The slums of Buenos Aires
Global connections on a local scale

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Under supervision of Dr. L. Smith
Foreword

This thesis is written as closure of the bachelor study Human Geography at the Nijmegen School of Management of the Radboud University Nijmegen. The subject is the global participation that can be found in a slum, in this case Villa 31 in the Argentinean capital Buenos Aires. For many years, I have been fascinated by Latin America and especially Argentina. This study gave me the opportunity to go to Argentina and explore the country. And because of my research, I have discovered and seen parts of Argentina the normal visitor never sees. Some tourists I met did not even know slums in Buenos Aires exist. I have visited slums, talked with dwellers, played football with the children. My research was also a perfect way to meet Argentineans and interesting people. I had meetings with researchers at universities, journalists and foundations.

Of course, I have had hard moments during my time in Buenos Aires. Sometimes I was asking myself, why do I have to make it so difficult? A new language, new country, new culture, new people, and most of all, a new reality. I will never forget the experience of being in the slums. Sometimes it was a harsh confrontation with reality. Especially after playing football with 8-year old kids. Afterwards I returned to my host family in their rich barrio or went to my Argentinean friends living five minutes away from the slum in luxury houses. The kids, however, had to return to their life in the slum and I was not sure what would happen with these cute children before I would see them again the next week. It was difficult and confusing to see this huge inequality between the rich and the poor. In the six months I spent in Argentina, I got to love the country and its culture, but there are aspects of it, I will never understand.

I have to thank a lot of people who helped me during my time in Buenos Aires. The family Quesada, my host family in Buenos Aires, who gave me a home in Argentina, helped me with my Spanish and talked with me about all aspects of their country. Monica Visenti and all the students of Collegio Filii Dei for inviting me to their school and for sharing their stories and, of course, for the amazing goodbye-barbeque. Priscila Palacio from CEINLADI, Luis Baer from the UBA and Cristina Cravino from the Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento for their academic assistance. Sofi Dobel and Josefina Alegre for giving me the opportunity to come to Villa la Cava and for becoming friends. All the employees of the foundations I have visited and who are doing a really great job. My tutor Lothar Smith, who gave me the freedom to do this research and to fulfill a dream. And all the others who helped me in some way.

Sander Weeda, June, 2010
An example of globalization on a local scale. ‘Celulares’ are mobile phones, which they sell here. You can see advertisements of the big mobile phone companies in Argentina: Personal and Movistar. In front of this building, there usually is a market where people mainly sell used products. The five floor building shows the attraction of Villa 31: because of lack of space, houses are getting higher and higher to accommodate new residents.
Another clear example of globalization: Argentina is often seen as a country with the best meat in the world, coming from the enormous pampas. However, together with the current stage globalization, also McDonalds arrived. As you can see, this worldwide fast-food chain has taken a very prominent position in Buenos Aires.

Figure 2. The McDonaldisation of Buenos Aires. (source: Google maps, 2010)
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Summary

In 2008, for the first time in world history, more people live in urban areas than in rural areas. Together with the current globalization of the world, this urbanization is one of the main topics in today’s human geography. Urbanization and globalization meet each other in the existence of a global urban system, formed by mega cities all over the world. These cities become more and more connected with each other due to flows of people, money and goods. Mega cities become attractive destinations for migrants, looking for prosperity. But few countries are able to handle the urban population crush, which is causing problems on an exceptional scale. A consequence of this urban growth is overurbanization. A lot of these migrants end up in shacks in massive slums with precarious housing conditions and bad living circumstances. The informal market is directly paralleled in informal shantytown and squatter housing. Because so few jobs with regular wages exist, few families can afford rent or house payments for housing. In situations where urban growth has swamped the available stock of cheap housing, the inevitable outcome is improvised shanty housing that offers precarious shelter.

Also in Argentina’s capital Buenos Aires, this is the case. The biggest, oldest and most famous villa miseria (slum) of the city is Villa 31 de Retiro. It is located in one of the most expensive parts of the city, next to the business district, the train station and port of Buenos Aires.

While global forces lead to change in the city, cities modify and embed globalization within a local context. In researching global cities, the focus is mainly on the high society and the lower part of society is too often left out. This research shows global links on this local scale. Four different kinds of links in Villa 31 are described. First, the location. Located next to the expensive Sheraton Hotel, head office of Microsoft and the port of Buenos Aires, global connections are physical very close. The area itself offers daily purchases or they can be done in the city center, close to the slum. Second, social participation shows a very clear global connection. Electricity, mobile phones and internet are common used. This provides the inhabitants information about the rest of the world and gives them the opportunity to maintain contact with family back home or in other countries. Third, economic links are very clear. The informal sector is an important source of income, but also vulnerable for global economic changes. Fourth, the housing condition and whole housing system shows the importance of the slums central location and the amount of money that flows.

Global links are available in slums. Sometimes very clear, sometimes subtle. Another conclusion is that our Western view on slums does not expect some of these connections. Slums with internet access and mobile phones are often not considered as ‘real slums’. This indicates a limited knowledge about slums in our society, with a view based on stereotypes from the media.
1. Introduction

“With more than half of the world’s population now living in urban areas, this is the urban century” says Ban Ki-moon – secretary-general of the United Nations, in his foreword of the State of the World Cities Report 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities. In 2008, for the first time in world history, more people live in cities than in rural areas. COHRE (2008), the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, suggests that “urbanization in and of itself is not inherently problematic, but the pace and sheer scale of urbanization has, in many places, far exceeded local government capacity or willingness to provide basic amenities to city residents, including adequate housing, water, electricity, and sanitation”. Urban growth is most rapid in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5 million residents every month (UN-Habitat, 2008). As a result, urbanization in many places has resulted in the creation of gigantic urban slums, where thousands and sometimes millions of urban residents live in sub-standard housing conditions, without access to even the most basic services. Already one out of three people living in cities of the developing world lives in a slum, according to UN-Habitat research. The report asserts that within two decades, nearly 60 per cent of the world’s people will be urban dwellers. As cities grow in size and population, harmony among the spatial, social and environmental aspects of a city and between their inhabitants becomes of paramount importance.

In many cities, wealth and poverty coexist in close proximity: rich, well-serviced neighborhoods and (gated) residential communities are often situated near dense inner-city or peri-urban slum communities that lack even the most basic services. A very interesting region to study this phenomenon is Latin America. This continent is already the most urbanized region in the developing world. And Latin American cities are among the most unequal in the world, with Brazilian and Colombian cities topping the list, closely followed by some cities in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico (UN-Habitat, 2008). Urban inequalities in this highly unequal region are not only increasing, but are becoming more entrenched, which suggests that failures in wealth distribution are largely the result of structural or systemic flaws. Even in places where rural migration to urban areas has begun to level off, slums within cities continue to grow at a fast pace, through good economic times and bad (Reel, 2007).

According to varying estimates from city agencies, 300,000 to 500,000 of the 3 million habitants of Central Buenos Aires live in the slums (Reel, 2007). The biggest, oldest and most famous Villa
miseria (the Argentinean name for a slum) of Buenos Aires is Villa 31. A huge slum, with approximately 25,000 to 40,000 inhabitants. The fact that it is number 31, says enough: there are plenty more…

On the other hand, Buenos Aires is one of the mega cities of Latin America, ranked as number 33 in the 2008 Global Cities Index of Foreign Policy (2008) (see attachment 1). Buenos Aires is seen as one of the global cities, a city often described as ‘the Paris of the South’. Foreign Policy (an American magazine, founded by Samuel P. Huntington, writer of the book ‘The Clash of Civilizations’). The magazine was first published by the Washington Post, later sold to The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a foreign-policy think tank based in Washington, D.C) asks itself ‘what makes a global city’? “The term itself conjures a command center for the cognoscenti (experts). It means power, sophistication, wealth and influence. To call a global city your own suggests that the ideas and values of your metropolis shape the world. And, to a large extent, that’s true. The cities that host the biggest capital markets, elite universities, most diverse and well-educated populations, wealthiest multinationals, and most powerful international organizations and are connected to the rest of the world like nowhere else”.

Figure 3. The 2008 Global Cities Index, Foreign Policy (2008). This description of Foreign Policy is a good example of a more general approach of global cities. When researching this phenomenon the focus mainly is on the highest part of society, the upper-
class, the multinationals (as Foreign Policy does with its description about elite universities, diverse and well-educated population, wealthiest multinationals etc.).

But as always, there is a reverse side of the medal. The urban problems, as described before (like the increasing proportion of slum housing), deserve more attention in researches about global cities. The city of Buenos Aires for example, has a very clear (and shocking) inequality. Very rich neighborhoods are located right next to enormous slums. Villa 31 is the best example, located in one of the most expensive parts of the city, next to the business district, the train station and port of Buenos Aires. In researching global cities, this lower part of society is too often left out. This study is about their position in the global network. Are they part of that network? Can they participate? If yes, is it in a formal or informal way? How important are they for the global city network? What are the links from the slum habitants with this wealthy and other world?

