

# Review of Informality and Housing using Science Mapping Review Methodology: A Bibliometric Analysis.

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**Abstract:** Approximately 25% of the world's urban population, comprising over 1.6 billion people, resides in underprivileged neighbourhoods or informal housing called slums. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 11 places a strong emphasis on developing urban areas in a manner that is inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Informal housing is a key area of focus in achieving this goal. Despite many global declarations intended to address informality and housing challenges, these declarations have often lacked concrete guidelines, regulations, or evidence-based instructions. The primary objective of this bibliometric paper review is to facilitate the bridge between knowledge and policy. Therefore, this investigation employed a bibliometric analysis using science mapping and followed a quantitative methodological approach. We gathered and examined several publications using Scopus databases for bibliometric analysis. The results were visualised using the bibliometric R package tool biblioshiny. This study employed co-citation analysis to delineate the body of knowledge and analyse the distribution of co-citations to assess the intellectual structure. Additionally, it investigated collaborative connections at the levels of nations and institutions to review the distribution and dissemination of existing knowledge. Furthermore, this study utilised cluster analysis to identify the dynamic evolution of research topics and significant research themes, as well as to highlight emerging trends that provide potential avenues for future research. The findings suggest a specific focus on the factors that contribute to informality and housing, particularly in push and pull factors and less on institutional change processes. Moreover, the implications imply that research

*in this field is becoming less novel, prompting scholars to explore new areas by integrating insights from various disciplines.*

**Key words:** Informality; Housing; Urban; Planning; Development; Bibliometric; Biblioshiny

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## 1. Introduction

Approximately 25% of the world's urban population, which is over 1.6 billion people, reside in underprivileged neighbourhoods or informal housing commonly referred to as slums. (Quesada-Román, 2022). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) places a strong emphasis on developing urban areas in a manner that is inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Informal housing is a key area of focus in achieving this goal (Habitat, 2019). Informal housing areas are places where multiple residences are illegally occupied and lack basic services. These areas are often built on land that the occupants do not legally own. Tendencies that are disregarded or omitted from mainstream or contemporary theories, such as social, economic, and political factors, are increasingly being used to label anything informal as a recognised term of informality (Polese, 2023). The building regulations impose standards to which most households can only aspire and so they are forced to build outside the formal permissions system (UN-Habitat, 2012). Several states and international organisations have recognised that the increasing prevalence of informality will pose a significant challenge in the 21st century and numerous policy statements have been made addressing this issue. Despite these international-scale policy statements aimed at combating informality, they have rarely been backed by evidence-based instructions and guidelines. Therefore, the goal of this bibliometric paper review is to close this knowledge and policy gap in the context of informal housing sector. Housing, as per (Clapham, 2018) is a distinct and complex good that holds essential value and serves as a significant expression of a person's identity. The UN-Habitat (2020) report revealed that most of Africa's urban growth has occurred in informal settlements, leading to a significant dominance of the informal sector in the current housing stock. Bibliometric methodologies have been attempted by (Demir et al., 2020), (Nazir et al., 2020) and (Woo and Jun, 2020) to review housing literature and issues from diverse perspectives. However, very few studies have been conducted to review research particularly on informality and housing using the bibliometric mapping method. According to (Zhang et al., 2020) scientific mapping is a method used to study the intellectual structure of a field. The driving force behind bibliometric analysis is to categorize, comprehend, and integrate the body of knowledge as a guiding principle for further research.

This study employs co-citation analysis to define the body of knowledge in the field of informality and housing. It then examines the dissemination of co-citations to measure the intellectual structure of this field. Additionally, this study employs collaboration network analysis to examine the collaborative connections between authors, countries, and affiliations, aiming to understand the flow and distribution of existing knowledge. To analyse the evolution of research in this field, cluster analysis was employed to identify significant research topics and themes, as well as to highlight emerging trends that provide potential possibilities for future research undertakings. This paper conducted an extensive bibliometric analysis to review informality and

housing using science mapping review methodology. It addressed four key research questions (RQ): Which journals have published the most cited articles on informality and housing? What is the intellectual structure of informality and housing? What are the key concepts that have been studied on informality and housing? What is the landscape of collaboration evident in publications on informality and housing?

