"Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World"
By Robert Neuwirth

In his book “Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World” author Robert Neuwirth explores the depths of a world that many of us will not, the world of squatter communities and uncovers the radical systems of sustainability needed to maintain the ad hoc cities. These thriving illegal communities stretch from countries like Brazil, Kenya, Turkey and India and boast robust systems of real estate, merchantile exchange, construction and law enforcement. These unsanctioned communities continue to grow world wild and present a number of political human rights issues.

Squatting, as described by Wikipeida, is the act of occupying an abandoned or unoccupied space or building that the squatter does not own, rent or otherwise have permission to use. Squatting is significantly more common in urban areas than rural areas, especially when urban decay occurs.[1] According to author Robert Neuwirth, there may be as many as one billion squatters globally, or about one of every six people.[2]

In each of the squatter communities where Nuewirth was a temporary resident, he reported that economics as being the impetus of the birth of the illegal city. Many, unable to live in the cities or towns due to high rents or overall cost of living, spread to outlying unincorporated areas where rents or the cost of living is more affordable. A consequence is that many of the amenities that exist in proper cites or towns do not exit in squatter communities running water, electricity, sewage and sanitation removal, law enforcement and building materials to name few. But despite not having the infrastructure of legitimate cites, complex systems of exchange and governance exist and in some instances high-rise structures and strip malls.

I found this book very enlightening, proving the will and creative spirit of people in difficult situations. It puts the idea of sustainability into an altogether different context, sustainability as it relates to self-organizing communities. It also breaks predisposed notions of “slums”, “ghettos”, and “shanty towns” unveiling a tremendous spirit and unyielding determination.

I suggest this book for those who want to go beyond the reduce, reuse and recycle thinking in regard to sustainability, and introduce the concept of community into the overall concept.