'Slum' and the City

Exploring relations of informal settlements comparatively in Chennai, India and Durban, South Africa

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Chapter 8 | Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This dissertation examined the relationships between the households living in the informal settlements and the hosting cities, taking Chennai, India and Durban, South Africa as empirical cases. This chapter comes back to the main research question and related sub-questions, connecting the different strands of debates elaborated in the four empirical chapters. Furthermore, through the empirically grounded discussions presented in the thesis, this chapter also presents the thesis' contributions to urban theory and policy proposals for improving informal settlements in the Global South.

This chapter is organized as follows. The first section discusses the summary of the four empirical chapters, focusing on the different aspects of the relational understanding of informal settlements. The next section deals with relations at and between the three different geographic and institutional scales, in the light of the theoretical debates discussed in Chapter 2. This is followed by the discussion of the main research question of the thesis and the policy implications for informal settlements. Furthermore, the limitations of case studies research methodologies are discussed. In the last part of this chapter, directions for future research are presented.

8.2. Informal Settlements as Relational Spaces – Chapter Summaries

The main issue explored in my dissertation concerns how informal settlements are transformed over time through their relations across and within multiple scales (geographic and institutional), utilizing the comparative cases of Chennai, India and Durban, South Africa. I looked at informal settlements as nodes with internal and external relations, and explored how households in the settlements have developed their livelihoods over time through such relations within the cities in which they are embedded. The relational aspects of informal settlements in Chennai and Durban are explored with a different focus in each of the four empirical chapters, which are briefly summarized below.

Chapter 4 analysed the approaches towards informal settlements in Chennai through the local combination of political coalitions, policy discourses and slum practices as relational spaces that operate at the local and link to the national and international scales. Enumeration reports commissioned and/or prepared by the state nodal agency for slums, the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board provided the core documentation for mapping the shifting approaches to slums in Chennai since the 1970s. These reports were analysed in terms of their conceptualizations,
categorizations, instruments and the actors involved in order to understand how slums are discursively constructed in these official enumeration documents and how these configurations shifted over time. This analysis was enhanced with interviews with strategic actors, which revealed the past and present issues related to slums in Chennai. Using a historical lens, the discussions presented in the chapter were divided into four different periods. The chapter shows how policy discourses and actor coalitions for constructing ‘slum’ configurations have evolved since the 1970s, when the first enumeration report was prepared by the TNSCB, and captured the underlying continuity of practices towards ‘slums’ in Chennai.

Chapter 5 explored how households residing in two informal settlements in Chennai build livelihoods in relation to their settlement histories and macro-economic and institutional contexts. The livelihoods index at the household level was compiled out of financial, human, social/political and physical assets, revealing the differences between the livelihoods of households in the two settlements. The transformation of households’ livelihoods over time was mapped through both changes in physical assets, from arrival in the settlement until the fieldwork period in 2013-2014, and the broader settlement histories of Anna Nagar and Kamaraj Nagar. The varied outcomes for the households and the settlements was further explored in light of the macro-economic changes of the city areas where they are located and the institutional analysis focusing on categorization of slum settlements in Chennai. This chapter contributed to the asset-based understanding of urban livelihoods by showing that the changes in physical assets cannot be solely attributed to the household’s duration of stay in the settlement but were also linked to the structural contexts in which the settlements are embedded. Therefore, this chapter argued for a relational understanding by utilizing an analytical framework that enabled a situated understanding of slums highlighting three aspects: (1) the city-wide economic development practices and settlement classifications, and (2) the differences between households in building livelihoods over time within (3) the contexts of the settlements and their locations in the city.

Merging the two strands of discussions elaborated in Chapter 4 and 5 for the case of Chennai, Chapter 6 explored policy approaches towards informal settlements in Durban and livelihood-building processes of households living in Durban’s River Side Settlement through the interaction of relational spaces at the household, settlement and city scales. Drawing on theories of rationality, governance and urban livelihoods, the chapter discussed the different trajectories of development as experienced by residents in informal settlements, in relation to the perspectives represented in the planning documents of eThekwini Municipality. This chapter also captured how the households in River Side Settlement built their asset-based livelihoods over time. The discussion on the approaches to informal settlements revealed that the dominant developmental discourse of spatial integration through urban planning in post-apartheid South Africa has been limited in practice, partly because of divergent priorities of different municipal departments. In eThekwini Municipality, the practice of the
Human Settlement Unit was not aligned to planning norms as laid out in the Spatial Development Frameworks by the planning department. Analysing planning and practices towards informal settlements in relation to the urban livelihoods of households not only revealed a ‘conflict of rationalities’ between the marginalized population and the techno-managerial state (Watson, 2003; 2009), but also showed the complexity that arose from the ambiguities in functioning among the different departments in the Municipality.