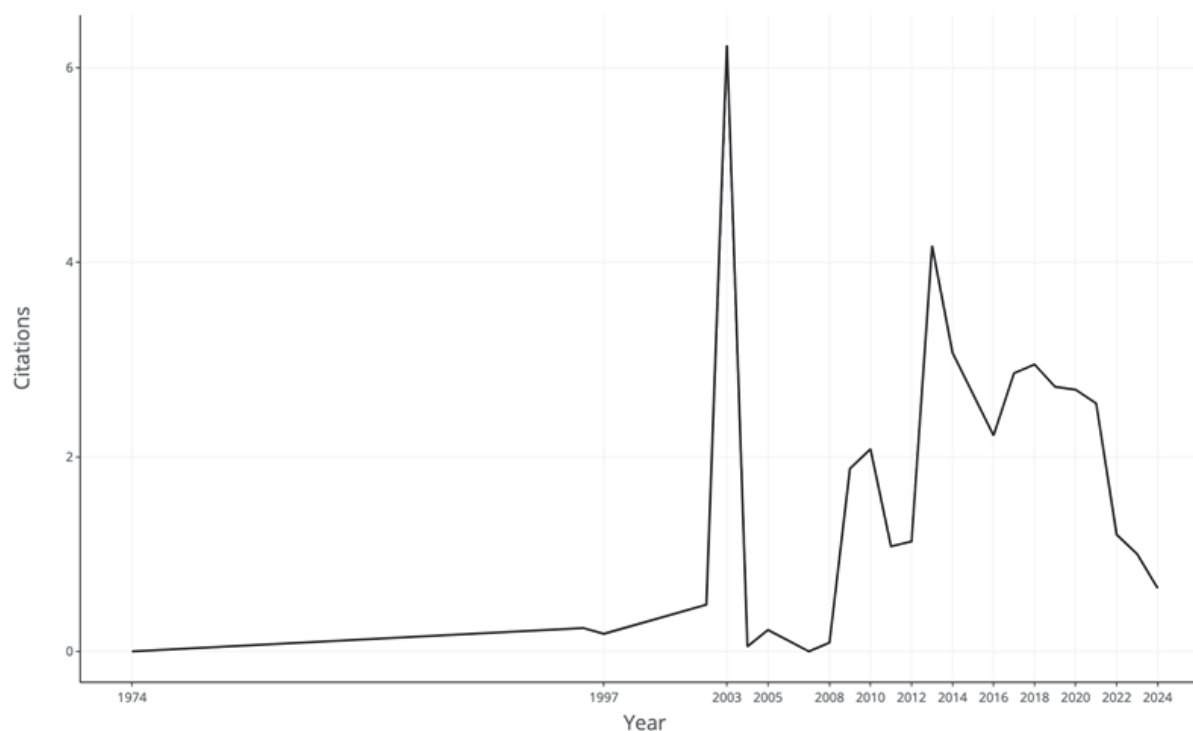
## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1 Research design and data collection**

This paper employed a bibliometric analysis and followed a quantitative methodological approach. A bibliometric analysis is a quantitative study of academic papers that generates indicators of research performance and scientific progress through numerical and mathematical simulations (Zyoud et al., 2015). Several scientific publications were collected and scanned for bibliometric analysis using only Scopus databases. This study systematically collected all academic research on informality and housing that was discovered in Elsevier Scopus, one of the most meticulously curated and extensive scientific databases in the world. This database was chosen over others like Web of Science (WoS), PubMed, and Google Scholar because of its comprehensive coverage and academic rigour in the social sciences, in particular (Mongeon and Paul-Hus, 2016). Recent studies reveal that a overwhelming 99% of publications indexed in Web of Science (WoS) are also included in Scopus (Singh et al., 2021). The search was guided within the article, title, keywords, and Boolean operators like 'AND' to combine the search and focus on the most useful and valuable results. Consequently, in September 2024, a literature search was conducted with the following search limitations inquiry string: (TITLE-ABS-KEY (informality) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (housing)). The Elsevier Scopus database inquiry yielded a total of 560 documents between 1974 and 2024. Subsequently, a data cleaning procedure was employed to verify any missing or erroneously entered information using the Zotero reference manager tool. The 550 cleaned documents were exported into a bibTeX file for data analysis using biblioshiny, a data analysis software. The final cleaned documents from 284 sources were acknowledged for data analysis. Of these, 459 were scientific articles, 62 were book chapters, 12 were books, 11 were review articles, and 8 were conference papers.