1.1 Framework

“Argentina is a country full of contradictions” Maxima Zorreguita said March 30th 2001 at her engagement announcement with the Dutch prince Willem-Alexander (Holtwijk e.a., 2001). “It’s a complicated country to understand”. There’s a culture of the rich, but in reality the country is poor. Just around 1900, Argentina was wealthier than the Netherlands. However, the former first world country transformed into a more or less third world country. The country paid her price for an era of political mismanagement, wars and economic turbulence.

Central in the development and history of Argentina stands its capital city, Buenos Aires. This metropolis can be typified as a primate city. “A primate city is a city which accommodates a disproportionately large number of a country’s population” (Pacione, 2001). It is the leading city in the country or region, disproportionately larger than any others in the urban hierarchy. The rest of the country depends on it for cultural, economic, political, and major transportation needs. Centralized development is most evident in countries where a world city or primary urban centre overwhelmingly dominates the state. In Argentina, Buenos Aires controls the political, economic, cultural and social processes of the entire nation (Knox & Taylor, 1995).

The city, located at the bank of the Rio de la Plata, has a population of approximately 3 million people. Including the metropolitan area, the total population of Buenos Aires is almost 14 million, making it one of the 20 most populated urban centers in the world. As you can see in the table below, Buenos Aires is – after Mexico city and Sao Paolo – the 3rd city of the Latin-American continent.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tsukiji</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>33,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>Korea (South)</td>
<td>23,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ciudad de México</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>22,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>22,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>22,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>21,900,000</td>
</tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>São Paulo</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Kolkata</td>
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<td>Karachi</td>
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<td>Guangzhou</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Al-Qahirah</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>14,800,000</td>
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<td>Argentina</td>
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<td>Moskva</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>13,500,000</td>
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<td>Beijing</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>13,200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>13,100,000</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Largest cities in the world, reference date 01-01-2009 www.citypopulation.de

The combination of the big percentage – and absolute number – of habitants, the political power – which is totally based in Buenos Aires – and the economic leading position in the country makes Buenos Aires not only an important city for Argentina, it is one of the major and leading cities for the whole South American continent. For example, the Port of Buenos Aires is South America’s biggest port, receiving ships from all over the world bringing consumer goods and machinery and taking away agricultural products and by-products (World Port Source, N/A). And, Buenos Aires is a cultural hub of the Americas, an attractive destination for tourists.

Many people from the countryside of Argentina are attracted to the potential prosperity in Buenos Aires, hoping for a better life in the city. The population growth in the capital is fastest in its slums, which continue to arise beside railroad tracks, appear under bridges and even expand across the grounds of an ecological reserve. In Argentina the slums are called *villa miseria*. The term is a combination made of the Spanish words ‘villa’ (village, small town) and ‘miseria’ (poverty).
The biggest, oldest and most famous *villa miseria* is Villa 31 de Retiro. On the map below you can see where Villa 31 is located in Buenos Aires:

Figure 4. Villa 31 located on the map of Buenos Aires (Source: www.welt-atlas.de).

As you can see, the *Villa* is really in the centre of the city near the famous Plaza de Mayo and the ‘Microcenter’. Zooming in on Villa 31 with Google maps on a normal map, nothing indicates a slum. No streets, no names, just a grey part of the city near the highway and port.

Figure 5. Villa 31 at Google maps, map view (Source: Google maps, 2009)
But when looking at the satellite images of the city you can see a massive slum located at the grey part of the map:

![Satellite View of Villa 31](image)

**Figure 6. Villa 31 at Google maps, satellite view** (Source: Google maps, 2009)

This is one of the key points of the slums in general: officially they do not exist, but in reality, they do.

Villa 31 covers 15.25 hectares that belong primarily to the national government (International Alliance of Inhabitants, N/A) and is situated alongside the main highway that rounds Argentina’s capital, nestled beside the train tracks originating from the central train station. The self made houses – home to thousands of people – are clearly visible to drivers as they cruise by. Villa 31 is located in Retiro on public lands belonging to the port of Buenos Aires and the main railroad terminal. Along the horizon above the ‘villa’ the modern city skyline arises: tall, shiny buildings in the rich upper-class district Retiro with companies like Microsoft, Daimler-Chrysler, and the luxury Sheraton Hotel, which contrasts sharply with the situation in Villa 31 (La cooperativa de mujeres artesanas de la 31, N/A).

### 1.2 Research target

This research combines two important themes of today’s human geography: globalization and urbanization.
Globalization is the “increasing interconnectedness of different parts of the world through common processes of economic, environmental, political and cultural change (Knox & Marston, 2007). Knox says that “in the global economy goods and services are produced and marketed by an oligopolistic web of global corporate networks whose operations span national boundaries but are only loosely regulated by nation-states”. The continuing expanding of connections between places becomes more and more important. Cities play a vital role in this development. They are – more than ever – connected to each other and create a global network. An outcome of globalization is the consolidation of the core of the world system (Knox & Marston, 2007). The countries of the world can be divided into major world regions, the ‘core’ and the ‘periphery’ and in-between the ‘semi-periphery’. The core includes major world powers and the countries that contain much of the wealth of the planet. The periphery are those countries that are not reaping the benefits of global wealth and globalization. Because of the uneven global economic development, strongly influenced by cultural and political factors, the core-periphery contrasts become bigger and bigger.

The second topic is urbanization. The process by which an increasing proportion of a national population lives in towns and cities (Pacione, 2005). As said before, in 2008, for the first time in world history, more people live in cities than in rural areas. And those cities become bigger and bigger. The United Nations counts 19 mega cities – or those with more than 10 million people – throughout the world (Foreign Policy, 2008). Greater Buenos Aires is one of those 19 mega cities with its population of 13.8 million, 38% of the total population of Argentina. As Knox and Marston (2007) suggest “urbanization is one of the most important geographic phenomena in today’s world”.

These new and big challenges of globalization and urbanization are for example the expanding of slums in the cities. Pacione (2005) describes slums as “an area of overcrowded and dilapidated, usually old, housing occupied by people who can afford only the cheapest dwellings available in the urban area, generally in or close to the inner city”.

“Throughout much of the world, the scale and speed of urbanization, combined with the scarcity of formal employment, have resulted in very high proportions of slum housing, much of it erected by squatters” (Knox & Marston, 2007). About one-third of the world’s urban dwellers live in slums, and the United Nations estimates that the number of people living in such conditions will be doubled by 2030. This as a result of fast urbanization in developing countries (Reel, 2007), because most of the largest metropolitan areas are based in developing countries.
These central themes are all coming together in the slums of Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires can be seen as a ‘global city’. Pablo Cicolella and Iliana Mignaqui argue in *Global Networks, Linked Cities* (2002) that “Buenos Aires is one of the largest urban agglomerations in the world, located in the second hierarchical level of global cities together with Sao Paolo and Mexico City, with more weight in its national economy than these cities in theirs and in this regard more like Greater London with respect to the United Kingdom or Ile de France, with respect to France”. Buenos Aires is connected with the rest of the world with flows of money, people and goods. According to the research of Foreign Policy in 2008, Buenos Aires is ranked as number 33 in their Global City index. In 1986 John Friedmann ranked Buenos Aires as a secondary world city in the core-world.

The urbanization expresses in the fact that Buenos Aires has shown a spectacular increase of their inhabitants and with its population of almost 14 million at the moment, it’s one of the mega cities in the world. As you can see in the table below, the city grew at a very high speed. In less than 50 years, the population doubled.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
<td>5 098</td>
<td>8 745</td>
<td>11 847</td>
<td>12 553</td>
<td>13 089</td>
<td>13 432</td>
<td>13 768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1. Population growth of Buenos Aires.**


At the moment, around 10% of the population of central Buenos Aires lives in slum conditions. The city contains slums since 1930. With today’s circumstances, the slums are getting bigger and the inequality in Buenos Aires increases.

As Pacione (2005) suggests, there is a reflexive relationship between the global and the local. “While global forces lead to change in the city, cities modify and embed globalization within a local context”. This is a critical point, because it indicates the presence of the global phenomenon at a local scale. This research does the same: looking at global links on a local scale. It seeks to explore the connection between mega cities and globalization. There are lots of researches and books about it, but – in my opinion – the position of the lowest part of society is too often left out. Buenos Aires attracts many people from the countryside of Argentina (and also from other South American countries, for example Bolivia), hoping for a better life in the capital. As Pacione (2005) says, “the principal cause of rural-urban migration is the higher wages
and more varied employment opportunities available in the city”. As suggested before, the continuing globalization makes Buenos Aires more connected with other cities, and potential employment may be found in this ‘global network’ of the city.