Chapter 7 of the thesis analysed the relations between different geographical and institutional scales with informal settlements as nodes in the two cities of Chennai and Durban. The main question raised in the chapter was how relations with the urban policy context shaped the ways households of informal settlements build their livelihoods in two different geographical and historical contexts. By exploring the interconnections between households, settlement and city scales for building livelihoods over time within a comparative urbanism perspective, it analysed two relations between the three scale levels with focus on the city, informal settlements and household’s livelihoods. Using the theory of comparative urbanism, the chapter highlighted the marginalization of households living in informal settlements vis-à-vis the polarization of city spaces, discrepancies between policy and practice at the city level, and the influence of unemployment, health problems and gender-based violence on livelihoods building processes at the household level in the two selected settlements in Chennai and Durban.

8.3. Revisiting the Research Questions

The four empirical chapters summarized above considered different aspects of the relations that informal settlements developed with the cities in which they are embedded. This section revisits the research questions raised in the introduction of the thesis.

The main research question, exploring the informal settlements’ relations with the wider city at different geographic and institutional scales, is further broken down into the three sub-questions that follow. Taking a bottom-up perspective, the theoretical debates on building assets by households are analysed. This is addressed in the first sub-question of the thesis by asking - How do slum households access opportunities or experience constraints through their relations at different scale levels for building livelihoods in Chennai, India and Durban, South Africa? This question links to the household’s perspective for building livelihoods (Hendriks, 2011; Krishna, Sriram, & Prakash, 2014; Moser, 1998; 2009; Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002; Verrest & Post, 2007). The debates presented informed the analysis and interpretation of livelihood-building strategies in the informal settlements of Anna Nagar, Kamaraj Nagar and River Side Settlement. Although the starting point for analysing this question was the household, this thesis focused on the dimensions of relational spaces between the household and the city contexts (see Chapter 5, 6 and 7).
The issue of building livelihoods in informal settlements concerns how households prioritize assets as they move out of poverty. There is no consensus concerning which assets should be strengthened first nor for whom, as transformation is required along various dimensions (Meikle, 2002; Moser, 2009; Pryer, Rogers, & Rahman, 2005; Rakodi, 2002). The research found that long-term residents in the two informal settlements of Chennai invested in physical assets as a foundation for building other assets. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis of Anna Nagar, Kamaraj Nagar and River Side Settlement reveals that prioritization of assets depends not only on how long the household resides in the settlement and on their household cycle in the intergenerational process of building livelihoods (Moser, 2009), but is also influenced by their settlement histories – particularly by the precarity of their tenure. Apart from the financial, human, social/political and physical assets, cultural norms played a dominant role in the livelihoods of the households living in the three informal settlements. These range from funeral and dowry expense for the households in Chennai to the bride price (Lobola) in Durban. Gaining access to opportunities and facilities is realized by different forms of negotiations with city institutions; the strength of their rights to the city is linked to recognition of the settlements as such and their own perceived tenure security.

A household’s process of building livelihoods is closely associated with the dynamics of the settlement where they reside. Different development trajectories of households and settlements reveal the complexity that further influences the livelihood-building opportunities. The inner-city informal settlement of Anna Nagar in Chennai and River Side Settlement in Durban are enclaves of low-caste and black-African population groups, respectively, both located on environmentally sensitive, flood-prone areas, characterized by winding narrow lanes and high-density housing. While most housing in River Side Settlement is temporary, Anna Nagar presents a variegated image with temporary houses along the waterway and consolidated structures near the road. The level of physical infrastructure not only varies between the two settlements but also within different parts of each settlement. The tenure security of the households is closely linked to the policies and practices of city institutions, which were designed around land ownership at the settlement scale. Originally, the land of Kamaraj Nagar belonged to the nearby temple, whereas Anna Nagar was built on land owned by different state and central government agencies. In contrast, River Side Settlement had multiple landowners, with one part belonging to municipal government and another land parcel under private ownership. Because of the TNSCB and World Bank intervention, the private land of Kamaraj Nagar could be provided with legal titles for the households in the form of conditional pattas, while the residences of Anna Nagar and River Side Settlement have a range of perceived tenure which include a fear of eviction and precarity for some while perception of security for the others. These diverse land ownership patterns of the three settlements contributed to their distinct histories and different livelihood-building opportunities and strategies.
Negotiation of infrastructural services and building physical assets through political or bureaucratic means is contingent to tenure security and status of informal settlements. Both Anna Nagar and River Side Settlements were politically well connected to the local representatives and the households living there have negotiated services and built homes. In contrast to Anna Nagar and River Side Settlement, Kamaraj Nagar presented a profile of an established neighbourhood with brightly coloured houses, exhibiting an attractive exterior with many recent residents employed as engineers, graphic designers, hair stylists, and chefs. Due to their tenure and settlement security, the residents of Kamaraj Nagar communicated directly with the municipality (e.g., to address lags in services) and rarely contacted their local political representative. This comparative analysis of the informal settlements within Chennai and between Chennai and Durban dispels the ‘myths of marginality’ associated with such settlements. It highlights the security that the categorization of the settlement provides (low risk of removal and demolition of property), which gives households the chance to build up their livelihoods across generations and access job opportunities in the vicinity. Furthermore, the discussions of households living in informal settlements in the two cities presented in this thesis challenge the negative exaggeration (Davis, 2006) and over-simplifications of informal settlements, often employed to support particular policy lines (see De Soto, 2000).