The annual average citation per year output on informality and housing-related publications is presented in plot 1 from 1974 to 2024. The first impactful publication on informality and housing was published in 1974 with the title "Full-timers: Who are these older people who are living in their RVs?" (Hartwigsen and Null, 2014) with (9) overall citations. However, in 2022, a total of (79) articles have been published, which is the highest production year on this topic of informality and housing so far. In 2003, the single paper by (Roy, 2003) "Paradigms of propertied citizenship transnational techniques of analysis" received 137 citations, setting a record-breaking average citation per year score of 6.2. Additionally, in the year 2013, we had 12 publications, and the average citation per year was a score of 4.2, which made it the second-highest average. Publications about informality and housing have declined since 2022, possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Plot 1: Annual average citation per year (1974-2024)



Source: Scopus database

## 2.2 Data analysis

Bibliometric data analysis has gradually advanced to the point where it is widely used in research management compared to other methods such as VOSviewer (Eck and Waltman, 2009), SciMAT (Cobo et al., 2012), CiteSpace (Chen, 2006), CitNetExplorer (van Eck and Waltman, 2014) and Bibexcel (Persson, Danell and Schneider, 2009). This study employed bibliometric data extracted from the Scopus database to analyse and visualise the data using the Biblioshiny R package tool. Biblioshiny, an online user interface for Bibliometric, analyses data during various stages of data analysis, including importing, filtering, conversion, analytics, and plotting documents. Co-citation, theme mapping, coupling mapping, co-occurrence, and co-authorship are data analysis methods included in this online scientific mapping. Co-word analysis, a scientific mapping technique, analyses the co-occurrence of concepts in scientific literature. This approach allows for the systematic reconstruction and visualisation of the formality and intellectual structure of scientific concepts as a weighted network of interconnected concepts. At the outset of the coding process, codes corresponding to the chosen research areas were employed. Additionally, the codes associated with the primary sections of each clustering group were correlated with each group code, aligning with existing literature and policies.

### 3. Results and discussions

#### 3.1 Top cited journals

Based on the analysed findings and Scopus data spanning from 1974 to 2024, the top journals that have published the most cited articles on informality and housing are as follows: 'Urban Studies', which holds the distinction of being the most frequently referenced source for journal article referrals, with a total of 32 publications (TC=1423). The International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, which published 21 articles (TC=1253), also endorsed the list. Habitat International, with 17 publications (TC=394), secured the third position. According to a leading academic journal score, recent metrics illustrating the annual average number of citations for newly published articles included 'Cities' (CiteScore = 11.2), 'Journal of Urban Studies' (CiteScore = 10.5), and 'Habitat International' (CiteScore = 10.5). These figures demonstrate the growing recognition of the field of informality and housing in prestigious journals.

Table 1 : Most relevant sources with local impact

Source	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
URBAN STUDIES	18	32	1.286	1051	32	2011
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF URBAN AND REGIONAL RESEARCH	14	20	1.167	556	20	2013
HABITAT INTERNATIONAL	11	17	0.688	387	17	2009
CITIES	8	16	0.286	287	16	1997
LAND USE POLICY	8	11	0.533	367	11	2010
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOUSING POLICY	7	11	1.750	127	12	2021
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING REVIEW	6	11	0.261	127	12	2002
URBAN FORUM	6	10	0.400	112	12	2010
GEOFORUM	5	7	0.455	160	7	2014
ENVIRONMENT AND URBANIZATION	4	7	0.286	140	7	2011
EURE	4	5	0.667	38	5	2019
HOUSING STUDIES	4	9	0.444	171	9	2016
REVISTA INVI	4	4	0.571	57	4	2018
ANTIPODE	3	3	0.600	77	3	2020
CITY	3	4	0.333	26	4	2016
INTERNATIONAL SOCIOLOGY	3	3	0.375	81	3	2017
JOURNAL OF HOUSING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT	3	3	0.231	51	3	2012
PLAN JOURNAL	3	3	0.333	10	3	2016
PROGRESS IN PLANNING	3	3	0.273	239	3	2014
SUSTAINABILITY (SWITZERLAND)	3	5	0.500	45	5	2019
WORLD DEVELOPMENT	3	3	0.200	111	3	2010
ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF GEOGRAPHERS	2	2	0.250	60	2	2017
EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENT	2	2	0.250	18	2	2017
CESKY LID	2	2	0.167	15	2	2013
CITY, CULTURE AND SOCIETY	2	2	0.286	35	2	2018