This research looks at global connections on a local scale. The habitants of Villa 31 can actually see global signs from the doorsteps of their houses when they look around: the port of Buenos Aires, the multinationals located at the other side of the road – the natural border of the slum – and the train station. Physically, they are very close to global connections. But can they take part in this system? What global links can be found inside the slum? Can they participate in the global network of Buenos Aires to improve their quality of life? If yes, how do they participate? Is it limited to economic dimensions? Or does it also include social participation?

1.3 Research questions

Given the context described above, the central question of this thesis will be:

*How and to what extent do the habitants of the slum ‘Villa 31’ participate in the global network of which Buenos Aires is part of?*

This question is based on the following conceptual model:

![Figure 7. Conceptual model](image)

At a macro level, the concept of a global network in a globalizing world is the beginning of this research. This global network is mainly based on the existence of global cities, which together form a global network. When looking at such a global city, the global becomes local verifiable. The focus of this research is the position and participation of an even more local part of the city, a specific district: the slum and its dwellers. This brings us to a connection with the point the model started: what is their role in ‘the’ global network?
This paper is divided in three parts. The first part is the theoretical research about the themes shortly described before: globalization, urbanization and slums. The second part is the empirical research in Villa 31, to find out what the position of the lowest part of society is in global networks. The third and last part is the conclusion and discussion.

A lot of literature about globalizing cities exists. Saskia Sassen, writer of The Global City (2001), suggests that as digitized, computerized and electronified as globalization is, cities still form an essential element in the mechanics of globalization. This because only global cities can provide the specialized and always shifting infrastructure required to keep up with the needs of international capital. Knox and Marston (2007) argue, a small number of ‘world cities’, most of them located within the core regions of the world-system, occupy key roles in the organization of global economics and culture”. And “world cities provide an interface between the global and the local”. I will use the literature to describe the position of the world cities in the global network. An important source is the theory of Manuel Castells about the The Information Age.

So the first sub question will be:

- What is the literature saying about the slums of a world city in a globalizing world?

The second part of this research contains the empirical study. First, I have created the theoretical framework in the first part of this paper, now I will make a shift from macro to micro level. As said before, this local and informal part of global cities and global networks is too often left out in the existing literature.

- What global connections can be found in slum Villa 31?

At last, conclusions will be made and potential discussions and following researches will be suggested.
2. Methodology

As supposed before, the first part will be literature research based on existing studies about the slums of a world city in a globalizing world. The second part will be empirical research. Therefore, I have visited Villa 31, observed the area and talked with the dwellers.

Vennix (2006) says “theoretical hypothesis will be transformed into a plan for empirical observation. The collected empirical data have to definite an answer about the truth of the hypothesis.” The chosen methodology is a case study. This type of research is effective when it comes to research questions with a focus on finding out how or why something is as it is (Vennix, 2006). Robson defines a case study in Saunders (2008) as “a research strategy which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”. According to Yin in Research in Organizations (2005) “it is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. That is what this research will do: looking at Villa 31 in its real life context and trying to get multiple sources of evidence, by observing and interviewing dwellers and specialists. I will use empirical data to investigate my research question. It is an inductive research; from a case study, I will draw more general conclusions. As Yin suggests in Saunders (2008), it is better to do a multiple case study, but because of lack of time, I have only investigated one case: Villa 31. I will try to make an embedded case study by talking with different types of dwellers in the Villa.

2.1 Research process and difficulties

Researching in a complete different country, even a total different continent, was the big challenge before I started. To experience a whole new culture, different people, different living situations, another language. And not just as a tourist, but as a researcher. This fact, would give my time in Argentina a really special touch.

I had to take a lot of decisions, already before my time in Argentina started. I chose to improve my Spanish, to be able to talk with the dwellers and other people in Argentina. I already knew some basic Spanish, but went to lessons in Buenos Aires and lived with a middle-class family in one of the richest areas of the city: Recoleta. Living with this family was a great way to improve my Spanish, but also to learn about the Argentinean culture and values. And, it was interesting to
talk with them about the slums and (urban) problems of Buenos Aires and to hear their opinions about it. The life of this family was quite similar to my life in the Netherlands. It is said that Buenos Aires is the most European city of Latin America, and in some parts of the city, like Recoleta, it surely is.

Already in the Netherlands I had a lot of email contact with Argentina. The university itself does not have any formal contacts with universities in Buenos Aires (anymore). So I had to arrange it all by myself. Via a professor in Nijmegen I made contact with an academic institute; El Centro de Investigaciones en Estudios Latinoamericanos para el Desarrollo y la Integracion. This institute of the Universidad de Buenos Aires was a good starting point for my research. My first week in Buenos Aires, I met the director, Maria de Monserrat, and secretary, Priscila Palacio. This meeting was a good kick-off for my research. They were the first I talked with about the human geography, economy, history of Argentina and about the slums. We spoke about my research proposal and the best way to do my investigation.

Later that week I joined some students to work in Villa la Cava, a huge slum in the rich suburb San Isidro, to have my first confrontation with a slum. We played games with the children and helped them with their homework. This was helpful to see a slum and the reality of life inside it, and in total I went around 10 times to La Cava. Personally it was an impressive experience. Playing with these adorable kids, who live in this massive slum. The most confusing thing was to see these luxury apartments with swimming pools and tennis courts literally on the other side of the road. They also hired private security companies to protect them against the slum dwellers. So, at the edge of the slum men with enormous guns were protecting the rich people on the other side of the road, but in the slum itself the police never appeared. And after the two hours we spent with the kids, the Argentinean students returned to their enormous houses, and I went back to my host family in the rich area of Recoleta, but the children had to return to their life in the slum. This was a moment I really realized I had not picked an easy topic...

I met the Dutch correspondent Robert-Jan Friele, who works as a freelance journalist and writes for magazines and regional newspapers about Latin America. He wrote an article about the prices of renting a room in Villa 31. Besides that, it was good to hear his opinion about Argentina, the slums and he had some good contacts for me. He gave me the phone number of Josefina Eisele, who works for foundation Solidaridad South America. I had a meeting with her, we talked about the structure of the slums in Buenos Aires. A very informative conversation. I joined her on Saturday to work in Villa 21, another huge slum in Buenos Aires. Again, we played
with the kids. The church we worked in, was really inside the slum and we had to wait outside until an inhabitant of Villa 21 came to lead us to the church, otherwise it was too dangerous to enter the area.

Another good meeting was the one with Victoria Ricciardi form the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE). We talked about the structure of the slums and Villa 31 in particular. Ricciardi was the author of the Buenos Aires part of the research Women, Slums and Urbanization. Examining the Causes and Consequences. She wrote a chapter about Villa 31 and knew a lot about the rights slum dwellers have. Either Ricciardi as Eisele knew some other people who could help me as well. Ricciardi gave me the number of Cristina Cravino, an anthropologist working for the Universidad Nacional de Sarmiento and the slum expert of Argentina. I interviewed her and bought two of her books about the slums in Buenos Aires. This meeting was really important for my view on the structure of the slums.

Soon it turned out that it was quite difficult to find a good entry to Villa 31. It was as clear as could be, I could not enter the slum alone. That would be far too dangerous and would not attribute a lot to my research. I had some good contacts in other slums, but Villa 31 seemed to be more difficult to enter. It was hard to find a good entrance into the slum, and I was still unsure about possible interview questions. Time was running fast and I did not have the opportunity yet to enter Villa 31. But because Villa 31 was by far the most interesting slum for my research, with its central location and global links closely, I decided to keep trying and not to switch my research area. And all the meetings I had already, were really useful. It was such a different and difficult world I was working in. I needed time to understand the whole structure of the country and of life in slums and of course the language. My Spanish was improving quickly, but the language in the slum can be quite different and even for native speakers sometimes hard to understand.

The contacts I already had suggested me some other people, and after a few weeks I found some good links with Villa 31. I met Angelica Kennedy who works for a foundation which provides scholarships for students in Villa 31, so they can go to university. I joined Kennedy in a meeting with two boys from Villa 31 about the possibility to get a scholarship. We were really surprised, the first time we waited one hour for the students before they sent a text message to say they could not come, because they had to organize a party for the following day. The consideration of not going to the meeting, but to organize a party was hard to understand. The next week we finally had the meeting and I talked a bit with the students.
The best contact however was Pablo Nicastro, a lawyer who teaches law two times a week at a secondary school in Villa 31, Filii Dei. I joined his lesson with the fifth class. Because it was the last lesson of the school year, there was not really a program, so I became the program of the lesson. I talked with the students about their lives, my live in the Netherlands and a lot of other ordinary topics people from 17/18 year talk about. It was a good way to get to know them and learn about their lives. Afterwards, I spoke with the director of the school about the possibility to do more at the school to help my investigation. But my first two months in Buenos Aires almost ended at the moment I found this entry in Villa 31 and the school season was almost over. I arranged with the director I could revisit the school when returned to Buenos Aires at the end of my trip.

