In recent decades, the issue of informality has become particularly prominent. This is due in particular to the importance of the phenomenon of informal settlements (i.e. slums) in many cities of the Global South: according to UN-Habitat, in 2012 more than 850 million people lived in informal settlements in cities of the Global South; in some countries, the majority of the population lives in a slum (with some extreme cases, such as Central African Republic, where slum dwellers are 95% of the overall urban population). However, informality is not unknown in Western countries. For instance, it is a problem concerning some particularly deprived minority groups (such as Roma or homeless) in many cities. Moreover, if we go beyond the idea that informality implies poverty or deprivation, we note that the issue also contains a feature of many urban areas in Mediterranean countries, i.e. unauthorized housing (e.g. the so-called ‘abusivismo edilizio’ in Italy). The seminar will deal with the concept of informality and seek to provide a common theoretical matrix for the analysis of different forms of informality in the urban realm. The seminar will focus in particular on the relationship between informality and regulation, and it will argue for the importance of considering the role of norms when addressing problems of informality, from both a theoretical and a practical point of view.

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Francesco Chiodelli is research fellow at GSSI. His research focuses on themes of planning theory, urban conflicts, urban poverty and informality. His papers have appeared in a number of international journals. He has published Gerusalemme contesa. Dimensioni urbane di un conflitto (Carocci, 2012) and co-edited Cities to be tamed? Spatial investigations across the urban South (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

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