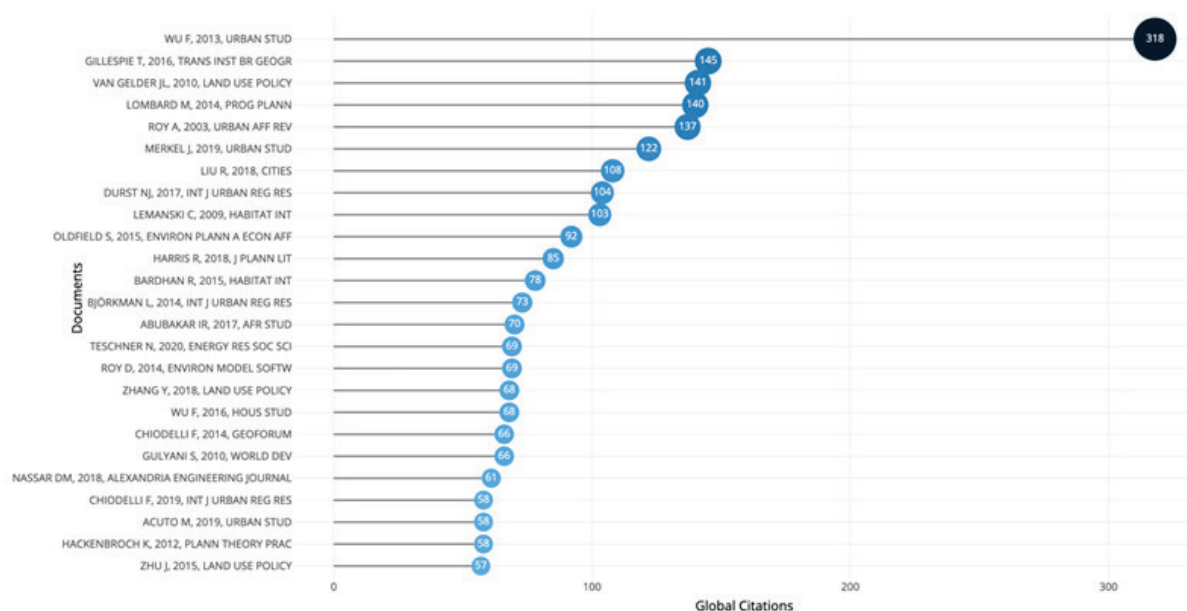
Note: TC=total citation, NP=number of publications, PY\_start = first published year, h\_index= measures both the productivity and citation impact, g\_index= emphasizes the sources of top-cited papers, m\_index=accounts for the academic lifespan of sources

Source: Scopus database



Several other well-known and highly respected journals, such as Land Use Policy, International Journal of Housing Policy, International Development Planning Review, and Urban Forum, are significant sources of knowledge base regarding informality and housing. The findings are published in multiple publications focused on urban studies, an interdisciplinary field that explores the interactions between urban planning, infrastructure, housing, and the cultural identity of communities. This field delves into understanding the challenges and opportunities that arise during urban development. The increasing acceptance of informality and housing is evident from the high citation count of general journals. Additionally, the most widely cited document is a paper titled “Informality and the Development and Demolition of Urban Villages in the Chinese Peri-Urban Area,” published in the journal ,Urban Studies.’ (Wu, Zhang and Webster, 2013). This paper stands out as the most prolific publication on informality and housing, with an impressive 318 global citations. It’s not surprising that scholars prefer this source because of its visibility within the urban studies field, as evidenced by plot 2.