After two months in Buenos Aires, I started traveling around Argentina, looking for other interesting places in this enormous country. I saw small villages in the North of Argentina and also in Bolivia, with enormous poverty. These are the locations, the migrants in Villa 31 are coming from. Walking around those desolate places I could imagine the hopeless situations of the people there and their considerations to move to the big city, with all its activity and opportunities.

After a great trip, which gave me a good view about the life in other parts of Argentina, I returned to Buenos Aires for one last month working on my research. I returned to my host family and had some good contacts from my first period. My Spanish was a lot better now, so communication would be easier.

The first day I had a meeting with the director of the secondary school to talk about possibilities to collaborate. I could come every Wednesday to the school to talk with the children and maybe with them I could enter the slum and talk to their parents.

One of my main concerns was how to approach the habitants of Villa 31. Some people immediately told me that a slum is not a zoo (of course...) and that the dwellers are not very forthcoming to external people. It was important to obtain their trust, and the school was a good way to see how to do that. The students were very direct and open and of course they asked me what I was doing. For me it was just difficult to say I was doing a research about Villa 31. This area was their reality, their life and they know exactly what their position is in the Argentinean society. I was struggling with the way to deal with this, and I think that maybe obstructed my empirical research in Villa 31. I was not sure how to approach the dwellers and was unsure about the way they would react on my presence and research. Also, because it was very difficult to
construct good interview questions. Already before my trip I knew that it would be hard to find good indicators to find global participation with the interviews I planned to do. The step from macro (globalization) to a micro (local) scale was a hard one to take. During my time in Argentina I hoped to find out how to do this, but it appeared to be much more difficult than I thought. Maybe I had to show more courage, but as an inexperienced researcher in such a different and difficult place I do not think I can blame myself a lot. I did what I thought I could do and when turned out that the interviews would not succeed, I already had spoken with lots of other people and observed a lot in Villa 31, which had given me a lot of information.

One of the most important meetings I had at the end of my time in Buenos Aires was the one with Luis Baer, geographer at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and colleague of Pablo Ciccolella, a well know Argentinean geographer. Baer was quite critical at my research and he thought interviews were not the best way to do my research. Also, it took some time to convince him of the relevance of my research. Until I explained that our view in the Netherlands of a slum is quite different compared to what I saw in Villa 31 (electricity, houses made of stone, internet), he did not understand what I wanted to research. When I made that clear, he supposed my research really has its relevance.

Although I did not succeed in interviewing the dwellers of Villa 31, I had good informal conversations with some, and especially the students of the school were really helpful. They really gave me a good view about the life in their slum. We talked a lot and they even organized a goodbye football match and barbeque for me (everyone paid 10 peso for a huge barbeque with a lot of meat and soft drinks, prepared by a father of one of the students). We talked, laughed, played, ate, danced and made pictures together. We really had a good time together and it was hard to leave. Unfortunately, it was already one of my last days, because this evening made me come closer to the students and if I could have stayed longer, I am sure I could improve my research. Just when I had the feeling I was on the right way, I had to leave Argentina... But because of modern communication methods, like Facebook, I still have contact with the students. We are able to stay in touch, to send each other messages and to keep posted about our activities. This is maybe one of the most important results of my research. Not only personally of having friends in Buenos Aires and keeping in touch with them, it also proves my research subject: the global participation in the slums does exist and I am part of it.
Of course, there is a lot that could have been better. A could have made my theoretical framework before my journey, so I already had more theoretical knowledge and knew better what to look for in Buenos Aires. Now I read things afterward and I thought: if I knew this before, I had done some things differently. On the other hand, now I read it with my knowledge and experiences from Buenos Aires. Without them, maybe I did not understand the message of the readings.

Another critical comment may be the fact that I did not make a full description of Buenos Aires as a global city in this thesis. I wanted to do this, but because of a lack of time, I could not. In Buenos Aires I was working really hard to find entries in Villa 31, with having meetings about the slums etc. I had the feeling, my focus on the slums was more important than the global position of Buenos Aires as a city. So I choose to invest my time in understanding the slums of Buenos Aires.

However, I am content with this project. I think I have found some interesting things to talk about in this paper. For me it proves the lack of knowledge we have about the lives in slums and it gives me loads of new ideas for new research.

Above all, it was an unbelievable experience. A lot of tourists I met in Argentina did not even know slums in Buenos Aires really exist. Because of my research I got to know another part of the country. I visited different slums, talked with the dwellers, played football with the children. For me it was an experience I will never forget. Also as a young researcher this process was priceless. I learned a lot doing research in such a different environment. I am sure this will have an enormous contribution to my capacities as a researcher.
3. Theoretical Framework: The slums of a world city in a globalizing world

The subject of this research is a slum in a world city: Villa 31 in Buenos Aires. There are a few topics in today’s Human Geography which shape the context of this study. In this theoretical part, I will describe these topics to provide a good framework. It is mainly based on the book *Human Geography. Places and regions in global context* from Knox and Marston (2007).

A very important note to start with, is the same as Richard Grant and Jan Nijman make in their article “*Globalization and the Corporate Geography of Cities in the Less-developed World*” (2006). “Overall, the globalization debate is not nearly as ‘global’ as it probably should be, it has a Western bias. Much of the theories and empirical research are focused on the experiences of the United States, Western Europe and other countries in the core of the world economy.” This is exactly the basic assumption for this study and the reason to look at the global participation of a slum.

3.1 Globalization

The leading context for his research is the current globalization of the world. This phenomenon can be described as ‘the increasing interconnectedness of different parts of the world through common processes of economic, environmental, political and cultural change (Knox & Marston, 2007). Knox says that ‘in the global economy goods and services are produced and marketed by an oligopolistic web of global corporate networks whose operations span national boundaries but are only loosely regulated by nation-states’. The continuing expanding connections between places become more and more important.

In the book *Geographies of development* (1999) Potter e.a. describe three different aspects of global change.

1. The world is effectively shrinking in terms of the distances that can be covered in a given time period, because of faster and more efficient transport.
2. Better communications such as satellite television and internet mean that people everywhere in the world can hear what is happening elsewhere on the planet more quickly than ever before.
3. Global corporations and global marketing activities are resulting in the availability of standardized products and television programs around the world. Not only McDonalds and Coca Cola are clear examples of this globalization, also the financial markets become more and more global. This is related with an impressive acceleration in the speed of
financial flows and transactions. This provides that money now can exist in a purely electronic form, so it takes only seconds to send sums from one part of the world to another.

Knox and Marston (2007) notice that global connections already exist for a very long time, but today they differ in at least four important ways of those of the past.

1. Globalization functions at much higher \textit{speed} than ever before.
2. Globalization operates on a much larger \textit{scale}, leaving few people unaffected and making its influence felt in even the most remote places.
3. The \textit{scope} of global connections is much broader and has multiple dimensions: economic, technological, political, legal, social and cultural.
4. The interaction and interdependencies among numerous global actors have created a new level of \textit{complexity} for the relationships between places and regions.

Manuel Castells (2002) says that globalization is “the process by which core activities in the economy, in media communications, in science and technology and in strategic decision-making are linked worldwide in real time, thus having the potential of daily working as a unit on a planetary scale”. Castells argues that in fact, “most activities are not global, they take place in a local or regional setting”. But the jobs these (global) activities “create locally, and the livelihood of people involved in these activities, are largely dependent on a globalized core, whose performance is organized in networks of global interaction via telecommunications, information systems and electronically based, fast transportation systems”.

According to Castells, “the global economy today – and society at large – is constructed around movement and flows: flows of information, ideas, symbols, money, technology and the forms of social interaction which lead to their exchange and assimilation”. This enables us to interact with others, no matter the distance in space or time. “This new informational capitalistic world economy is the basic principle of a new division of labor, social fragmentation and of a new culture. A culture of ‘real virtuality’ that originates because of the separation of cultural codes and symbols from time and space.” A consequence of this process is the spatial distributing of cities. Castells suggests a shift from a ‘world of place’ to a ‘world of flows’. Network cities arise, which function as \textit{nodes} (strategic intersections) or \textit{hubs} (a switch, spreading information) in a worldwide flow of goods and ideas.
3.2 Global urban system

Today’s globalization of the economy has created a global urban system. Castells (2002) suggests that the core activities of globalization are based in major metropolitan areas, with important global interactions between these metropolitan nodes. World cities play key roles in organizing space beyond their own national borders. They have become the control centers for the flows of information, cultural products and finance. Together they sustain the economic and cultural globalization of the world.

According to Pacione (2005), world cities also provide an interface between the global and local. The character of urban environments throughout the world is the outcome of interactions among a host of environmental, economic, technological, social demographic, cultural and political forces operating at a variety of geographic scales ranging from the global to the local. They contain “economic, cultural and institutional tools that channels national and provincial resources into the global economy. That transmits the impulses of globalization back to national and provincial centers”. Based on that, Knox and Marston (2007) give world cities the following characteristics:

- They are the sites of most of the leading global markets for commodities, commodity futures, investment capital, foreign exchange, equities and bonds.
- They are the sites of clusters of specialized, advanced business services, especially those that are international in scope and that are attached to finance, accounting, advertising, property development and law.
- They are the sites of concentrations of corporate headquarters – not just of transnational corporations but also of major national firms and large foreign firms.
- They are the sites of concentrations of national and international headquarters of trade and professional associations.
- They are sites of most of the leading nongovernmental organizations (NGO’s) and intergovernmental organizations (IGO’s) that are international in scope.
- They are the sites of the most powerful and internationally influential media organizations; news and information services; culture industries.

