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**The best way to deal with the slum problem?
Exploring the impact of community-based participatory
planning in the context of slum development in Kenya**

Summary booklet of PhD dissertation

RÁHEL CZIRJÁK

Supervisors:

Prof. Dr. István Tarrósy, University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities

Dr. habil. András Trócsányi, University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences

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1. Introduction: Justification and Approach of the Research Topic

Cities have always been centres of political, economic, and cultural power, as manifestations of human ingenuity and tirelessness. Historical experience with them, from antiquity to the latter half of the 20th century, suggested that urbanization was a measure of development. However, in the second half of the 20th century, the focus of urbanization shifted to the newly decolonised developing world, where urban populations began to grow rapidly, outpacing the expansion of urban services, infrastructure, governance, even the formal labour market. Consequently, urbanization crisis unfolded (Ricz, 2007; Parnell & Walawege, 2014; Smit & Pieterse, 2014; Pieterse, 2014; Parnell & Simon, 2014; Czirják, 2015a, 2019), with its most striking symptom being the existence of slums, where today nearly one billion people, almost a quarter of the Earth's urban population, reside (UN Habitat, 2022).

The urbanization crisis, the problem of large urban slums affects Africa, the fastest urbanizing continent, profoundly, as in sub-Saharan Africa half of the urban population, totalling 230 million people, are forced to live in slums, constituting more than a fifth of the global slum population (UN Habitat, 2022). Without effective solutions, the escalation of the problem is anticipated. Projections indicate that the continent's urban population will increase from 600 million to 1.5 billion by the mid-century (UN DESA, 2018), therefore it is in the fundamental interest of the continent to ensure adequate living conditions in its cities. However, the issue of slums is not solely Africa's problem. Without effectively addressing the urbanization crisis, other regions of the world can increasingly become affected, either indirectly or directly, by its negative consequences. Hence, confronting the problems, uncovering underlying causes, and developing solutions are important and relevant topics in 21st-century Europe as well.

The broad framework of this dissertation is critical geopolitics, which, unlike traditional geopolitical theories, examines power dynamics occurring not only at the global level but also in microspaces, and investigates the involvement of non-state actors in power relations alongside interstate relations. Slums can be interpreted as specific examples of power conflicts occurring in microspaces (such as the confrontation between illegal squatters and the state), as well as manifestations of social inequalities, where there is a confrontation between powerless tenants and powerful actors – landlords, decision-makers, middle class, etc. The existence of slums, as special urban areas at the microscale, is rooted in global processes, power relations, and structural causes, and manifests as local, micro-level symptoms of macro-level processes. Consequently, considering the topic and the initial perspective of this dissertation, it can be considered as geopolitical work, more specifically critical geopolitical work. Simultaneously,

it is urban geographical work, yet also Africanist work, building on the structuralist urban geographical approach, which suggests that understanding phenomena observed in geographic space requires uncovering underlying social, economic, political, and power structures and processes. However, it does not consider Africa as a "white sheet" where these macro processes manifest unchanged. It does not perceive Africa as a passive victim of global impacts but, from the perspective of African studies, builds on the idea of African agency, emphasizing the importance of local (internal) processes, factors, and actors that, interacting with global influences, modify them locally. The dissertation also builds on the normative approach of the structuralist urban geographical school, as well as moral philosophy's and critical urban geography's endeavors to criticize and eliminate social injustices and inequalities. However, it does so not on Marxist, but rather Christian foundations, thus social classes and class struggle do not constitute elements of its examination or terminology. Alongside its approach to social inequalities, it also builds on the practical perspective of critical urban geography because, in addition to theoretical examination of urbanization processes, it examines development methods related to slums as a platform for eliminating social injustices and aims to contribute to the praxis development. All these (critical) geopolitical and urban geographical approaches are applied from the perspective of African studies, thus the dissertation can also be considered postcolonial.

2. Purpose, Questions, and Structure of the Research

With my work, I aim to contribute to the results of African urban studies, which have now primarily focused on practice, namely, the improvement of urban dwellers quality of life through research findings (Roy, 2007; Myers, 2013). To achieve this goal, the dissertation not only intersects with other disciplines but also draws extensively from practical experiences. My goal is to contribute to the development and more effective operation of slum development practices, as well as the advancement of international aid profession's practices, through the conclusions formulated based on the analysis results. To achieve this objective, my writing addresses the following research questions:

1. **Research Question:** What factors have led to the breakthrough in urbanization, causing explosive growth in the limited urban population over thousands of years of human history with the onset of the industrial revolution, i.e. what factors played a role in the initiation of modern - or modern-day - urbanization?

