SUMMARY

In this research we have attempted to avoid the reductionism which results from analysis of urban policies and projects that focuses solely on institutional actors and fails to ascribe an active role to inhabitants and local actors. The research was conducted in four countries which differ as regards urbanization and public policies, but which are all characterized by an "authoritarian" style of government. It places these countries in a context in which major urban issues and the processes of land reclamation and/or the upgrading of urban centres which stem from them are becoming internationalized. It analyzes the interactions between institutional policies and social dynamics by targeting situations in which informal or formal urban planning activities, far from being separate, are very much interwoven.

By reconstructing projects and policies, from their inception to their implementation (or non-implementation), the research also compares two types of upgrading which seem at first sight very different: the displacement of individuals to rehouse them under better living conditions and straightforward eviction for major improvement works (motorways, major urban roads).

In spite of the differences – between countries, policies and projects – which are clearly shown by the case studies, applying a common analysis framework (that considers information flow, representations and expectations, battles of wills and negotiation and orders of legitimation) reveals some important similarities. The most obvious of these involve the ability of this interaction to produce the unexpected, in spite of a display of irreversibility and rationality in the early stages. The representations of "decision-makers" and the other parties, frequently initially represented as clear-cut, are not so different from each other and exhibit similar variability and evolution. Lastly, there is a considerable amount of transfer between different actors with regard to models and orders of legitimation. Our research also reveals some factors that can breath fresh life into such issues as the link between knowledge about social processes and the development of projects that will have an impact on space in general and on "models" that target deteriorated or illegal spaces in particular.