The world-cities are connected with each other, forming a global network. Different world cities have different positions in this global network (also called global system). These differences exist because of diverse functions and different degrees of importance as world cities.
The increasing globalization of the world and the *informationalization* of the economy – the shift of advanced economies from primarily goods production to predominantly information handling – has affected the urban system strongly. Manuel Castells in *The Information Age* has described this as “the transition to the informational mode of production: a shift as momentous, as the shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy in the 18th and 19th centuries”. In typical developed countries, already by 1991 between three-fifths and three-quarters of all employment was in services, while between one-third and one-half was in information handling; generally these proportions have doubled since the 1920s (Hall, 2005).

According to Saskia Sassen, writer of the book: The Global City, there is no such entity as ‘the global economy’ in the sense of a seamless economy with clear hierarchies. The reality consists of a vast number of highly particular global circuits: some are specialized and some are worldwide while others are regional. Different circuits contain different groups of countries and cities (Sassen, 2008).

John Friedmann created already in 1986 “The World City Hypothesis”, with an example of a global urban system. He distinguishes core and periphery cities, and primary and secondary cities. As you can see, Buenos Aires is a secondary city in the semi-periphery.

![Figure 8: The World City Hierarchy](Friedmann, 1986) [www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/rb/rb301.html](www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/rb/rb301.html)

An outcome of globalization is the consolidation of the core of the world system (Knox & Marston, 2007). The countries of the world can be divided into major world regions, the ‘core’ and the ‘periphery’ and in-between the ‘semi-periphery’ exists. The core includes major world powers and the countries that contain much of the wealth of the planet. The periphery are those
countries that are not gathering the benefits of global wealth and globalization. Semi peripheral regions are, according to Knox & Marston (2007) able to exploit peripheral regions, but are themselves exploited and dominated by core regions. They consist mostly of countries that where once peripheral. This semi-peripheral category shows that neither peripheral status nor core status is necessarily permanent. And because of the uneven global economic development, strongly influenced by cultural and political factors, the core-periphery contrasts become bigger and bigger.

Sassen (2002) suggests that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in a number of major cities in the developing world that have become integrated into various world markets: Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Bangkok, Shanghai, Manila, Beirut and Mexico City are a few examples. The new urban core was fed by the “deregulation of various economic sectors, the ascendance of finance and specialized services, and integration into the world markets”. The opening of stock markets to foreign investors and the privatization of what were once public sector firms have been crucial institutional arenas for this articulation. Given the vast size of some of these cities, the impact of this new core on the broader city is not always as evident as in central London or Frankfurt, but the transformation is still very real.

3.3 Urbanization

In today’s world, urban areas take a central place. As Knox and Marston (2007) suggest “urbanization is one of the most important geographic phenomena in today’s world”. Urbanization can be seen as “the process by which an increasing proportion of a national population lives in towns and cities” (Pacione, 2005). And not only is the proportion of the world’s urban population growing at a rapid rate, also “the world’s economic, social cultural and political processes are increasingly being played out within and between the world’s system of towns and cities”. Cities have always been a crucial element in spatial organization and the evolution of societies, but today they are more important than ever. According to Knox and Marston, the number of city dwellers worldwide raised by 1.35 billion between 1980 and 2005. In 2010, 50.5 per cent or 3.5 billion of the people on earth live in cities (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2010). Migration from rural to urban regions is an important reason for this urban growth. The global population as a whole has become more urban and less rural. As Pacione (2005) suggests, “this rapid growth has influenced not just the physical location of population but also the organization
and conduct of economic and social life of most people on the planet — both urban and rural dwellers”.

The cause of the urbanization is a combination of two factors:

1. Migration from rural to urban areas.

Emigration has provided one potential opportunity to improve the lives of rural inhabitants. But as the frontiers of the world-system closed, the wealthier core countries have created barriers to immigration. The only option for the growing numbers of poor rural inhabitants was — and still is — to move to the larger towns and cities. There at least is the hope to find a job, and the prospect of access to schools, health services, piped water and the kinds of public facilities and services that are often unavailable in rural regions. Cities also have the attraction of modernization and the availability of consumer goods.

2. Natural increase of the urban population.

Rural migrants go to cities more out of desperation and hope rather than being drawn by jobs and opportunities. Because these streams of migrants mainly consist teenagers and young adults, an important additional component of urban growth has followed: exceptionally high rates of natural population increase. In most peripheral countries the rate of natural increase of the population in cities exceeds that of net in migration. On average, about 60 percent of urban population growth in peripheral countries is attributable to natural increase.

One of the most prominent characteristics of urbanization is the amount of the urban population living in enormous cities that dominate the global urban and economic system. The metropolitan regions are the ones growing and expanding most rapidly.

Knox and Marston notice a few trends. First, a shift in the global distribution of largest cities from developed countries to developing countries takes place. A trend that will continue for the next future. Second, the largest cities become larger and larger. The number of mega cities (defined by the United Nations as cities with 8 million or more) is increasing fast. In 1950 only New York and London had a population of more than 8 million, in 1970 already eleven cities had become mega cities, including 3 Latin American cities. In 2015 it is expected that 33 cities can be called mega cities. 27 of them will be located in developing countries.

Buenos Aires is a clear example of a primate city. Primacy is a condition in which the population of the largest city in an urban system is disproportionately large in relation to the second – and
third-largest cities (Knox & Marston, 2007). Buenos Aires is around ten times bigger than Rosario and Cordoba, the second and third city of the country.

Primacy is a condition that occurs in core and periphery countries. Knox and Marston propose, this means that primacy is a result of the roles played by particular cities within their own national urban systems. But also a relationship with the world economy exists:

- Primacy in peripheral countries: is usually a consequence of primate cities’ early functions as gateway cities.
- Primacy in core countries: is usually a consequence of primate cities’ roles as imperial capital and centers of administration, politics, and trade for much wider urban system than their own domestic system.

Centrality occurs when cities’ economic, political, and cultural functions are disproportionate to their population. It is the functional supremacy of cities within an urban system. Cities that provide an extremely high share of economic, political, and cultural activity of a country have a high degree of centrality within their urban system. Very often, primate cities show these characteristics. But it is not necessary a city is primate in order to be centrality dominant.

3.4 Core and peripheral differences

This increasing role of cities generates new and big challenges. The United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS), has, according to Knox and Marston (2007), concluded “that few countries are able to handle the urban population crush, which is causing problems on an unprecedented scale with everything from clean water to disease prevention”. One of the most important geographical aspects of world urbanization is the difference in trends and projections between the core regions and the semi-peripheral and peripheral regions. High levels of urbanization have existed in the world’s core countries for some time. Core countries like France or Australia are more than 75% urbanized. But the rates of urbanization are relatively low, and so are the overall rates of population growth.

In the semi-peripheral countries, the levels of urbanizations are also very high. Countries like Brazil and South-Korea are for at least 75% urbanized. Rates of growth in semi-peripheral countries are high. In the peripheral countries, the rates are higher. Almost all countries have high rates of urbanization, with growth predictions of enormous speed and size. Generally, the urban growth in peripheral countries is a consequence of the onset of the demographic transition, which has produced fast-growing rural populations in regions that face increasing
problems with agricultural development. As a response, many people in these regions migrate to urban areas, looking for a better life.

According to Knox and Marston (2006) “urban growth processes in the world’s peripheral regions differ widely from those in core regions”. And “in contrast to the world’s core regions, where urbanization has largely resulted from economic growth, the urbanization of peripheral regions has been a consequence of demographic growths that preceded economic development.” Although the demographic transition is a quite recent phenomenon in the peripheral regions of the world, it has generated large increases in population well in advance of any significant levels of industrialization or rural economic development. The result, for mainly rural population of peripheral countries, has become worse. Problems with agricultural development have resulted in fast-growing rural populations face an apparently hopeless future of labor and poverty.

