

RT10 | INFORMAL AND ILLEGAL: DISCUSSING THE BOUNDARIES AND CHALLENGES OF NON-COMPLIANT DEVELOPMENT IN OECD COUNTRIES

Chairs

- Inês Calor, FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa;
- Rachelle Alterman, Israel Institute of Technology;
- Paulo Silva, Universidade de Aveiro.

Speakers

- Adam Sheppard, University of the West of England;
- Konstantinos Lalenis, University of Thessaly;
- Magda Wagner, Wroclaw University of Technology;
- Fatma Unsal.

Description

Almost anywhere in the world, non-compliance with planning rules is a continuous challenge. Most academic research focuses on the phenomenon of “informal settlements” in the Global South. However, unauthorized development is also present in developed countries, though with diverse scale and attributes. In the global south, much of the illegal/ informal development occurs through squatting without the owners’ contract or permission. By contrast, in the global north, much of the illegal development involves planning law only, rather than illegal occupancy of land. Even in northern European countries, where planning compliance and enforcement are more sophisticated, unauthorized development occasionally challenges the planning authorities. Romani camps in Sweden, “Bed in Shafts” in the United Kingdom and occupation of empty buildings in the Netherlands are examples which can be attributed to social needs.

Some south European and East European countries have many types of infringement by ‘regular’ citizens, rather than the poor or migrants. There are many unlawful allotments (often named semi-formal settlements) on legally owned property.

Additional examples of violations of planning law are balcony enclosure, façade changes, annexes to otherwise legal buildings, unpermitted changes of use in existing buildings, and unpermitted billboards and signs.

Whereas the literature on “informal” development usually focuses the social problems of housing, “planning enforcement” literature deals with “illegal” (or “unauthorized”) development. Are they discussing essentially similar or different problems? There are obvious differences in

physical size, urban impact and social context of the phenomenon. However, research to date has not addressed systematically either the causes of these phenomena or their impacts – whether social, legal, institutional, or environmental. Once built, reversal of illegality is not easy. Planning bodies or elected officials are reluctant to demolish.

The round table aims to provide an initial cross-national perspective of the problem of informal and illegal development in OECD countries, focusing on differences from developing countries. As there is very little existing research, the discussion is intended to stimulate national and comparative research into this crucial issue, yet one which is little understood in OECD countries.