Households in the different settlements had different economic opportunities in relation to their location in the city. Even though economic opportunities for households are connected to the wider economic policies of the city, these opportunities are often unevenly spread and concentrated in certain geographic areas of the city. The economic development of Indian and South African cities can be associated with their spatial growth patterns (Kundu, 2014; Shaw, 2012; Todes, 2014). Earlier research that established the link between economic and spatial urban growth illustrated that the specific socio-spatial patterns produced different growth trajectories of informal settlements in each city (ibid). The growth of the IT sector in Chennai is emblematic of the global competitive city vision. Concentrated in South Chennai, it attracted new migrants with higher levels of social and human assets to the informal settlement of Kamaraj Nagar, while contributing to rising inequalities within the settlement, as many original residents have lower educational and skill levels compared to recent migrants. Anna Nagar, located in North Chennai, serves as a manufacturing centre of the city and is a hub for low-skilled jobs, while River Side Settlement is located in close proximity to the city centre of eThekwini Municipality. Household members in both settlements are mainly employed in informal low-skilled jobs. The discussion on the differences between the households living in Anna Nagar, Kamaraj Nagar and River Side Settlement are associated with perceptions of tenure security, which allows households to build up their livelihoods across generations.

Different historical developments at the settlement and city scales directly influence possibilities for building livelihoods. The comparative lens highlights the social and economic constraints and opportunities faced by the residents living in
the three settlements because of development trajectories of the two cities and the countries where they are located. The residents in the settlements of Chennai and Durban exemplify the notion of ‘ordinary citizens’ through a combination of households (including the ones with titles) and those who are trying to eke out a living under challenging circumstances (Choplin, 2016). Gaining access to opportunities is realized by different forms of negotiation at the city scale. The strength and security of their rights are associated with the recognition that institutions bestow upon the settlement. Employment possibilities clustered in the vicinity of the settlement also influenced livelihoods of the households living in the settlement.

The second research sub-question – How are the relations between informal settlements and the formal city defined in these two urban contexts? – links the settlement to the city across an informal and formal divide and the formal changes in city spaces over time vis-à-vis the informal settlement dynamics. The first debate concerns urban institutional landscapes and how they influence the opportunities and constraints in slum settlements by structuring slum dwellers’ entitlements (and lack thereof). This process is related to how policies, laws and the functioning of institutions deter or support asset-building processes at household and settlement levels (Krishna et al., 2014; Subbaraman et al., 2012; Sutherland, Braathen, Dupont, & Jordhus-Lier, 2016). Non-identification by the state can influence the household’s ‘right to the city’ by curtailing access to infrastructure. Nevertheless, the official designation as a slum by the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board did not enable households of Anna Nagar and Kamaraj Nagar in Chennai to access similar opportunities on an institutional level. This is mainly because the de jure identification differed from de facto interventions within the two slums, resulting in different trajectories of households and the settlements where they were located. This corroborates findings of a range of legalities associated with informal settlements (see Datta, 2012; Risbud, 2002 on Delhi; Van Dijk, 2014 on Kalyan-Dombivli and Mira Bhayandar). Chapter 4 highlighted the flexibility in categorizing informal settlements, which further leads to differentiated practices by TNSCB, and therefore, also livelihood-building possibilities for households. Categorizations of informal settlements in Chennai are part of the enumeration process. Enumeration processes in Chennai have led to a new representation of informal settlements over time through changing categorizations, while in eThekwini Municipality, the informal settlements are represented in the housing plan that is part of the larger planning endeavour by the Municipality. In both contexts, the latest discourses around informal settlements are rendered technical using planning models and matrices.