3.5 Slum housing

The consequence of all this urban growth is described as overurbanization. That happens when cities grow more rapidly than the jobs and housing they can sustain. In such circumstances, urban growth produces slums: shacks set on unpaved streets, often with open sewers and no basic utilities. The shacks are constructed out of any material that comes to hand, such as planks, cardboard, tarpaper, thatch, mud and corrugated iron. It is the pressure of in-migration that many of these instant slums are squatter settlements, built illegally by families who are in need for shelter. Slums are residential developments on land that is neither owned nor rented by its occupants. Pacione (2005) describes slums as “an area of overcrowded and dilapidated, usually old, housing occupied by people who can afford only the cheapest dwellings available in the urban area, generally in or close to the inner city”. In their Millennium Development Goals Report (2007), the United Nations describe slum conditions as: “lacking at least one of the basic conditions of decent housing: adequate sanitation, improved water supply, durable housing or adequate living space”. According to Knox & Marston (2006), “the scale and speed of urbanization, combined with the scarcity of formal employment, have resulted in very high proportions of slum housing, much of it erected by squatters”. About one-third of the world’s urban dwellers live in slums, and the United Nations estimates that the number of people living in such conditions will be doubled by
2030. This as a result of fast urbanization in developing countries (Reel, 2007), because most of the largest metropolitan areas are based in developing countries.

Even if the growth rate of slum dwellers decreases, the rapid expansion of urban areas will make it challenging to improve living conditions quickly enough to meet the target. Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia are still the regions where lack of adequate shelter among urban populations is most acute. In most of Asia and in Latin America, where the majority of urban dwellers have access to improved water and sanitation, slum conditions are characterized mainly by overcrowding and makeshift shelters. The non-durability of housing, in fact, is a problem for an estimated 117 million people living in cities of the developing world. Slums can not only provide affordable shelter but also function as important reception areas for migrants to the city, with supportive communal organizations and informal employment opportunities that help them to adjust to city life. Nevertheless, there are many shanty and squatter neighborhoods where self-help and community organization do not emerge. Instead, grim and desperately miserable conditions prevail. Pacione (2005) notices 10 forms of social disorganization in slums:

1. **Poor education facilities.** Run-down schools, few teachers, with insufficient qualifications, lack of facilities such as books and equipment.
2. **High rates of unemployment.** Lack of skills, low levels of education.
3. **Many dependent on welfare.** For health care, food.
4. **Lack of sense of community.** Transients, ethnic and racial diversity.
5. **Family problems.** High rates of divorce, separation, illegitimacy.
6. **Personal degradation.** Drinking, drugs.
7. **High crime rates.** Robbery, theft, violence.
8. **Numerous delinquent gangs.** Anti-social and violent.
9. **Opportunities for political.** Gang leaders, politicians.
10. **Numerous religious sects.** Store-front churches, new religions.

### 3.6 Mega cities

Mega cities are very large cities characterized by both primacy and a high degree of centrality within their national economy. Their most important common characteristic is their absolute size, most of them with a population of 10 million or more. This, together with their functional
centrality, means that in many ways they have more in common with mega cities in other countries than with the smaller metropolitan areas and cities within their own countries. Mega cities in the (semi-)periphery provide important intermediate roles between the upper levels of the system of world cities and the provincial towns and villages of large regions of the world. They not only link local and provincial economies with the global economy but also provide a point of contact between the traditional and the modern, and between the formal and informal economic sectors (Knox and Marston, 2007). The informal sector of an economy involves a wide variety of economic activities whose common feature is that they take place beyond official record and are not subject to formalized systems of regulation or remuneration. The slums in mega cities are often associated with problems of social disorganization and environmental degradation. However, many neighborhoods are able to develop self-help networks and organizations that form the basis of community in the middle of impressively poor and crowded cities.

The major cities and metropolitan regions of the world are essential settings for the processes of economic and cultural globalization. Central to this close relationship between urbanization and globalization are networked infrastructures of transportation, information and communications technologies such as telephone systems, satellite television, computer networks, electronic commerce and business to business Internet services. In contrast to the infrastructure networks of earlier technology systems that supported previous phases of urbanization, these information and communications technologies are not locally owned, operated, and regulated. Rather, they are designed, financed and operated by transnational corporations to global market standards. Separated from local processes of urban development, these critical networked infrastructures are very uneven in their impact, serving only certain neighborhoods, certain cities and certain kinds of metropolitan settings. This is called splintering urbanism. It is characterized by a strong geographical differentiation with individual cities and parts of cities engaged in different – and fast changing – ways in increasingly complex circuits of economic and technological exchange. The uneven evolution of networks of information and communications technologies is forming new landscapes of innovations, economic development and cultural transformation, while at the same time it intensifies social and economic inequalities between the fast and slow world. The conclusions of the UNCHS report Cities in a Globalizing World (2001) is that traditional patterns of urbanization are rapidly giving way across the globe to a very new dynamic. One that is dominated by “enclaves of ‘superconnected’ people, firms and institutions, with their
increasingly broadband connections to elsewhere via the internet, mobile phones and satellite TVs and their easy access to information services”.

Castells argues, in his discussion on the rise of the ‘Fourth World’, that this increase of informationalism is directly linked to the structural changes that produce rising inequality, polarization, poverty and misery. Although the world’s overall economic production is growing, there is a rising inequality between different regions, as well as “intra-country” inequality within all highly developed societies. Castells attributes the growing inequality in developing countries to the rate of rural-urban migration and the growing inequality in the industrialized countries to the various declines in the welfare state, wage levels and labor’s bargaining power.

This point of view is interesting in this research, which focuses on lower classes of society and their position in global networks. Castells proposes that the continuing globalization increases the inequality and poverty. This is an interesting hypothesis which I can apply on Buenos Aires: is the globalization increasing the inequality and poverty, or is it an opportunity for the people of slums like Villa 31 for a better life?

### 3.7 The informal market

The typical peripheral metropolis plays a key in international economic flows, linking provincial regions with the hierarchy of world cities and, thus, the world economy. Within peripheral metropolises, this role results in a dualism in geographic space of the formal and informal sectors of the economy. This dualism is very clear in the built environment, with high-rise modern office and apartment towers and luxurious homes contrasting sharply with slums and shantytowns, clearly showed in Buenos Aires.

In many peripheral cities more than one-third of the population is engaged in the informal sector (Knox & Marston, 2007). People who cannot find regularly paid work must look for other ways to earn money. The informal sector consists of a broad range of activities that represent an important coping mechanism. Occupations like selling souvenirs, making and selling food on the street and dressmaking may seem marginal from the point of view in the global economy, but more than a billion people around the world must feed, clothe and house themselves entirely from such occupations. In many peripheral cities more than half the population subsists in this way. The informal economy has some negative aspects, such as working children. But also a few positive features, for example, the informal garbage picking provides an important means of recycling paper, glass, plastic etc.
The informal sector also represents an important resource for the formal sector of peripheral economies. It provides a vast range of cheap goods and services that reduce the cost of living for employees in the formal sector, thus enabling employers to keep wages low. Although this network does not contribute to urban growth or help alleviate poverty, it does keep companies competitive within the context of the global economic system. For export orientated companies, in particular, the informal sector provides a considerable indirect subsidy to production.

The informal labor market is directly paralleled in informal shantytown and squatter housing. Because so few jobs with regular wages exist, few families can afford rent or house payments for housing. In situations where urban growth has swamped the available stock of cheap housing and outstripped the capacity of builders to create affordable new housing, the inevitable outcome is makeshift shanty housing that offers, at best, precarious, shelter. Such housing has to be constructed on the cheapest and least desirable places. Nearly always it means building without any basic infrastructure like streets or utilities.

Globalization and the accompanying trend towards neoliberal economic policies have intensified problems of poverty and slum housing in many cities. Trade liberalization has often resulted in the closure of some industries that have been unable to compete against cheap imports, leading to massive retrenchment and higher unemployment levels.

Rising urban unemployment and increasing poverty have forced large numbers of the urban poor into the informal sector. Underpaid formal sector employees have also entered the informal sector as a survival strategy. This leads to the erosion of tax base and decreasing ability of national and local governments to assist the poor through social and basic services.

Faced with the growth of slums, the first response of many governments has been to eradicate them. But often this does not work; the dwellers rebuild their houses somewhere else in the city and new slums appear. The thinking now is that informal sector housing should be seen as a rational response to poverty. It offers the dwellers at least some income.

Simone Buechler (2006), who did an ethnographic analysis of working conditions in the squatter settlements of the Brazilian mega city São Paulo, suggests that not only the financial district of São Paulo should be seen as the only parts of the city that are connected to the global economy. Generally, “it is taken for granted that investment bankers and other corporate elites are global actors, but also the populations of low-income communities form a integral part of globalizing cities, although they may have little direct contact with individuals in other countries”. They are enmeshed in the global economy because they are impacted by it and because they sustain it.
through their work, for example, by producing cheap goods for the low-income service workers. At the same time “they also may be excluded spatially from the centers of power, often politically and economically in the sense that they are excluded from the profits and wealth that they produce for the owners of capital and for the global economy”.
4. The global connections in Villa 31

This part of the research is based on the case of my research, Villa 31 de Retiro. A big part and is mainly based on my empirical research. But first, I will describe the general structure of the slums of Buenos Aires and a historical overview of Villa 31.