Plot 2: Most global cited documents



Source: Scopus database

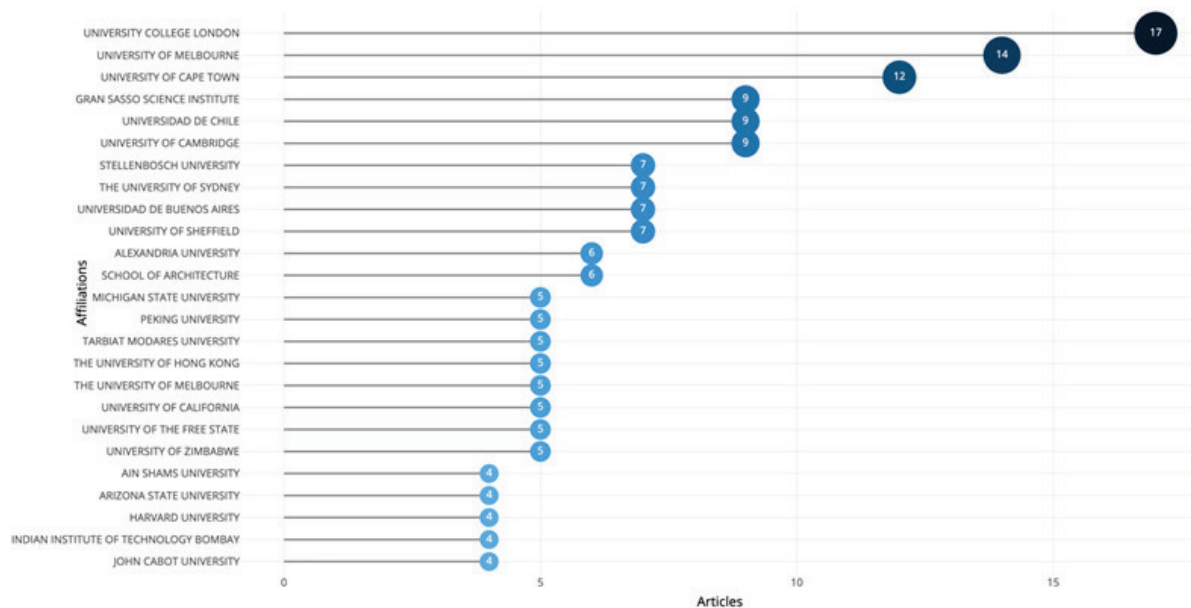
## 3.2 Intellectual structure

### 3.2.1 Relevant affiliations

The top three affiliations in terms of informality and housing research are University College London (17 articles), the University of Melbourne (14 articles), and the University of Cape Town (12 articles), as illustrated in plot 3. Other relevant affiliations include Gran Sasso Science Institute, Universidad de Chile, and the University of Cambridge, each with nine publications.

These findings highlight the diverse range of intellectual perspectives represented by top universities (UK, Australia), including contributions from developing countries (Chile, South Africa). Additionally, this study also examined the collaborative networks among the relevant affiliations previously discussed. The collaboration network analysis examined the connections between scholars in the production of knowledge. It was used to identify significant research institutions and to comprehend the process of academic knowledge dissemination. The betweenness-centrality index in the collaboration network is represented by the size of the nodes, which indicates the level of connectivity between nodes.

Plot 3: Most relevant affiliations



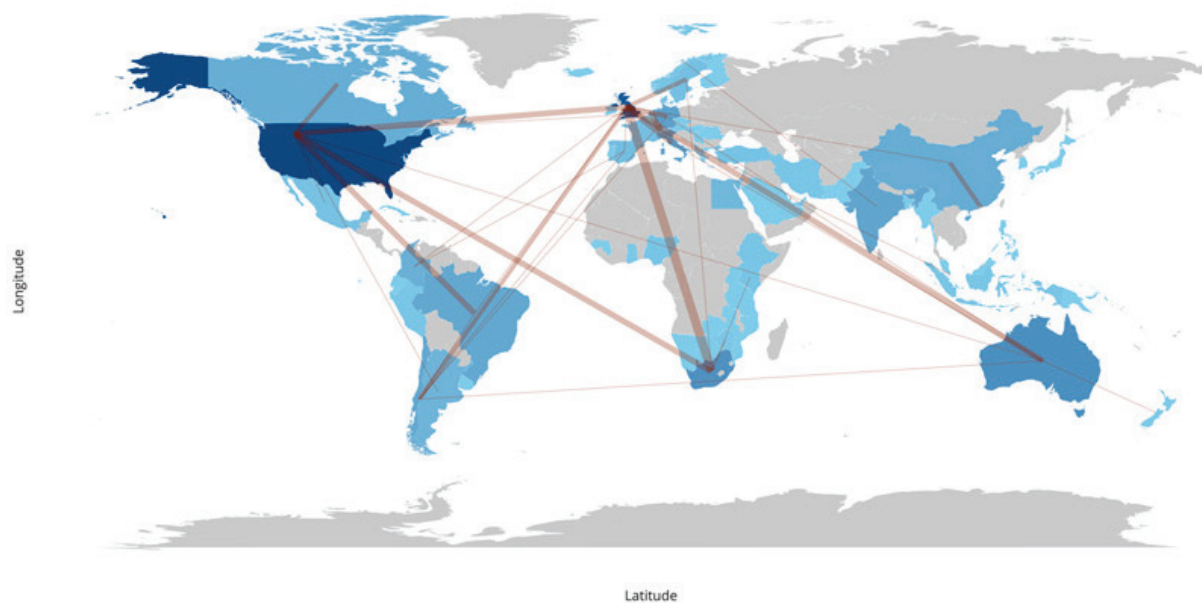
Source: Scopus database

### 3.2.2 Contributing countries

The intellectual structure, as indicated by Map 1, highlighting the most prolific and productive countries or nations based on the citation performance gained between 1974 and 2024 on articles related to informality and housing. The map illustrates that the darker the blue colour, the more significant the country's contribution to publications. The record includes well-known structures from the most relevant affiliations, such as those from the UK, Australia, and South Africa. Surprisingly, writers from the USA contribute the most publications (134), followed by academics from the UK (101), South Africa (59), and Australia (49). The findings also highlighted the dissimilarity between research among English-speaking academics (Beritelli et al., 2016) which incorporates examples such as South Africa and Chile, among the top-cited countries. The United States and the United Kingdom as expected are home to numerous prominent journals in the areas of urban studies, planning, and housing, such as 'Urban Studies,' 'Housing Policy Debate,'

