

From De Soto's Solution to Urban Disaster: The Effects of Land Titling Policies on the Development of Cities of the Global South in the Case of Lima Peru

Authors : Jitka Molnarova

Abstract : Based on De Soto's idea that a formal land title can provide a secure home and access to credit to poor urban families, a large number of developing countries accepted the formalization of informal settlements as the ultimate solution for their housing crises and struggles with poverty. After two decades of implementation, very little is known about the effects this policy has on the quality of the neighborhoods it produces and on the development of cities in general. Using the capital of Peru -where the solution originated- as a case study, this paper illustrates the negative outcomes this policy has on urban development arguing that land titling encourages 1) expansion of the city often to areas of high physical risk, 2) production of precarious housing on unserviced land, and 3) practices of illegal land trafficking. The evidence is based on interviews with community leaders and officials working at the Cooperation for Formalization of Informal Property (COFOPRI), comparison of satellite images documenting the expansion of Lima in the past twenty years, and a technical evaluation of dozens of houses that have been or are in the process of being granted a land title.

Keywords : COFOPRI, De Soto, housing policies, land titling, land trafficking, Lima, Peru, precarious housing, urban expansion

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