2. **Research Question:** What causes the difference in modern (day) urbanization between developed and developing countries? This will provide an answer to the question of

what creates the urbanization crisis experienced in the developing world, i.e., what factors are behind the emergence of large urban slums.

3. **Research Question:** What is the key to successful slum development - where success refers to achieving lasting positive changes in the lives of slum dwellers? By uncovering the factors of successful development, I aim to formulate field-applicable proposals.

The answering of the research questions is structured as follows throughout the work: the dissertation begins with the examination of modern urbanization as the starting point, and by answering the first two research questions, it reveals the background of slum formation. In light of this knowledge, the next step is to explore the various forms of handling slum problem that have emerged and evolved over the decades based on field experiences and the changing focus of donors and the international aid system's rhetoric. Through a historical overview, I examine the different types of development procedures and interventions that have been typically implemented over the decades. On the other hand, connected to the rhetoric of the international aid system, I scrutinize the mode of development interventions, specifically comparing community-based participatory planning with external or expert-led planning.

After this methodological overview, I examine the possibilities and impacts of their practical application through two slum development programs in Kenya. The case study analysis focuses on the Building in Partnership: Participatory Urban Planning (BiP:PUP) projects in Kitale, located in the northwestern part of Kenya, as well as the Kenyan Slum Upgrading Programme (KENSUP) projects in Kibera, Nairobi. Through the case study analysis, I aim to find answer to the third research question, namely, what is the key to successful slum development, where success refers to achieving lasting positive changes in the lives of slum dwellers.

2. Methodology

In the dissertation, I conducted both secondary and primary data collection methods. Firstly, I performed an analysis of secondary sources, involving the review, synthesis, and formulation of new conclusions of the relevant literature, as well as quantitative analysis of relevant statistical databases. The latter was primarily complementary, serving to support the findings made during the literature review.

Secondly, my work relied on primary data collection procedures from several months of fieldwork in Kenya. During my research, I visited Kibera, specifically the implementation site of the KENSUP development program in Soweto East, where I carried out non-parameterized observation, I visually inspected newly built houses and the various-sized apartments within them. Additionally, I visited several homes in areas of Kibera not subject to redevelopment. I documented my observations with photographs. These observations greatly contributed to my comprehension of the information gathered from the literature as well as from interviews.

The second group of primary data collection methods consisted of interviews. Throughout my doctoral research, I utilized various types of interviews, which I categorized into three groups according to the interviewees. Firstly, I conducted expert interviews on the housing situation in Kenya, slum issues, and the case study development programs. These comprised three individual and one group interview, conducted online. The second major group of interviews consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with stakeholders directly involved in KENSUP, which took place in July 2021, in their homes in Kibera. The five interviews covered different beneficiary groups of the development. The third group of interviews included an unstructured interview conducted in person with a social worker and community activist living in Kibera, who is also a beneficiary of KENSUP. Due to his professional involvement, he has a broader perspective on the processes. During the analysis of interviews, I did not conduct classic content analysis; rather, I aimed to deepen the qualitative understanding of the information gathered from the literature, resolve any inconsistencies, and incorporate new perspectives.

3. Summary of Research Findings and Utilization

As a starting point of the thesis, I have examined the modern – or modern-day – urbanization that began with the industrial revolution, to identify the factors that enabled its emergence and to explore the reasons for the different characteristics of urbanization processes in the developing world, and thus the background to the formation of urban slums. I have summarised all this in **the model of successful modern urbanization.**