and 'Cities.' The high volume of research published in these journals results in frequent citations, further setting their position as leading authorities in the field. The United States and the United Kingdom hold a dominant position primarily due to substantial funding, significant academic influence, linguistic advantages, and the potential impact of their policies. Despite its dominance, this influence occasionally hinders the conduct of context-specific research in the Global South. For instance, South Africa holds a prominent position in research within the African context, while the United States and the United Kingdom dominate global theoretical and policy discussions. The long-term legacy of apartheid-era land policies and the persistent housing inequality make informal housing a persuasive subject for study in South Africa (Turok and Borel-Saladin, 2016).

Map 1: Countries collaboration world map



Source: Scopus database

The findings also indicate that the United Kingdom and South Africa have the most robust overall collaboration, particularly in their relationship regarding informality and housing. Both countries share similar legal frameworks, which makes comparative research in housing rights, informality, and urban land management more relevant and applicable. The United Kingdom collaborates also with other countries, notably Chile, and has significant ties with Australia. As the world's largest publisher, the United States maintains close working relationships with Brazil and South Africa, which underscores the prevailing trend, and the pressing need that researchers currently face to enhance their collaboration success with developing nations. Collaborations with Pacific Asian nations, such as China and India, are notably absent. China and India adopt state-led approaches that prioritise centralised planning, eviction, and relocation policies over



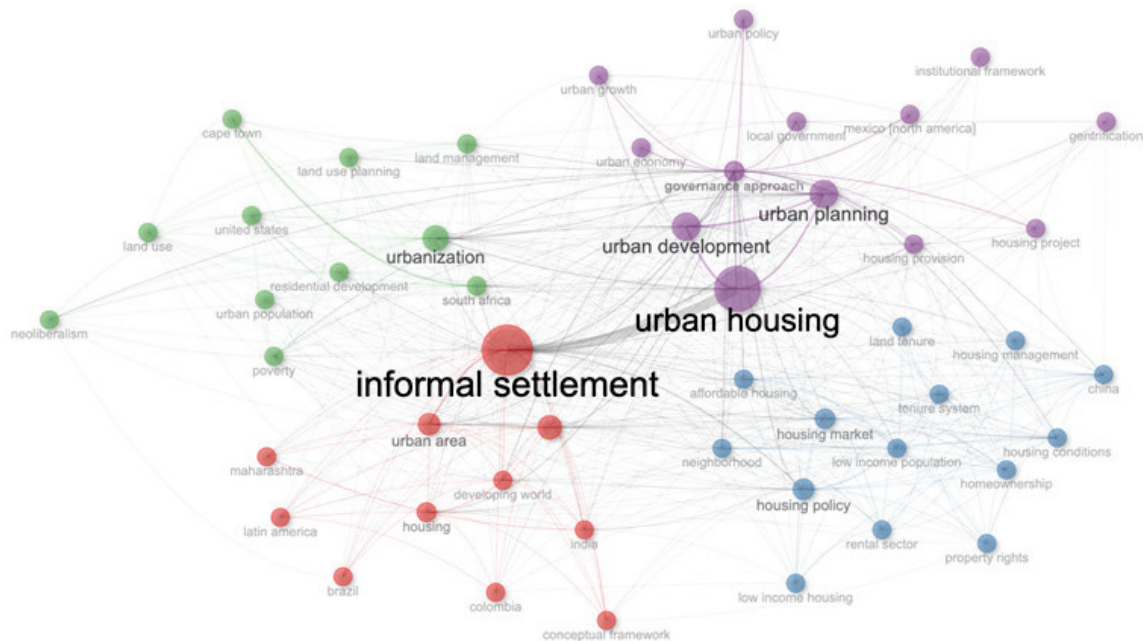
legalising informal settlements (Ren, 2018). They also have strong domestic research networks and journals that prioritise local scholars over Western collaborations. The actual inconsistencies between policy targets and policy imports regarding participation depends on the status of the institutions and involvement of the right citizen participation (Kabaghe, 2017). This success can be attributed to the consistent pursuit and development of international partnerships.