The process of regularization of informal settlements in the form of tenure security is crucial but not an adequate tool for integrating informal areas into the formal spaces of the urban centres. Provision of tenure security devoid of other support in itself is not enough for households to build their livelihoods. Apart from regularization, tenure security through land titles is supposed to act as collateral giving the urban poor access to the formal market (De Soto, 2000). Provision of
conditional land titles in Kamaraj Nagar led to a surge of construction of houses in the area, catering to a new wave of recent migrants. In addition, many of the original residents became victims of market-led displacement and were forced to leave the settlement. While the land titles had a range of influences on the households living in Kamaraj Nagar, institutionally the settlement continued to feature in the slum lists of TNSCB, including the most recent one published under Rajiv Awas Yojana in 2014. In addition to tenure legality, perceived tenure security leads to housing improvement and settlement development (Nakamura, 2016; Payne, Durand-Lasserve, & Rakodi, 2009; van Gelder, 2009). Perceived tenure security played an enormous role in some sections of Anna Nagar: some households invested in their physical assets and enjoyed good access to infrastructural facilities, while others remained in temporary housing structures (e.g., in the canal area, where the threat of eviction was high).

In contrast to Anna Nagar and Kamaraj Nagar, many of the displaced households in River Side Settlements returned to rebuild their structures following relocation to a formal greenfield housing project in Verulam, 25 km away from the location of the present settlement. Proximity to income generating possibilities was a stronger attracting force for these households than tenure security in peripheral locations. These findings highlight the contention that underlies the processes of regularization of informal settlements based on individual property rights and supports Durand-Lasserve & Royston’s (2002) insistence on moving beyond the formal and informal dichotomy that overlooks the diversity and legitimacy of existing tenure arrangements.

The historical, political and economic transformation of city spaces shaped the trajectories of the informal settlements that provide the context for households to build up their assets. Moreover, the differential development of core and periphery in Chennai was seen to have a close association with each settlement’s history. This spatial growth of Chennai is associated with its urban history since the British era, when settlers considered the northern part congested and preferred South Madras as an attractive option for their ‘garden estates’ (Arabindoo, 2009). The present day IT growth in its southern periphery of Chennai embodies this trend, while the core of the city remains the manufacturing hub of the city. These different growth patterns have influenced opportunities and constraints of livelihoods building for residents living in these city regions. In contrast, the spatial growth of Durban resulted from the apartheid-era design of cities: well-connected and central areas, occupied by the wealthy, with peripherally located poorer populations, far away from economic opportunities and social amenities (Marx & Charlton, 2003). The city centre of eThekwini Municipality in the post-apartheid period reoriented itself towards low-income consumer markets while the northern part of the city developed into a retail and commercial hub (Todes, 2014). River Side Settlement is located close to the city centre, giving its residents easy access to non-formal job opportunities, while the economic growth of the city has shifted elsewhere.
In conclusion, the relations between the informal settlements and the cities where they are located was explored through three dimensions: 1) enumeration of informal settlements and how they are made visible; 2) diversity of tenure arrangements; and 3) spatial development of city spaces vis-à-vis the settlements that are located there. By exploring the relations between the informal settlements and the city, this question goes beyond household’s agency for building livelihoods and links to political and institutional dimensions within which they exist and operate. The study shows that informal settlements transform over time based on the institutional and spatial connections that draw upon the city spaces. These transformations lead to different development trajectories for the households that reside in these settlements.

The third research sub-question – *How have approaches to informal settlements evolved in relation to the cities where they are embedded?* – was tackled by analysing approaches to informal settlements as a combination of policy discourses, political coalitions and dominant practices from a macro perspective. The city macro scale delves into discussions of policies and political coalitions in urban governance concerning informal settlements. This was mainly explored by examining the framing of issues in policy-related documents such as enumeration reports and the housing plan, in combination with the dominant state-led practices and actor coalitions that constitute the approaches to informal settlements in eThekwini Municipality and Chennai. This question explored the interactions between progressive policy rhetoric and the political coalitions that influenced the approaches to informal settlements. Relational spaces between the global and the local were found through the policy framings and how they evolved over time for the cases of Durban and Chennai.

Discussions of approaches towards informal settlements in both Chennai and eThekwini Municipality indicated cleavages between policy and practices in the two contexts (also recently discussed by Dupont et al., 2016). eThekwini Municipality draws heavily on the developmental agenda to address inequality through spatial discourses, whereas the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board in Chennai prefers legal and administrative routes for setting out policy discussions. Furthermore, the policy rhetoric has transformed over time in both Chennai and eThekwini Municipality. Despite changing policies, both cities show underlying continuity of practices towards informal settlements. Although housing policies shifted towards an integrated approach in 2004 in eThekwini Municipality, the greenfield practice of peripheral housing has been ongoing since 1994. Similarly, TNSCB never discontinued any established practice towards ‘slums’ in Chennai over the last 40 years, despite the policy focus shift from tenement construction to upgrading and present-day relocation and resettlement. Although the approaches towards informal settlements vary in and within the two cities, the research has shown that the households aligned their strategies to build assets with the practices of their municipalities’ (cf. Moser, 2009). Furthermore, while ‘multiple deprivations’ is a widely accepted theory on urban poverty, the institutional practices of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board as well as the Human
Settlements department of eThekwini Municipality focused much more on physical infrastructure. While physical infrastructure (especially housing) is an important first step towards building livelihoods at the household level, overlooking employment generation policies often forces households to prioritize locational benefits over physical infrastructure. Therefore, if institutional approaches do not support generation of other assets, the state’s response may provide only minor or limited quality of life improvements to the households living in informal settlements.