Figure 1: Model of Successful Modern Urbanization
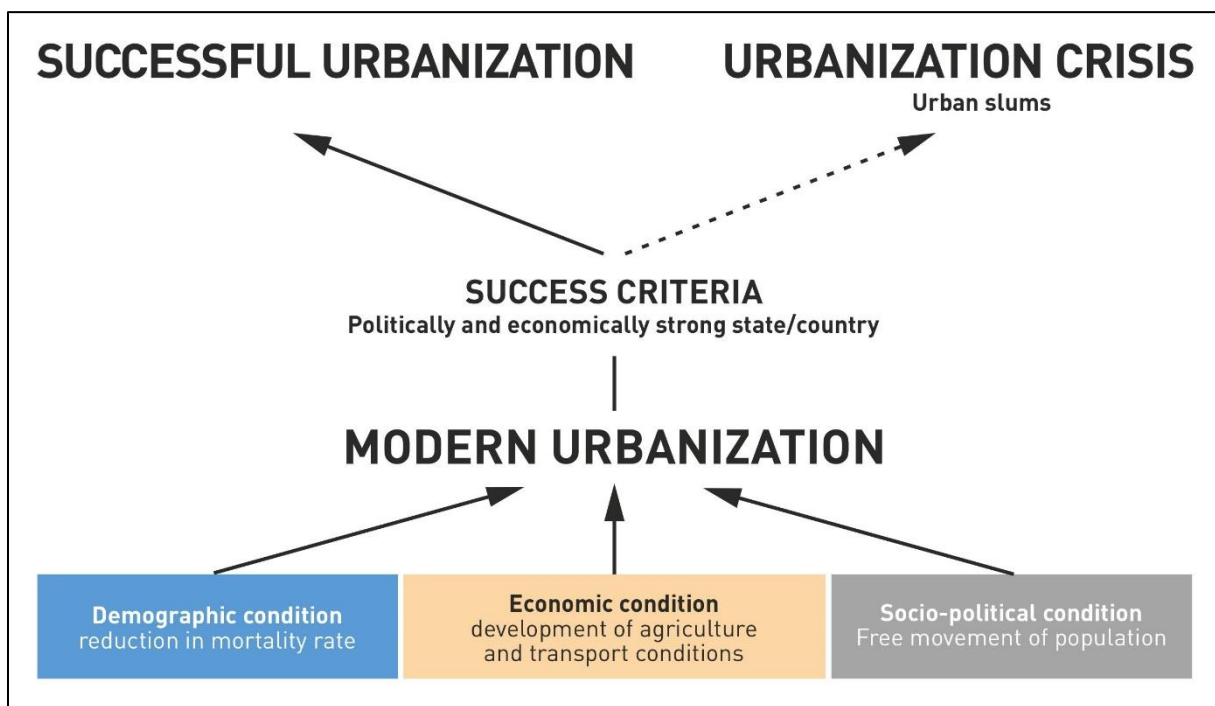
Own editing

Accordingly, modern urbanization could have started when the following three conditions were met simultaneously (**first research question**):

- **Demographic condition,** which, with a constant birth rate, represented a decrease in the mortality rate due to significant improvements in survival chances, initiating rapid population growth. This contributed directly and indirectly to the growth of urban populations. Directly, through natural increase within the city, and indirectly, through rural-urban migration intensified by overpopulation in rural areas, that generated surplus labour in agriculture.

- **Economic condition** entailed the development of agriculture and transportation conditions determining the delivery of agricultural products, resulting in surplus labour

in the primary sector and ensuring the provision of food and livelihood for the growing urban population not engaged in agriculture.

- **Socio-political condition** allowed for the free movement of population, enabling surplus labor from the agricultural sector to migrate from rural areas to cities.

The fulfilment of these conditions in the developed countries were made possible by the industrial revolution, while in developing countries, they could only be fully met with liberation from colonialism, as discriminatory colonial urban policies hindered rural-to-urban migration. In addition to the timing of modern urbanization, the global economic and political position of the two regions is also very different, which determines the scale of the problems associated with urbanization and their potential and scope for addressing them. This leads us to the criteria for success, which address the **second research question.**

The modern urbanization unfolding in the early stages of the industrial revolution also caused urban problems in countries of the Global North, primarily in the form of slums inhabited by industrial workers, however, they were able to manage and eliminate them at the systemic level. I illustrated the process using the example of Great Britain, where a strong state, both as an actor and as a geographical operational framework, made it possible to eliminate slums. This was due to the fulfilment of the following success criteria:

- **Politically strong state:** the state has been able to address slums comprehensively by developing a policy framework that has been able to guide urban development in a competent way. The state was not only able to create professional legislation, but also to implement and enforce it, which is closely linked to the next success criterion, as compliance with regulations sometimes meant implementing infrastructural developments.

- **Economically strong state:** In the case of Great Britain, the state had the financial means for the infrastructural developments prescribed by legislation, including revenues from formal employment taxes. Moreover, with a strong economy, the state – in this case, not as an actor but as a geographical framework – was able to absorb a significant portion of the workforce, creating formal employment opportunities for most slum dwellers, which in the long run provided the possibility of lifting people out of extreme poverty as incomes rose. Furthermore, alongside the state, investments by market players led to the creation of a sufficient quantity and quality of housing stock to meet the needs of the urban population.

