



## Everyday Advantage and Disadvantage in Informal Housing: Policy Lessons from the Geography of Urban Informality in Los Angeles

**Vinit Mukhija, UCLA**

**Wednesday, May 20th**

**12:00 - 1:00pm**

**In light of the community concerns regarding COVID-19, this talk will be given as a webinar. The link will be provided on Tuesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> to those that have registered by 5:00 pm on Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> at [uccs.ucdavis.edu](https://uccs.ucdavis.edu).**

*Although unpermitted or informal housing is conventionally associated with the Global South, the academic literature on urban informality in Global North cities is steadily growing. Policymakers in Global North countries like the U.S. are also increasingly acknowledging the prevalence of informal economic activities and responding to them by implementing policies to address their legal status. Their emphasis is often on legalizing informal activities. In the case of informal housing, the underlying policy assumption of legalization is to offer formal security of tenure and greater confidence to homeowners to increase their private investments in improving housing conditions. The legalization approach, however, fails to adequately consider the economic realities and social, institutional, and spatial embeddedness of informal housing. In this presentation, I map the geography of informal housing in the City of Los Angeles to understand its embeddedness in the city's social, institutional, and spatial conditions. I show that informal housing reproduces and reinforces the economic advantages of wealthy owners and the disadvantages of its less affluent owners and tenants. I focus on unpermitted second units on single-family-zoned lots, and map them through two strategies: real estate listings of houses for sale and complaints against unpermitted second units. Drawing on the experience from the Global South, I recommend policies based on increasing the perception of security of tenure for owners of informal housing in Los Angeles, as well as direct support for tenants. I also draw theoretical lessons for improving our understanding of the nature of informal housing in the Global North by underscoring its everyday embeddedness.*



**Vinit Mukhija** is Professor and Chair of Urban Planning in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). His research focuses on informal housing in developing countries and “Third World-like” housing conditions (including colonias, unpermitted trailer parks, and illegal garage apartments) in the United States. He is particularly interested in understanding the nature and necessity of informal housing, and strategies for upgrading and improving living conditions in unregulated housing. His work also examines how planners and urban designers in both the Global South and the Global North can learn from the everyday and informal city. He is the author of *Squatters as Developers? Slum Redevelopment in Mumbai* (Ashgate 2003; Routledge 2016), and co-editor of *The Informal American City: Beyond Taco Trucks and Day Labor* (MIT Press 2014, with Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris). He is writing a book on informal housing in

Los Angeles. The book, *The New American Dream: The Informal and Formal Redefinition of Single-Family Housing and Cities*, is under contract with MIT Press.