

# From the City to the Desert Analysing Shantytown Resettlement in Casablanca, Morocco, from Residents' Perspectives

## Abstract

Since the mid-1990s, the majority of the Moroccan population are living in cities – many of them in informal, self-built shantytowns called *bidonvilles*. After the suicide bombings in the city centre of Casablanca, carried out by *bidonville* dwellers in 2003, the Moroccan government re-enhanced its efforts to tackle the ‘problem’ of shantytowns by announcing the ambitious programme *Villes Sans Bidonvilles* (VSB, Cities Without Shantytowns). The VSB programme aims to eradicate all Moroccan shantytowns by relocating the dwellers to mostly peripheral, but serviced plots for auto-construction. Following the dominant *modus operandi*, two households from the *bidonville* together receive one plot of land in the new town. In more than 90% of the cases, they are unable to build the house themselves and transfer this duty to a private third party. The third-party investor builds a four-storey house on the plot and receives in return the two lower floors, while the two resettled households move respectively into one of the upper flats. This allows even poor residents to become owners of a new flat.

This PhD project looked at both process and outcome of resettlement from the perspective of affected people, analysing the specific resettlement project of the 90-year-old *bidonville* Karyan Central in Casablanca. Regarding the process, it asked how social dynamics, local actor constellations, and power structures shape resettlement implementation. Concerning the outcome, it analysed in how far the welfare of people affected by the VSB programme changes because of the resettlement. Methodologically, the PhD thesis compares in an analytical way current living situations in a non-affected *bidonville* and in a resettlement town. The empirical analysis is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods, largely building on a household survey ( $n=871$ ) as well as on informal conversations, participant observation, document analysis, and in-terviews with relevant stakeholders. The main field research took place between December 2016 and April 2017. The household survey includes former inhabitants of Karyan Central that were resettled mostly between 2010 and 2011 to the new town Nouvelle Lahraouiyyine and residents of the *bidonville* Er-Rhamna, which is similar in size, structure, and functions compared to the demolished Karyan Central.

The results show that satisfaction with the new housing situation depends on various factors beyond housing comfort and is largely shaped by individual needs and former housing pathways. Thus, some residents stressed that they were pushed from the city to the desert, referring to the loss of social networks, urbanity, and centrality. Other residents were appreciative of the move into new houses, hoping that the government would further invest in the development of the new town, which is already marked by multiple forms of neglect. The thesis emphasises that the VSB programme, which, although formally part of anti-poverty and urban inclusion policies, puts a primary focus on the clearance of the *bidonville*. Following a rather narrow interpretation of the right to adequate housing, the VSB programme overemphasises physical housing standards while ignoring aspects of socio-spatial integration. Moreover, various injustices, corruption, and opaque implementation practices have led to homelessness and psychological distress for a considerable number of people – even though affordability was not an issue