The political coalitions configuring the approaches to informal settlements have evolved over time in both cities. The analysis of political coalitions revealed increasing influence from international and national actors on the approaches to slums at the city scale. Chennai hosted World Bank projects during the 1970s and 1980s; however, the discourse of neoliberalism continues to drive current slum approaches. Each of the different phases of ‘slum’ configuration in Chennai has been accompanied by an enumeration report, which epitomises the shift in the policy discourse towards informal settlements in the city.

The 1990s marked a transition period for both India and South Africa. Since 1994, the post-apartheid South African city governments have strived for a planning-based development agenda, and housing policies are very much manoeuvred by the national government’s discourse of supply-based housing practices to address the spatial inequalities of the apartheid period. Similarly, economic liberalization policies ushered in a new era for urban areas in India. While the discourse on the economic competitiveness of the global city has dominated the development agendas of Indian and South African cities, prioritizing infrastructure growth over improvement of informal settlements (Banerjee-Guha, 2002; Dupont, 2011; Huchzermeyer, 2011), this research agrees with Parnell & Robinson’s (2012) argument for building ‘locally legible accounts’ that refocus the analytic lens on multiple drivers that operate in specific urban contexts. Historical segregation and deprivation of the majority of South Africa’s Black population has dominated the housing discourse of eThekwini Municipality, whereas in Chennai the discourse shifted from a paternal Dravidian state approach to the nationally driven relocation processes practiced today.

Recently, the national governments in India and South Africa have dominated the policy debates at the local level and both cities have witnessed a turn towards policies advocating evictions. Both cities share the tendency to use planning matrices and models driven by the latest technologies in mapping and analysis with the goal of depoliticizing intervention priorities. However, this shared urban imaginary of city governments in Chennai and eThekwini Municipality differs on the basis of governance structures and planning histories of the two cities. Although informal settlement planning has a long history in South Africa, in the case of India it is a newly found rationale to for developing ‘slums’. However, both city governments adhere to the ‘problem solving’ approach of the new urban agenda defined by UN-Habitat (UN-Habitat, 2016: 177).
The governance of informal settlements is increasingly subjected to privatization in the process of knowledge construction in the two contexts. The growing use of geo-technologies in mapping slums has led to greater contributions by the private sector in knowledge generation (Pfeffer et. al, 2015). The capacity of local governments remains limited because the technical expertise of the private sector consultants reduces the necessity of building up internal technical capacity and therefore decision-making. In Chennai, the private consultants as new knowledge producers incorporated a fresh vocabulary regarding classifications. However, these classifications are not legally binding because they were not included in the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Act 1971. Slum categories highlighted the relationship between informality and illegality, with ‘objectionable and undeveloped’ representing illegal and informal settlements and ‘un-objectionable and developed’ referring to legally recognized, yet informal areas. Slum strategies were thus built around these new categorizations, marking a discontinuity with past discourses and creating new ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1972). Unlike the continuous evolution of categories, the general and mostly negative definition of slums was preserved in legal documents over time in Chennai. In contrast to Chennai, the technocratic approach of the Housing Plan of eThekwini Municipality includes spatial analysis to map short- and long-term strategies for developing informal settlements. This approach to knowledge creation around slums ‘rendered technical’ the interventions by highlighting the use of expert knowledge that depoliticizes housing (Li, 2007).

The approaches to informal settlements in the two cities were discussed as a combination of policy discourses, political coalitions and practices. The discussion on the approaches towards informal settlements reveals the cleavage between policy and practices towards informal settlements, increasing influence of international and national actors in urban governance of informal settlements and privatization of knowledge construction. The transformations in the approaches to informal settlements have both common and distinct features. The focus on technology, planning theories and physical infrastructure in the two countries are common denominators in the two contexts, while the cities vary in their administrative and spatial mandates to govern informal settlements.