In contrast, the economically subordinate role created by colonization and the weakness of political systems established by external powers resulted in much more limited maneuverability for developing countries, where, moreover, urban population growth began with unprecedented speed after independence, with the drastic divergence of the quantitative and qualitative branches of urbanization, causing greater-scale urban problems as observed in countries of the Global North.

After exploring the background of urbanization crises in this way, as a third research question, I sought to answer what constitutes the key to successful slum development, where success is understood as achieving lasting positive changes in the lives of slum dwellers. To examine this, I first reviewed the broader context of slum development, the nearly eight-decade history of international aid, with particular attention to the evolution of the concept and ideology of participation, and then examined various intervention methods and approaches on a global scale, and subsequently focused on Kenya. Through this, the most widely used current practice and approach emerged: on one hand, the method of slum upgrading, which comprehensively develops slums locally, and on the other hand, community participation, as the current buzzword of international development cooperation, accompanied by the methodology of participatory planning. I have extensively analysed how these are implemented in practice and uncovered that participation can mean different things to different actors. Inconsistent terminology and field practices falling short of theoretical objectives often hinder effective slum development.

To clarify the concept of participation, I reviewed and evaluated the most dominant models of social and community participation, which I have synthesized and identified the following levels:

1. **Information:** One-way flow of information, where experts inform the affected community about the ongoing or completed intervention.
2. **Consultation:** Two-way flow of information, where the affected community can provide feedback, although there are no guarantees that their observations will be incorporated into the implemented development. Typically characterized as an extractive process for information gathering.
3. **Partnership:** the group of stakeholders affected by the problem to be addressed no longer only involved in the flow of information, but also have decision-making power, which gives them the ability to influence the development that is implemented. This is the level at which we talk about community planning as a concrete form of participation.

4. **Active Community:** An active, empowered, capable community that can initiate independent action to tackle the problems that affect them. This does not presuppose the availability of resources for implementation, but it can negotiate with external actors and advocate for the necessary resources.

Continuing the discussion of the concept and approach to participation, I presented the application possibilities and methodology of community planning associated with the partnership level. This part of the dissertation can also function as a practical manual, as a further outcome of my research.

With this, I prepared the case analysis of two Kenyan slum development programs, examined based on three aspects: the level of social participation in the programme, the achievement of the programme's objectives, and its long-term impact on society. On this basis, I assessed the BiP:PUP programme, which was implemented through a broad partnership and, in the case of the slum population, through community planning, as successful, as it managed to achieve its objectives and, in terms of social impact, consistently demonstrated positive results. In Kitale's three slums, small-scale, comprehensive developments were implemented, which, through active community involvement in decision-making, genuinely responded to local conditions and needs, thus improving the living conditions of the locals. Beyond the successful developments realized, the program's most significant achievement was its impact on the system's stakeholders. Through extensive partnerships, BiP:PUP made the existing municipal planning process more effective, enabling the implementation of developments that addressed the needs of the poorest. Community planning significantly improved the mindset of the participants. On the part of decision-makers, this meant open, cooperative policy leadership that responded to the needs of the poorest, while for the affected population, it resulted in the creation of an active, capable community that to this day operates and expands the implemented developments and is capable of advocating for its interests in development processes. As a result, twenty years after the implementation of BiP:PUP, significant positive changes have occurred in the three slums, markedly improving local living conditions.

In the case of KENSUP, I examined in detail two projects implemented in Kibera, K-WATSAN and KSUI, both of which, despite yielding some positive results, cannot be considered successful based on either the achievement of their set goals or their overall societal impact. Serving as the entry point for KENSUP, the K-WATSAN project engaged the population of Kibera Soweto East at a consultation level, resulting in small-scale, comprehensive

developments. Although the consultation level does not guarantee that the feedback provided by stakeholders will be incorporated into the planning process, decision-makers in this project were receptive to local input, leading to the expansion of initial development plans with the addition of an access road requested by residents. The positive effects of the small-scale, comprehensive developments contributed to improving local living conditions, and the intensive dialogue with stakeholders fostered a commitment to continue the program. However, unlike the partnership level, the consultation level, in the absence of decision-making power, does not lead to the development of the capacity of stakeholders to take action, thus the long-term sustainability of the positive results of development is questionable.