### 3.3 Key concepts

#### 3.3.1 Mapping the keywords

The report also examined the key concepts that have been studied regarding informality and housing, and how these concepts are interconnected. This was accomplished by analysing the co-occurrence of words based on abstracts, keywords and keywords plus. The findings in the analysis of the articles have been categorised into four groups or school of thought using the colours (clusters) as displayed in network 2.

Network 2: Co-occurrence network of keywords



Source: Scopus database

The size of the nodes in the cooperation network represents the betweenness centrality index, indicating connectivity between nodes. The decentralised cluster features exhibited by the major idea nodes suggest that research groups have been organised around these concepts collaboratively. 'Informal settlements' and 'urban housing' concepts are the two most important key concepts, with the strongest connections based on node size. These concepts are further tied

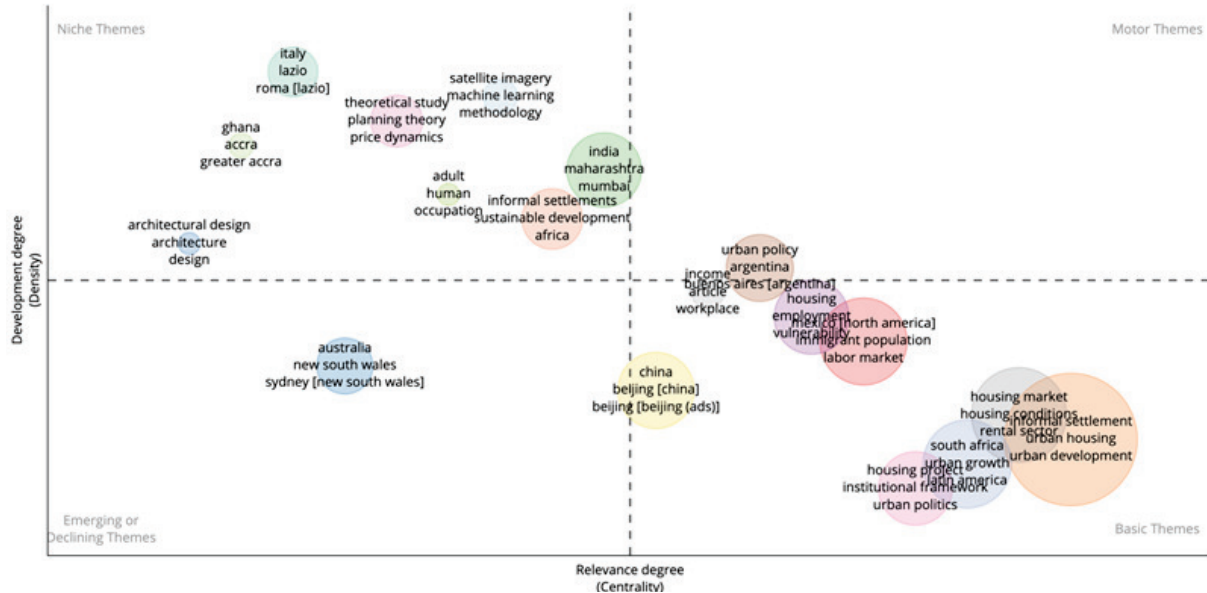
to other important concepts namely, 'urbanisation', 'urban planning', and 'urban development.' The blues cluster is most likely focussed on the push factors (formal institutions) in the context of government laws and policies, as evidenced by the key concept's 'urbanisation', 'land use planning', 'residential development', and 'land management'. Another cluster purple which is also closely related to the push factors is represented by key concepts 'urban planning', 'urban development', 'governance approach', 'local government', and 'institutional framework'. The red cluster another associated with push factors in the context of property rights incorporates keywords such as 'housing market', 'housing policy', 'property rights' and 'land tenure.'. Contrarywise, the green cluster which is associated with pull factors (informal institutions) in the context of norms and customs includes 'informal settlements', 'neighbourhood', 'informal sector', 'employment', and 'housing.' It's worth noting that the green cluster has highlighted numerous cases studies of interest, including those from Latin America (Colombia, Mexico), India, and other regions.