8.4. Towards Relational Understanding of Informal Settlements

The main debate explored in this dissertation is the transformation of informal settlements with respect to their relations between different scale levels, through the following main research question: How are informal settlements transformed through relations across/within multiple scales (geographic and institutional) and how does this transformation link to household opportunities for building livelihoods?
The research explored new territory in the study of informal settlements. Most debates on informal settlements focus either on the macro or on the micro level, often overlooking the relations that connect the two. From Victorian cities of the nineteenth century to the megacities of the twenty-first, ‘slums’ are part and parcel of the development histories of urban centres across the globe. Despite this long history, informal settlements are either seen as a catalyst towards an apocalyptic vision of the urbanization i.e. cities reduced to areas of ‘inequality, poverty and danger’ (Davis, 2006) – or are associated with the idealized view of slum-free cities, which has gained momentum during the decades – largely driven by the UN’s MDGs and SDGs, and inspired by De Soto’s argument for simple solutions to the complexities of informal settlements (Gilbert, 2009). This thesis contributes to the understanding of informal settlements in a contemporary world by going beyond these extreme and opposing views, postulating a framework where settlements are not viewed as isolated territories but rather as distinctive nodes that operate in relational spaces of urban centres.

The transformation of informal settlements in this thesis was explored in a comparative frame of analysis by focusing on two relations: 1) city approaches to informal settlements (policies and practices), and 2) how households build urban livelihoods through economic opportunities and against the constraints posed by the urban context. By exploring these relations of informal settlements in two different and dynamic cities, the thesis provides rich insights for 1) city policies, practices and discourses; 2) recognizing diversity among informal settlements; and 3) analysing how households build assets through the relations that they have with the settlement and city contexts. While focusing primarily on the city scale, the discussions demonstrate how the national and international political coalitions influence – and to some extent directly shape – the interventions that take place at the city scale (Dupont et al., 2016). This research shows that the policy discourses are constitutive and constructed by changing political coalitions and as a result are in a continuously reconstructed (Massey, 2005, Gaventa, 2006). While the policy discourses and political coalitions evolve, there is underlying continuity in the practices towards informal settlements. These practices encapsulate the ‘material realities’ of informal settlements and are manoeuvred by the conceived spaces of urban planning. However the rationalities governing both are divergent in nature (Watson, 2007; 2009).

This thesis argues that the households living in informal settlements form integrated yet complex relational webs with the settlements and the cities. Different outcomes for building livelihoods are a result of settlement and city contexts that influence the transformation of households living in informal settlements (Dupont et al., 2016; Parnell, 2015). The trajectories of the households living in the settlements are closely associated to settlement histories, which are shaped by the institutional practices, macro-economies, historical transformation and political coalitions that govern city spaces. The research also revealed that even though the city interventions are top-down, households living in informal settlements cannot be viewed as ‘passive’ recipients of policy interventions.
(Gilbert, 2009; Moser, 1998; Moser, 2009; Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002). They align their livelihood-building processes with the approaches of city governments as well as resist practices that affect them negatively by negotiating through various political channels (Dupont et al., 2016).

The main contribution of this thesis is in bringing out the interactions between the household, settlements and city scales in different geographical and institutional contexts. This relational perspective to informal settlements has been recently termed as ‘multi-sited’ analysis by Lemanski and Marx (2015), calling for a shift in urban poverty research to focus on multiple scales and contexts. This study not only looked at different scales and contexts but also engaged in the relations that exist between them. Furthermore, this thesis is an empirically grounded contribution using a comparative lens for studying cities in the Global South that is often the case for research conducted in the Global North (for example see Parnell, Pieterse, & Watson, 2009; Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009).

8.5. Policy Implications

In the case of India and South Africa, provision of housing and related physical infrastructure dominates the policy discussions on informal settlements. Despite the rich discussion on the multi-dimensionality of urban poverty (see Baud et al., 2009; Krishna, 2010; Moser, 1998; 2009; Narayan, Pritchett, & Kapoor, 2009; Rakodi, 2002), policy practice remains focused on these two areas. It should be noted that housing and related infrastructure are crucial starting points for households to be able to build further assets; however, solely looking at physical assets overlooks important practices that would foster improvements in financial, human, and social/political assets. Therefore, while I recognize the importance of housing and related infrastructure for households living in informal settlements, my work focused on uncovering how additional support of other livelihood dimensions, such as employment, could better empower households to overcome poverty.