4.1 The slums of Buenos Aires

The ‘villas miserias’ – also called ‘villas emergencias’ (emergency villages) or ‘barrios precarios’ – of Buenos Aires started around 1930, but really became an issue in the ’40. Anthropologist Christina Cravino from the Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento describes the general structure of the slums of Buenos Aires in her book ‘Las villas de la ciudad. Mercado e informalidad urbana’ (2006) (The slums of the city. Market and urban informality). She defines the ‘villas miseria’ as informal urbanizations that are product of occupation of available urban ground. She notices some characteristics:

1. They produce irregular urban plotting. In general inner streets are irregular and of small dimension.
2. Located close to production and consumer centers, where urban space is scarce.
3. In the city of Buenos Aires (Capital Federal), mainly they settle down on fiscal property. Mainly, the best areas for temporal urbanization were or are owned by the government.
4. The houses are build with precarious material. The habitants build their houses of masonry, as a consequence they are houses unstable.
5. High population and overcrowding.
6. The residents have low-skilled work and low wages. Most often in the informal sector of the economy.
7. A lot of the inhabitants are migrants, mainly from neighbor-countries Bolivia and Paraguay. But during the years, many of the new generations are born in the slums. (Cravino, 2006)

Important is to notice the differences between the slums of Ciudad de Buenos Aires and Gran Buenos Aires. The Ciudad is the centre of the city, where actually live around 3 million people. Grand Buenos Aires is the city centre with all the suburbs with a total population of around 13 million inhabitants.
4.2 History and structure of Villa 31

*Villa 31* and *Villa 31 bis* (the different names correspond to two parts of the same slum) is the only slum that exists in the northern part of the city of Buenos Aires, which is the richest and most developed part of the Argentinean capital. Villa 31 is one of the oldest, largest, and most populated slums of Buenos Aires.

Villa 31 de Retiro started in 1930 on public land near downtown, the port of Buenos Aires and one of the large train stations serving the northern part of the country. At first, it housed the families of dockworkers who lost their jobs in the economic crisis of 1929. In the Forties, European immigrants arrived and worked laying the rail system extension. Early immigrants were poor, Italian immigrants who came to the city to work in the port. The government wanted to house them close to their work, so they offered houses in the area around the port. The place became known as the ‘Immigrants Neighborhood’. In the Fifties, the area was organized as six neighborhoods with a coordinating committee of neighborhood delegates.

At the beginning of the Seventies, about 16,000 families (45,000 – 60,000 residents) lived in Villa 31 and were organized by neighborhood through an active coordinating committee in the struggle for access to land and housing and for integration with urbanized neighborhoods (International Alliance of Inhabitants, 2008). At that time, Villa 31 residents worked in a variety of trades, and there were, in particular, many skilled construction workers. The residents counted on official promises and integration plans through the means of an urbanization project developed by the University of Buenos Aires School of Architecture.

During the military dictatorship (1976 – 1983), there was a violent expulsion campaign carried out against the residents. During this period, the city wanted to get rid of the Villas, and the mayor sent bulldozers to destroy the houses built by the dwellers. The people were taken by force in military vehicles out of the capital area and left to their fate. Immigrant residents were moved to neighboring areas. However, these expulsions were obstructed by a legal action promised by some city priests, and a favorable decision made by a judge in 1979 allowed forty-six families (180 – 200 residents) to remain in the neighborhood, which had already been “cleaned out”, its residents removed, their houses bulldozed by the city.
With the return of democracy in 1984, Villa 31 was quickly re-inhabited. In the first few years of the democracy, 200 families a day moved in, both expelled former residents and newcomers, and in the mid-Eighties, there were nearly 12,000 residents (about 1,900 families).

Today, Villa 31 covers 15.25 hectares that belong primarily to the national government (so, not to the city government). A small part belongs to the former oil company YPF corporation (Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales), which has now been privatized as Rep-sol/España, and another fraction belongs to the railroad company. In the early Nineties, the national government signed a plan to return the land to its occupants, but the decree was never carried out. In the mid-Nineties, the city offered money in exchange to relocate Villa 31, in order to break its organization and use the land for a highway (International Alliance of Inhabitants, 2008). The resistance of a large number of residents defeated this initiative when city officials tried to expel them by force. The city sent bulldozers to demolish their residences again (the expulsion process started in 1994 and ended in 1996).

The people’s resistance and struggle succeeded in stopping the police operation of eliminating the poor from an urban area increasingly valuable due to real estate transactions worth millions. 800 consolidated residences were destroyed, and a large number of residents were displaced due to the current system of political clientelism in the city that makes autonomous and democratic organization more difficult.

Numbers about the population of Villa 31 vary. COHRE says, based on research carried out in 2003 and 2004, 4,649 families live in Villa 31 and 1,780 live in Villa 31 bis (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2008). Table 2 shows official population numbers of the city government. An increase from 12,204 inhabitants in 2001 to 26,403 in 2009 can be noticed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villa</th>
<th>Censo 2001</th>
<th>Censo 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hogares</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Población</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,244</td>
<td>100,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa 31</td>
<td>2,007</td>
<td>64,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa 31 bis</td>
<td>1,147</td>
<td>36,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Population in Villa 31 and Villa 31 bis. (source: Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2009)

Unofficial numbers, vary from 80,000 to 90,000 habitants, according to Argentinean newspaper *La Nacion* (Castro, 2009). This is an ongoing discussion of different numbers about the slums.
Villas 31 and 31 bis are precarious urban settlements. Villa 31 bis emerged after the construction of President Illia highway in the 1990s, and today joins with Villa 31 under the highway. A complicating factor is the fact that Villa 31 is situated on lands which belong to the national government, yet any urbanization plan needs to be approved by the city authorities. Thus, any final decision concerning the future of the slum needs to be taken jointly between the national and local governments. In recent years, the slum has come under threat of forced eviction. Villa 31 is a site of an intense conflict between the city’s government, presided over by mayor Mauricio Macri (Zibechi, 2008). Macri was elected in 2007 by an absolute majority of the conservative Argentine capital. In his electoral campaign he promised to urbanize the slums and eradicate the Retiro area, moving its population to outlying zones or distant from the center. The inhabitants of Villa 31 know that this area is highly wanted by real estate agents, multimillion-dollar works have been constructed in the port zone next to the slum. Speculation in the area near the port has led big companies of Argentine, European, and U.S. capital to create the Madero Port (Puerto Madero area), a mega-undertaking along the style of gated communities with a private seafront for yachts, five-star hotels, multinational offices, and luxury restaurants. Now they plan to expand it with Puerto Madero II, at the area of Villa 31.

When looking at diagrams of the demography of Villa 31 (figure 9), a clear difference can be noticed between Buenos Aires in general and Villa 31.

![Figure 9](source: Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2009)
The average age in Villa 31 is with 23,3 years almost 16 years younger than in general in Buenos Aires. A few explanations are possible. First, as said in the theoretical part of this research, the streams of migrants mainly consist teenagers and young adults. So this group is highly present in the slums. Second, as a result of these migrants an exceptionally high rates of natural population increase exists. Women in the slums give birth at a younger age than in general and have more children. Third, as a result of the bad living conditions, the habitants in Villa 31 do not become that old as in general in Buenos Aires. Habitants above 70 nearly exist in Villa 31. Besides that, elder habitants have more opportunities after working all their life, to leave the slum and to rent an formal house.

4.3 Global links in Villa 31 de Retiro

Finding global connections in Villa 31 is not very easy. It is difficult to find such a macro phenomenon on a micro scale. But as Castells argues, “in fact most activities are not global, they take place in a local or regional setting”. That was what I was looking for, subtle global connections. This empirical part describes my discoveries at micro level, in Villa 31. After my empirical research in Villa 31, I have noticed a few themes which are interesting with regard to my research subject about the global participation of slum habitants. First, of course, the location of Villa 31. Located at such a central place in the city, global connections should be very close. Second, the social participation of the habitants of Villa 31 is an important aspect. Economic motives are often the reason to migrate to the city, so the economic participation will be an important subject. Finally, also the housing condition has some interesting links.

Of course, this research is not complete and these 4 themes are just a few things that caught my attention. But it may be a good start for further studies.

4.3.1. Location

As said, Villa 31 counts 26.000 to 90.000 inhabitants (numbers vary). The slum is so big that it exists out of different smaller neighborhoods, the so called manzana’s (blocks). The location of Villa 31 is the main cause of its ‘popularity’. It is the only slum that exists in the northern part of Buenos Aires. Located next to the most expensive part of the city, the business district of Retiro. Next to the port of Buenos Aires and close to the old harbor, now the most luxury ‘barrio’ of the city: Puerto Madero. Bordered by Estacion Retiro (the main railway station of the city), the Terminal de Omnibus (the bus terminal, from which busses leave to whole Argentina, and neighbors Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and even Peru) and Subte line C (metro).
Across the street, opposite Estacion Retiro is the Plaza San Martin, with its statue of the independence hero on horseback and a memorial for those who died in the 1982 Falklands War, and surrounded by enormous palaces and expensive hotels. Along Retiro’s western edge are the huge new skyscrapers, along with the apartment blocks of upper class Argentinean families as well as expats, on Avenida del Libertador, overlooking the Rio de la Plata. As said, Villa 31 stands on land that does not belong to the city of Buenos Aires. It is owned by the national railways as well as the Port. And the national government of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner owns this land and supports the right of Villa 31 to exist.