Furthermore, the positive impacts of K-WATSAN have been eliminated by the implementation of KSUI in half of the intervention area due to construction works. KSUI, as a large-scale, one-dimensional development, constructed new houses for locals, which, although spectacular, failed to achieve its intended social impact. This is because the increased cost of housing resulted in the exclusion of the target group, the poorest residents, from the development. While some former slum dwellers were able to afford the increased housing costs, many have moved back to other parts of Kibera after renting their flats or have not been able to move in. The involvement of stakeholders was primarily at the consultation, but predominantly at the information level, meaning that a development predetermined by experts was implemented without input from locals. However, unlike K-WATSAN, the one-dimensional intervention did not consider the financial situation, lifestyle, or local conditions of slum dwellers, thereby failing to effectively address the problem. Overall, despite some positive effects, I do not consider KENSUP successful in terms of its set goals or its overall societal impact.

The findings from the slum development programmes analysed outlined the keys to successful slum development, addressing the **third research question**: community involvement in the development process through **community-based participatory planning** and a **comprehensive development approach** that addresses all the dimensions of slums, including society, economy, and environment. Therefore, actors working in urban slums in the developing world should consider these two aspects if they intend to achieve sustainable, successful developments in the long run.

4. Future Research Directions

Just as my professional work on slum development in Africa, my research to increase its effectiveness and efficiency does not end with this dissertation. With the ongoing rapid urbanization in developing countries, an exacerbation of the problem is expected, thus necessitating the timely development of effective solutions. In terms of future research, I foresee two emerging directions at both macro and micro levels.

- At the macro level, there is a need to explore the factors causing the dichotomy between theory and field reality within the policy and public administrative system. Instead of isolated interventions, there is a necessity to shift towards systemic solutions.
- At the micro level, the exploration of the field applicability of community-based participatory planning is crucial. To achieve this, it is necessary to examine the prerequisites for a successful community planning process involving slum communities.

5. List of Publications

Publications closely related to the research topic:

- **Czirják R.** (2015). Urbanizációs válság? Nyomornegyed-probléma London és Nairobi példáján. *Afrika Tanulmányok,* 9(3-4)

- **Czirják R.** (2019). Community-Led Planning: The Key to Successful Slum Upgrading? *DETUROPE: Central European Journal of Tourism and Regional Development,* (11)1, 164–181.

- **Czirják R.,** Solymári D. (2022). A nyomornegyed-probléma alakulás kérdései Kenyában: A KENSUP program kiberai eredményeinek további vizsgálata. *Külügyi Szemle,* 21(4), 133-165.

- Solymári D., Mangera, J., **Czirják R.**, & Tarrósy I. (2021). Overview of Kenyan Government Initiatives in Slum Upgrading: The Case of KENSUP and KISIP Projects. *Afrika Tanulmányok*, 15(3), 37-59.

- Solymári, D., **Czirják R.** (2023a). Most Current Issues and Perspectives of the Urban Slum Problem in Kenya: Examining the Results of the KENSUP Slum Upgrading Programme in Kenya. *Nemzet és Biztonság: Biztonságpolitikai Szemle.* 16(2), 126-143.

- Solymári, D., **Czirják R.** (2023b). Dilemmas of Development Politics around African Urban Segregates In Kiss J., Tarrósy I. (eds.): *Farewell to Africa – Selected Studies in Memory of Zsuzsánna Biedermann,* Cambridge Scholars Publishing (megjelenés alatt).

Publications not closely related to the research topic:

- **Czirják R.** (2017). Második versenyfutás Afrikáért: a nyugati és feltörekvő hatalmak afrikai jelenléte a gazdasági, politikai és fejlesztési együttműködések tükrében. In Biedermann Zs., Kiss J. (szerk.), *Szubszaharai Afrika gazdasága a 21. században.* (pp. 163-203). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó.

- **Czirják R.** (2020a). Neo-Colonialist Efforts in Africa in the Light of EU–African and Chinese–African Relations. In Eszterhai V., Renxin, W. (eds.), *Stuck Between Great Powers: The Geopolitics of the Peripheries.* (pp. 32-49.). Corvinus University of Budapest.

- **Czirják R.** (2020b). Neokolonizációs törekvések az EU-afrikai kapcsolatokban? *Külügyi Szemle,* 2020(4), 105-124.

- Solymári, D., Kairu, E., **Czirják, R.**, & Tarrósy, I. (2023). Caring Interventions for the Most Vulnerable Populations in Economically Disadvantaged Areas during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic by Non-Governmental Organizations in Kenya. *Social Sciences.* 12: 284, 15 p. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12050284