The second policy recommendation is that provision of legal tenure is not the only viable option for improving livelihoods of households living in informal settlements. This study has empirically demonstrated the importance of tenure security as the first step for households living in informal settlements to build their assets. Even perceived tenure security, in the absence of legal titles, can lead to better and more consolidated housing structures (Nakamura, 2016; Payne, Durand-Lasserve, & Rakodi, 2009; van Gelder, 2009). Although having legal titles can significantly enhance the investment in the built environment, legalization can also lead to market-led eviction of households because of increasing land demands (Payne, Durand-Lasserve, & Rakodi, 2009). Thus, tenure security is crucial for households to build their livelihoods, and legal land title is one way to do so. In addition, legal titles are expensive and could also result in displacement of households living in informal settlements, thereby reproducing urban poverty.
Keeping these discussions in consideration, it is important not to reduce the tenure security of households living in informal settlements to provision of legal titles for the land. Rather it would be more appropriate to explore possibilities of communal titles or other forms of titling that could sustain the perceived tenure security among the households while reducing the risk of displacement due to increased land value.

In this thesis, I presented an argument against the sole focus on the territoriality of informal settlements, by discussing their relations with the immediate neighbourhood and the city. With respect to the notification of informal settlements, there are legal and institutional provisions in Chennai and eThekwini Municipality. In contrast, there is a policy vacuum around the issue of de-notification of ‘slum’ settlements in Chennai. As upgrading is a recent policy measure of the eThekwini Municipality, the phasing out of informal settlements through the process of de-notification has not surfaced. Since the inception of TNSCB, the institution has been practicing upgrading policies with varying focal areas. Many settlements in Chennai do not fit the definition of ‘slum’ in the Tamil Nadu Slum Areas Act but continue to be a part of TNSCB’s ‘slum’ list for Chennai. De-notification is a much-needed policy measure that can integrate improved settlements as ‘formal’ parts of the city and also greatly enhance the effectiveness of funds allocations for targeted deployment in areas where assistance is most needed. This approach could also effectively contribute to the notion of ‘slum-free’ cities by rightly integrating the settlements as part of the city rather than simply displacing the households living in informal settlements in the peripheral locations.

Finally, this thesis highlights the recent surge in model-based planning that has underlined the notion of using technocracy for the improvement of informal settlements in eThekwini Municipality and Chennai. Both cities argue for a comprehensive strategy towards the improvement of informal settlements, taking into consideration upgrading as well as relocation practices. The development models in both contexts draw on planning rationales that work with the assumption of informal settlements as closed spaces devoid of contextual understanding. This thesis has argued towards the theory of ‘slums’ as relational spaces. While the development models are based on complex spatial analysis in eThekwini Municipality and matrices in Chennai centred on vulnerability assessments, both approaches focus on infrastructure and overlook other relational dimensions of informal settlements and how that can be utilized to inform policy development. Specifically, Chapter 5 argues for an analytical framework that enables a situated understanding of slums highlighting (1) city-wide economic development practices and settlement classifications, and (2) differences between households in building livelihoods over time within (3) the contexts of the settlements and their locations in the city. These subjective criteria for the informal settlements in addition to the objective infrastructural deficits can enhance both the understanding of and the development of intervention models for improving life and livelihoods in informal settlements.
8.6. Methodological Reflections

In this section I will discuss how the research methods were combined to answer the research questions and address some of the research limitations of the study. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this thesis to answer different aspects of the relations that households living in informal settlement have with their contexts. Overall combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies has the benefit of developing a holistic understanding while engaging a particular issue in depth. The survey was used to reinforce the qualitative findings related to the livelihoods of households living in the informal settlements in the two contexts, recognising that the data about informal settlements is scarce mainly because the scale and depth of urban poverty is often ignored by many city governments as well as nationally (Lemanski & Marx, 2015; Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013). While the household survey provided first-hand data about residents in informal settlements, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were used to understand the macro issues related to the area.

Because of the multi-scalar nature of the research, the relations of informal settlements were not only explored from a bottom-up perspective, by focusing on household and settlement scales, but also through document analysis and interviews with governance actors in each of the two cities. Combining the methods and different contexts highlighted the complex web of relations in which the formal and informal spaces of cities are intertwined. Conducting an ethnographic research or a large-scale survey would have brought out a deeply rooted analysis or an overall trend, respectively, which could not have answered the research question raised in the thesis. I do recognize that the combined qualitative and the quantitative methodologies used in this research also have their own shortcomings. For instance, in the case of households’ asset building, surveys were conducted in the three settlements; however, since the data were not collected on a basis of a probability sampling, the sampled population could not be considered representative in a statistical sense. This difficulty of sampling cases in informal settlements restricted the analysis of the surveyed data, and it was not possible to calculate sampling error, variances and confidence intervals for the eta squared, and levels of significance could not be carried out for the survey data. In addition, a mixed method research design is subject to ‘practical, political and resource’ constraints when adopted in a real-life context (Mason, 2006: 11). Practical research challenges involved time constraints in accessing qualitative and quantitative data, differential power relations while conducting fieldwork in the informal settlements, institutional settings of the two cities, and resource limitations (research funding, time constraints, skills and competencies that the two methodologies demanded). In addition, practical issues of data collection by research assistants also influenced the research output. This research heavily relied on the research assistants who did the surveys, interviews and focus group discussions at the settlement and household levels. Therefore, the meaning communicated by the informants was interpreted through the research assistant’s
lens and then again through the researcher. Linguistic barriers and positionalities of the research assistants as well the researcher influenced the data that has been collected and analysed in this research.

