

The Squatters' Records:
A Research Note on Historical Records of Squatters in Bogotá, Colombia

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Bogotá's Department of Planning houses a vast archive on the city's more than 2000 squatter settlements. In hopes of gaining legal recognition, each settlement submits records that trace its correspondence with city and national authorities since founding. These documents include petitions for public services, past requests for property titles, maps kept by the community, founding charters of neighborhood associations, correspondence with politicians, court documents (if the land is in dispute), and informal contracts for the sale and transfer of property. The records date from 1946 to present. My research note will provide a qualitative description of the material provided by the squatter communities, as well as summary statistics on the changes in historical and spatial trends in settlement formation, land prices, and political engagement. In describing the documents collected (and only later provided to the state by poor communities), this note is intended to open a methodological discussion on the study of the lives of the urban poor.