

Tim Smedley - Sustainable Urban Design: Lessons To Be Taken From Slums

guardian.co.uk. Jun 5, 2013. We should not romanticise slums, but informal settlements can teach us a lot about society and the economy of resources.

Alfredo Brillembourg is enthusing about Zurich's blue recycling bags. "They are an incredible thing," he says, his accent revealing his Venezuelan roots. The architect and former Columbia University professor talks at a breathless pace, most sentences ending in exclamation marks. "Zurich is an incredible city for recycling! Not only that but they figured out how to finance the whole thing, everyone is obliged to throw their garbage out in one type of bag, the Zuri-bag. That bag is more expensive than a normal plastic bag, you get fined if you don't use it so the price of the bag includes the cost of collection and an incentive to reduce waste."

However, we're not here to talk about Zurich, the latest home for his urban design practice Urban Think Tank, jointly run with co-director Hubert Klumpner. Rather, our conversation regards slums. The informal settlements of the global south, off the map and off the grid, which could not be further removed from the Swiss financial capital. But the Zuri-bag offers an interesting contrast - recycling is something that slum inhabitants do naturally, without expensive schemes. And Brillembourg is one of a number of urbanists who believe we can learn a lot from slums.

Read more: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sustainable-design-lessons-from-slums>