By engaging in a comparative analysis of informal settlements across Chennai and Durban, the study explored not only why the two contexts are similar or different but also what factors contribute to the noted differences and similarities. The benefits of comparative urbanism cannot be ignored, but conducting research across two countries demands substantial resources in terms of time and research funds. Also, conducting research across multiple locations limits the possibility of engaging in more in-depth discussions that would have been otherwise possible during the same timeframe at one location. In addition, the equivalence of research concepts in comparative research was challenging to operationalise. For instance, in the case of India, the household was often confused with family. At many instances during the survey, it was difficult to communicate that household members need not be blood related and household as a unit constitutes occupants sharing a roof, consumption and expenditure. Similarly, in South Africa due to constant movement of household members, it was often difficult to map who exactly lived in which household. Nevertheless, I could address these operational challenges associated with household definition in the two contexts through repeated questioning and clarifications.

Moving away from the income-based understanding of urban poverty, this research focused on the multi-dimensionality of deprivations faced by households living in the informal settlements of Chennai and eThekwini Municipality. Taking a multi-dimensional approach revealed how households prioritize their assets for building livelihoods in relation to the cities where they live. This highlighted the focus on physical infrastructure by the institutions vis-à-vis multiple financial, human, political and social deprivations faced by the residents living in informal settlements. The multi-dimensional understanding also brought to light the complexities in the lives of people living in informal settlements and how these are related and shaped by institutional and governance practices. In the thesis, I focused on the asset-based livelihood processes and not on their subjective evaluation because the subjective dimension is only possible when the researcher has spent considerable time building a high level of trust among people in the different sites of investigation, which was not feasible in the timeframe of a doctoral thesis. While this can enhance the understanding of the complexities associated with informal settlements, subjective evaluation related to well-being is a much more time-intensive project.

8.7. Topics for Further Research

This thesis has highlighted the role of city and settlement contexts in the process of building urban livelihoods for the households living in informal settlements of Chennai, India and Durban, South Africa. Moving beyond the commonly set
This doctoral thesis focused on regional hubs in the two countries. With increasing urbanization the growth of informal settlements is likely to shift from metro cities to smaller urban areas, which are unprepared for such transformations. Moreover, the focus on global cities or megacities has resulted in parochial urban theory by neglecting discussions on small and medium urban centres (Bell & Jayne, 2009). Several scholars have pressed for an inclusive agenda of urban theory by either focusing on smaller cities (Bell & Jayne, 2009; Kudva, 2013; Satterthwaite, 2006) or by arguing for the concept of ‘ordinary cities’ (Amin & Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2006). In addition, relatively little is known about informal settlements in smaller urban regions of the world, due to the megacity bias of most contemporary urban studies. There is a pressing need to include analysis of informal settlements beyond megacities and engage in research that includes multiple urban centres of varied sizes, in order to develop an empirically grounded and theoretically robust research agenda. Moving beyond the hierarchical understanding of urban spaces and taking a comprehensive approach, by including informal settlements in cities of all sizes, will deepen our understanding of a range of relations that the households living in the cities have with their urban spaces. In addition, it will offer insights into the diversity of settlements in smaller urban regions and how differently they transform in comparison to their counterparts living in megacities.

Theory of comparative research has heavily critiqued the empirical focus on largely European and North American cities (Parnell et al., 2009; Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009). In contrast, the debates on informal settlements tend to be located and theorized mainly for cities in the Global South. Comparative in nature, this thesis explores the informal living conditions in the cities located in India and South Africa. A more ambitious project would be to go beyond the territorialities of northern or southern city regions of the world. While there are policy lessons that could be learnt by looking beyond the North–South dichotomy, these debates are still to be explored as much of the global informal theory is still quite limited.
By adopting an integrated perspective across the North–South divide processes of living and working informally across the globe can be further illuminated. Inequality, marginalization and informal living conditions are not limited to the Global South, but are very much present in the urban landscapes across the North–South divide (see the works of Aguilera, 2016; UN-Habitat, 2008; Wacquant, 2008). In light of recent Syrian refugee crises in Europe, non-formal housing and legality are urgent as well as pertinent questions for the Global North. Therefore, moving beyond the duality of North and South will form a crucial step towards theorizing informal settlements across economic, social and geographical divides of our connected globe.