

BACKGROUND IMAGE: Fuel containers recycled as cooking instruments in Lusaka. Photograph taken by local resident
OTHER IMAGES: Examples of resident photographs: stories of people and materials

30

° EAST



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MATERIAL ECONOMIES

Recycling practices in informal settlements along African longitude 30°E

... the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks, and scrap wood. ▮▮

Davis, Mike, 2006, Planet of Slums, London: Verso

TOPIC

This investigation addresses the scholarship's theme **use of resources** and is framed around the question: how do inhabitants of African informal settlements recycle materials? Rather than looking at the informal settlement as a problem, I want to look at it as an inspiration; that its very informality can achieve efficient and entrepreneurial practices of recycling. The difficulties of the informal settlement can capture unplanned possibilities, where moments of creativity or faint signals can offer these new and important opportunities. While much is known about the planning, socio-cultural, and legal aspects of informal settlements, there has been little attention to the design and physical form of such self-built environments. This project aims to explore and learn from the material economies of the African city and is motivated by the Zabaleen people of Cairo ("garbage collectors") who are seen as symbols of entrepreneurship and the unrecognised value of informal settlements.

DESTINATION

The datum for the journey will be along **longitude 30°E** through the African continent. The project investigates what it is like to live, work and travel at this longitude. There are significant differences along this north-south axis in the availability and recyclability of materials. Following this line (allowing for a 2° deviation) the project will visit six cities: **Cairo** (Egypt), **Khartoum** (Sudan), **Kampala** (Uganda), **Kigali** (Rwanda), **Lusaka** (Zambia), and **Johannesburg** (South Africa).

The physical locations and layouts; demographics; histories and economies, fit only the broadest of ranges. Materials will change, be adopted, appropriated, and re-appropriated differently along the course of 30°E. The project becomes an architectural journey of seasonal change, fragile environments, and divergence. In no other place is a continent in such flux and endures the significant prevalence of informal settlements.

METHOD

The research output will be in three strands: (a) **text-based**, (b) **drawn** and (c) **photographic**. This fieldwork includes architectural drawings (plan, section, axonometric), occupant interviews and a series of illustrated essays. The final strand will be achieved by distributing 'point-and-shoot' cameras to the residents. These photographs will document their everyday lives in relation to recycling tactics and construct a narrative that places the people of the settlement at its centre. This method draws inspiration from the Mwelu Foundation, a photography-based charitable organisation in Nairobi.

The travel itself will be over twelve weeks from mid July, spending two weeks in each city. The project will be supported and co-ordinated before travel with the Mwelu Foundation, helping liaise and communicate with community or non-governmental-organisations in each destination to facilitate access, guidance and distribution of cameras.

The scholarship will be used to cover the main anticipated costs of travel (international and internal), accommodation and equipment, such as, the point-and-shoot cameras and other photographic apparatus.

ABC

CANDIDATE MOTIVATION

My motivation for this scholarship draws on my interest in urban informality and the resiliences and possibilities of the modern African city. My current fourth-year dissertation explores these issues through first-hand fieldwork with the Mwelu Foundation in Nairobi. I worked for the UN agency UN-HABITAT at its headquarters in Nairobi during my placement year, which offered an insight into the concern of accelerated urban growth. Travelling to the continent broadened my perspective on the role of architecture in everyday life.

I am a fourth-year architectural student at the University of Edinburgh. I am a founding editor of website Lecture Junkie and contribute journalistic pieces to the RIBA, which includes reflections of the lived experience in Nairobi, Slum Vibrations & Slum Vibrations II.



SIX DESTINATIONS
TWELVE WEEKS
ESSAYS, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS
INSPIRED BY THE MWELU FOUNDATION



Cairo, EGYPT



Khartoum, SUDAN



Kampala, UGANDA



Kigali, RAWANDA



Lusaka, ZAMBIA



Johannesburg, SOUTH AFRICA

