

The Invisible Planner: Unearthing the Informal Dynamics Shaping Mixed-Use and Compact Development in Ghanaian Cities

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Abstract : Urban informality, characterized by spontaneous and self-organized practices, plays a significant but often overlooked role in shaping the development of cities, particularly in the context of mixed-use and compact urban environments. This paper aims to explore the invisible planning processes inherent in informal practices and their influence on the urban form of Ghanaian cities. By examining the dynamic interplay between informality and formal planning, the study will discuss the ways in which informal actors shape and plan for mixed-use and compact development. Drawing on the synthesis of relevant secondary data, the research will begin by defining urban informality and identifying the factors that contribute to its prevalence in Ghanaian cities. It will delve into the concept of mixed-use and compact development, highlighting its benefits and importance in urban areas. Drawing on case studies, the paper will uncover the hidden planning processes that occur within informal settlements, showcasing their impact on the physical layout, land use, and spatial arrangements of Ghanaian cities. The study will also uncover the challenges and opportunities associated with informal planning. It examines the constraints faced by informal planners (actors) while also exploring the potential benefits and opportunities that emerge when informality is integrated into formal planning frameworks. By understanding the invisible planner, the research will offer valuable insights into how informal practices can contribute to sustainable and inclusive urban development. Based on the findings, the paper will present policy implications and recommendations. It highlights the need to bridge the policy gaps and calls for the recognition of informal planning practices within formal systems. Strategies are proposed to integrate informality into planning frameworks, fostering collaboration between formal and informal actors to achieve compact and mixed-use development in Ghanaian cities. This research underscores the importance of recognizing and leveraging the invisible planner in Ghanaian cities. By embracing informal planning practices, cities can achieve more sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant urban environments that meet the diverse needs of their residents. This research will also contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between informality and planning, advocating for inclusive and collaborative approaches that harness the strengths of both formal and informal actors. The findings will likewise contribute to advancing our understanding of informality's role as an invisible yet influential planner, shedding light on its spatial planning implications on Ghanaian cities.

Keywords : informality, mixed-uses, compact development, land use, ghana

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