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## **Summary of the Global Informality Project (GIP)**

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The Global Informality Project invites you on a voyage of discovery, to explore societies' open secrets, to comprehend unwritten rules and to uncover informal practices. Broadly defined as 'ways of getting things done,' these informal yet powerful practices tend to escape articulation in official discourse and policy-making. Our database at [www.in-formality.com](http://www.in-formality.com) includes entries from 5 countries, 66 countries, 200+ researchers and is searchable by region, keyword or type of practice. The first Global Map of Informality is also available online. Do explore what works and how, where and why!

Informal practices are not the same as corrupt practices although there may be some overlap. The informal practices revealed in this book include emotion-driven exchanges of gifts or favours and tributes for services, interest-driven know-how (from informal welfare to informal employment and entrepreneurship, often not seen or appreciated as expertise), identity- or value-based practices of solidarity, and power-driven forms of co-optation and control. The paradox—or not—of the invisibility of these informal practices is their ubiquity. Expertly practised by insiders but often hidden from outsiders, informal practices are, as this book shows, deeply rooted all over the world.

Fostering informal ties with 'godfathers' in Montenegro, 'dear brothers' in Finland and 'little cousins' in Switzerland—known locally as *kumstvo*, *Hyvä Veli*, and *Vetterliwirtschaft*—as well as *Klungel* (solidarity) in Germany, *compadrazgo* (reciprocity) in Chile, or *blat* (networks of favours) in Russia, can make a world of difference to your well-being. Yet just like family relations, social ties not only enable but also limit individual decisions, behaviour and rights, as is revealed in the entries on *janteloven* (aversion to individuality) in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, or *krugovaya poruka* (joint responsibility) in Russia.

The Global Informality Project (GIP) assembles pioneering research into the grey areas of informality, known yet deliberately unarticulated, enabling yet constraining, moral to

‘us’ yet immoral to ‘them,’ divisive and hard to integrate into policy. While typically unmentioned in official discourse, these practices are deeply woven into the fabric of society and are as pervasive as the usage of the terms, or language games, associated with them: *pulling strings* in the UK, *red envelopes* in China, *l’argent du carburant* in Sub-Saharan Africa. While they may be taken for granted and familiar, however, they can also be uncomfortable to discuss.

Entries from all five continents presented in a WIKI format are samples of the truly global and ever-growing collection online ([www.in-formality.com](http://www.in-formality.com)). Practices are captured in the language of participants, local jargons that we interpret as ‘language games,’ shared, understood and ‘played,’ to follow Ludwig Wittgenstein’s take on practices. Based on vernacular knowledge and assembled bottom-up, our collection of case-studies allows us to view practices in a comparative context, without diminishing their diversity.

The Global Encyclopaedia of Informality – the two volumes that have so far emerged out of the Global Informality Project (forthcoming from the UCL Press) – is unique in the sense that it clusters together practices that previously have not been seen together. Each entry in this collection, describing the nitty-gritty of getting things done in a specific context, is fascinating in its own right. Yet when these practices are clustered into a wider ‘family’ and looked at as constellations, new patterns of regularity emerge. Such patterns, shared by some entries but lacking in others, tie entries together in a way which is best grasped by the notion of ‘family likeness’ or ‘family resemblance’ originally enunciated by Wittgenstein (*Philosophische Grammatik* 1969: 75, 118). Hereby we discover a complicated network of similarities and relationships, overlapping and criss-crossing (*ibid*, sections 66-67). In such conceptualisation of family resemblance, its ambivalent nature—being similar and yet different, whereby similarities ‘crop up and disappear’—is central (Wittgenstein 1953). Our dataset of practices, in all its richness and complexity, enables us to identify such ‘differing

similarities' in the four modes of human interaction – re-distribution, market, solidarity and domination – and to establish patterns of ambivalence in the workings of doublethink, double deed, double standards and double incentives.

This Global Encyclopaedia of Informality is a path-breaking exploration of informality that presents a number of discoveries:

- The bottom-up comparative analysis of practices from all over the world questions common assumptions on informality and reframes its links to corruption, poverty and development, identity, morality and oppressive regimes.
- The book highlights the role of ambivalence and complexity in the workings of human societies. Neither hidden nor fully articulated, neither particular nor universal, the patterns of ambivalence—substantive, functional, normative or motivational—prove essential for our understanding the fringes, grey-zones and blurred boundaries, which are themselves central for the world to go round.
- It opens up new policy dimensions regarding such issues as corruption, social capital, trust, mobility and migration, consumption, shortages, barter, survival strategies, alternative currencies, informal economies, remittance economies, labour markets, entrepreneurship and democracy.
- It illustrates the potential of 'network expertise,' that is, cross-disciplinary and cross-area inquiry enabled by the network of researchers. Where the disciplinary methods tend to focus selectively on political, economic, or social aspects, the 'networked' perspective provides insights into the complexity of the forces at play.
- Although informal patterns, identified in this volume, do not admit to quantitative analysis as readily as other phenomena, they have potential to become an explanatory tool for understanding social and cultural complexity and a basis of crowdsourcing in further data collection.

Following Olivier de Sardan's take on culture, we understand social and cultural complexity as 'a set of practices and representations that investigation has shown to be shared to a significant degree by a given group (or sub-group), in given fields and in given contexts' (Olivier de Sardan 2015b, p. 84). Each entry presents empirical material that:

- makes the 'informal order' more visible through ethnography and examples;
- refers to the key themes of ambivalence and complexity;
- weaves into a critical discussion of concepts devised for tackling such practices (such as clan, patronage, nepotism, revolving doors, informal networks or informal institutions);
- points to existing research and new research questions;
- suggests cross-references to parallel practices in other parts of the world.

We intentionally have not organised material by historical periods, geographical locations or analytical concepts, in order to safeguard the 'practical sense' of informality in clustering the entries (Bourdieu 1980). Where possible, entries flow in the bottom-up logic:

From more socially acceptable practices to more questionable;

From practices driven by survival to practices driven by self-expression;

From daily or regular to once-in-a-lifetime needs and the needs of others (brokerage);

From more visible practices to less visible (or deliberately made visible or invisible);

From more traditional/universal to more modern/temporal practices, responding to a particular constraint and disappearing when that constraint is gone.

What has been achieved in the Global Informality Project was only possible thanks to a remarkable collaboration of scholars across disciplines and area studies: sociologists, anthropologists, economists, historians and political scientists. Without their combined scholarly commitment, the ambition to portray at least a fragment of the world's social and cultural complexity would never have materialised. The majority of entries are based on

original ethnographic research and materials collected through fieldwork conducted worldwide, as well as secondary data analysis, media research through computer-aided technologies and human-assisted analysis. Collectively, it has taken the authors of this project over a thousand years of research to present this ‘informal worldview,’ itself only a beginning to our understanding of the ambivalent patterns of social and cultural complexity. The main outcome of all our efforts is, to date, the realisation that complexity can be approached only through mastering paradoxes; articulating the unspoken and visualising the invisible; finding patterns in the amorphous and formalising the informal; finding similarities in differences and differences in similarities; comparing the incomparable and doing the undoable.

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