8. Maspero Triangle District

At the same time, taking into account people with a higher economic level, the separation between them and the slum dwellers decreases [22]. It is a great example of how architects and governments could possibly build a new city and shape the human race, not the opposite. In order to achieve these kind cities, everyone needs to believe in their hidden potential [22].

6. Conclusion

One billion people live in slums due to financial reasons, migration from rural areas, city congestion and a number of other factors. Despite the general public's view of slums and slum life, with all its negative and undesirable elements, there is a side that is unobserved and undervalued, which fights and survives to overcome with originality, creativity and toughness. This way of life is evolving and new norms are being realized and optimized through different facets, such as entrepreneur, art and social trends. Thus, ways to improve the connection between the slums and the rest of the world are explored by highlighting the unseen side of this beautiful disaster of a place where people come together to live and survive. In order to cope with the complexity of slums, the researchers must consider their social structure and physical structure at the same time. Considering that slums are multifaceted, and each slum has different social and material structures at work, appropriate policies can be formulated and explored to improve the well-being of slum residents.

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