However, in comparison to the other clusters, the urban housing, urban planning, and urban development within the purple cluster stand out due to the nature of field of urban studies, which is highly ranked to informality and housing. Furthermore, the terms 'urbanisation,' 'informal settlement,' and 'urban housing' suggest a strong correlation, indicating that population expansion in urban housing settings is a key driver of the complex issue surrounding informality and housing. The visualising network places the 'urban housing' and 'informal settlements' close to one another but also far apart from the other clusters like 'housing markets and policy', as seen in network 3. Therefore, there is a greater tendency to experience urban poverty, especially in emerging nations such as Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. The keyword "informal settlement," which dominates the entire network, is the most significant keyword, indicating a different school of expertise because they often favour informal inferences that are prevalent in cities. The findings also indicate the necessity for further research or gaps in the field of institutional processes, particularly in comprehending institutional change and path dependencies, which are crucial solutions for attaining sustainability, resilience, and adaptability. The results suggest only the particular focus on the push and pull factors of informality and housing.

### 3.3.2 Thematic mapping

The thematic mapping is created using co-word analysis, which involves analyzing the co-occurrence themes of keywords from the dataset. These themes assist in identifying clusters of related research topics. The thematic mappings are essentially divided into four quadrants based on two dimensions: centrality (relevance degree) and density (development degree) as shown in map 2.

Map 2: Thematic map



Source: Scopus database

The findings indicate that this field of informality and housing lacks a well-developed and significant relevance theme, as indicated by the upper-right quadrant (motor theme). This suggests that the field is still in its developmental stage and has limited impact. Equally, the results also indicate that there are no emerging or declining themes (lower-left) suggesting that the research is settled and lacks innovation. There is a lack of interdisciplinary influence, which prevents the introduction of fresh perspectives in this field. Contrarywise, the basic theme (lower-right) generated and underscores fundamental topics that demand further investigation, such as 'informal settlements', 'land market', 'urban policy', 'urban growth', 'housing', and 'employment.' Additionally, the niche themes (upper-left) generated specialized and niche topics with significant development but having limited connections to other themes, such as 'satellite imagery', 'machine learning', 'theoretical study', 'planning theory', 'sustainable development', and 'architectural design'. The World Bank (2020) report also revealed a shortage of intermediate and more advanced ICT skills necessary to address sustainable solutions in the context of digital transformation and innovation.

## 5. Conclusions

There are a few limitations to the current bibliometric analysis study. First and foremost, this study was conducted using only one database for the literature review. Although we acknowledge the validity of other databases such as Web of Science (WoS), Dimensions, and Google Scholar, the results from the SCOPUS database would suffice due to its extensive coverage especially in

the social sciences field. This review acknowledges that if the data were extracted from a different database, or even a combination of databases, the results might be slightly different. The bibliometric dataset might not have included all the influential studies. This review assessed informality and housing research using bibliometric research approaches and a total number of 560 publications were accessible from 284 different sources between 1974 and 2024. On average, the number of documents released in various sources per year has grown by almost 8.34%. Studies on informality and housing have become more numerous and diverse, particularly after 2008. The United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa are the countries with the highest number of publications focused on informality and housing. The University College of London in the United Kingdom is the most productive research institution, followed by the University of Melbourne in Australia and the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The most widely cited sources in the field of informality and housing research include Urban Studies, International Journal of Urban and Regional Studies, Habitat International and Cities. The most frequently occurring keywords in informality and housing studies are 'Informal settlements,' 'Urban housing,' 'urban development,' 'urban planning,' and 'urbanisation.' The findings generally demonstrate the growing influence and contribution, particularly over the past decade, in terms of the volume, quality, and citations of published papers. Since informality and housing are widely discussed in the USA, UK, and South Africa, academics affiliated with universities in these regions have gained early recognition in publications.

In conclusion, the bibliometric analysis has identified promising areas of strength and weakness. The results of the key concepts suggest a particular focus on the push and pull factors of informality and housing. Further research and knowledge in the area of institutional processes are necessary, particularly in understanding how institutions change and how these changes are influenced by past events. This knowledge is crucial for developing effective urban solutions that can lead to sustainability, resilience, and adaptability. Additionally, the implications suggest that research in this field is becoming less novel, prompting scholars to explore new areas by integrating ideas from different disciplines. Considering the significance of the findings, they offer valuable new knowledge that will assist the editorial board and the academic community in developing research agendas, collaboration areas, and strategies to significantly advance the field of informality and housing. Furthermore, the study's findings have provided appropriate insights that will assist policymakers and public administrators in shaping effective integrated policy solutions to reduce informal housing practices. It has also enabled a thorough analysis of the complex interplay between formal and informal institutions. Future research on informality and housing could benefit from understanding the diverse approaches of thought expressed in the corpus of this study supported by evidence-based instructions and guidelines.

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