This location, in the city center with all her activity, is the main reason for people to migrate to Villa 31. A few tables of the research of Cristina Cravino (2006) are interesting when looking at the location of Villa 31.

As you can see in the table below, the slum itself provides daily products. 94% of the respondents do not leave the barrio for buying daily purchases. 4,8% buy it in the surroundings of the slum. Only 0,6% goes to other places in the city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not have purchases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surroundings of the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other place in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Place for everyday purchases

Looking at larger purchases, like clothes and furniture, still 31% is able to buy these in their own area, and 33,3% can buy it in the surroundings of the neighborhood. 21,4% percent has to go to other places in the city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not have purchases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surroundings of the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other place in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Place for purchases of larger amounts (clothes, furniture, electronics etc.)
This shows the existence of small shops, which mainly provide food and drinks inside and around the slums. It illustrates that the area is quite self-providing in every day purchases. Also large products are sold inside and around the slum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ciudad de Buenos Aires</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Percentage of working habitants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the neighborhood</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the city *</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside the city **</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The city in this case means the city of Buenos Aires, the area with 3 million inhabitants
** Outside the city means Gran Buenos Aires, with all the suburbs.

Table 5 Location of work

As you can see in the table above, from the working people in the slums in central Buenos Aires, 29.5% work inside their neighborhood. This suits with the existence of a commercial society inside the slums, with small shops as showed with the tables of purchases. 63.1% works in the city center and only 7.4% outside the city.

When looking at the kind of transport the slum dwellers use to go to work (table 6, next page), it says that 46.4% do not leave the neighborhood (which not fully corresponds with the table above). But it is interesting to look at modes of transport, because Villa 31 is located next to the bus and train station and pretty close to the metro station. 21.4% takes the bus to go to work. They make profit of the easy access to the bus station and by that, with connections to other places in the city. The train is also close, but mainly covers larger distances, outside of Ciudad Buenos Aires. As we have seen, there are not a lot of slum dwellers in the city center working in Grand Buenos Aires. Also the metro is not a very common used mode of transportation. This can be explained by the fact that the metro network of Buenos Aires is not very widespread and busses cover a larger area. Also the car and motorcycle are not very popular, because they are expensive modes of transport.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not leave the neighborhood</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Kind of transport used to go to work

So, the slum provides opportunities for business inside the area, as shown in the table with everyday purchases, with mainly small shops. And it offers transport possibilities to leave the slum, in order to go to work in other parts of the city. Although the slum offers business opportunities, more than 50% leaves the slum to go to work. Villa 31 offers opportunities, because of its central location, to go to work in other parts of the city, mainly the city center. This economic aspect will be discussed later in this chapter.

4.3.2. Social Participation

As said before, the dwellers of Villa 31 have illegally electricity facilities, in general they do not pay for it. But one of my main discoveries and revelations was the fact that a lot of them also have internet access. I visited a secondary school in Villa 31 a few times and got to know the students. We talked about my live in the Netherlands and their lives in Argentina and in their neighborhood. At the moment I have already 14 of these students as friends at Facebook, a social networking website. Looking at their Facebook-profiles I discovered a very active digital life. Hundreds of Facebook-friends (sometimes around 700), a lot of pictures, exchange of YouTube-videos (YouTube is a video-sharing website on which users can upload, share, and view videos) and messages to each other.

Looking at their Facebook-friends, I noticed that a lot of these friends are Argentinean, living in Buenos Aires and mainly in their own barrio. But Facebook also provides a way to keep in touch with their family back home. As suggested before, a lot of the dwellers of Villa ’31 are migrants who came from mainly Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay or the north of Argentina. With Facebook they can share pictures and stories to be virtual close to each other. I observed also other family
members who migrated to other Latin American countries, or even to Europe, at Facebook so they can still communicate with their family.

Internet offers a way to be connected with other parts of the world. This was clearly demonstrated in a conversation I had with an 18 year old student. We were talking about football and he knew that FC Twente, a small Dutch football team from the eastern side of the country, was leading the table. He had seen matches using internet and satellite television and searched for results and statistics on the internet. Besides that, I noticed a lot of boys wearing football shirts of Real Madrid, FC Barcelona, AC Milan or Manchester United; teams from Spain, Italy and England, which became world brands, known everywhere in the world. Also expensive sneakers, shirts and jackets from world famous brands like Nike and Adidas are very frequently worn.

Furthermore, cell phones are very common and often used. At the secondary school I noticed that almost every student has a mobile phone, and pretty often really new, expensive and sophisticated ones, with video cameras for example. Also this provides a transnational connection, which was proved when I received a message from a girl living in Villa 31 when I already had returned to the Netherlands.

According to Knox and Marston (2007), Internet is “the leading edge of the fast world”. They suggest that “slums, despite of their very low incomes, precarious housing and low education level, nevertheless are knowledgeable about international football, music, film and fashion, and are even able to copy fast-world consumption through castoffs and knockoffs”. According to my observations, I cannot confirm the second part of their theory, I have not noticed castoffs and knockoffs very clear. But as I have showed, the slum dwellers are aware of global sport events and also music was an important factor. Most of the children at the school in Villa 31 did not know where the Netherlands are located, but they do know that DJ Tiesto – a world famous DJ – is Dutch. And also of international football players like Ruud van Nistelrooij or Clarence Seedorf it was pretty known that they have the Dutch nationality.

Castells (2002) suggests “with the coming of the Information age, cities as specific social systems seem to be challenged by the related processes of globalization and informationalization”. Internet is one of the new communication technologies which appear to “supersede the functional need for spatial proximity as the basis of economic efficiency and personal interaction”. As said before, the appearance of a global economy and of global communication
systems subdue the local into global, shaping social meaning and slow down political control, traditionally exercised from localities. Flows seem to overwhelm places, as human interaction increasingly relies on electronic communication networks. The availability of internet and the digital activity of the slum dwellers show this local expression of globalization. The slum dwellers take part in the global flow of information. The fact that I still can communicate with the students while I am in the Netherlands and they are in Argentina proves their global connectedness. It offers them the possibility to find out more about other places in the world, other cultures, and other realities.

I did not discover a commercial use of internet inside the slum. My observation is that internet is mainly used as a social tool instead of a business instrument. But I think their internet connectedness has some positive features. The dwellers can extend their knowledge about the world, have the opportunity to get connected with people in other places or countries. For the students in Villa 31 internet was even that common that a girl asked me: ‘do you have internet in Holland?’

4.3.3. Economic participation

As said before, migration from rural to urban regions is an important reason for the current urban growth. An economic motive is one of the mean reasons to migrate to the big city. The best economic possibilities can be found in the city center, near all the economic activities. Also education and healthcare opportunities can be found in the city.

In conversations I had, including Victoria Riccardi from the Centre on housing rights and evictions, it turned out that the main jobs for the men living in the slums is construction work and most women work as housemaid. Mostly, this is illegal, unofficial work. In general they do not have a formal working contract and earn low wages.

The Argentinean anthropologist Cristina Cravino is the writer of the book *Las villas de la ciudad. Mercado e informalidad urbana*. She has done research about the living conditions and economic situation of the slum dwellers. On the next page (table 7) you can find a table about the employment in the slums of central Buenos Aires. She remarks that the majority of the respondents are females (76,8%), so it is maybe not really representative. But at least it gives a good indication of the employment.
The table does not mention if the unemployed work in the informal sector or do not have any form of income. When looking at the quantity of persons who contribute to a household’s income, in most of the times (53,6%) only one person contributes. This can indicate that in some cases only the father or mother of the family works, so the other is unemployed.
Hilding Ohlsson (2010) did a research about another Buenos Aires slum, Villa la Cava, located in the rich suburb San Isidro. He noticed that the economic activities are mainly “shops selling food; kiosks, butcheries, bakeries or small groceries; services such as “remises” (taxies), carpenters, plumbers, massagers, seamstresses, and even a bar with a pool”. This matches with the tables of Cravino about the everyday purchases that can be done inside the slums.

A very clear global connection turned out with the arrival of the global economic crisis. As said, the majority of the men living in the slums work in the construction sector. A mayor task was the restructuring of the former harbor area of Puerto Madero. Enormous skyscrapers, luxury offices and apartments and expensive restaurants had to be build. A lot of this construction was done by slum dwellers. But as suggested, they work mostly on day-base or for small projects. Near a giant building project I have seen unemployed citizens grouping and waiting for the construction manager. He chooses workers for day labor at the construction site. This construction work offers job opportunities for the slum dwellers.

But with the global financial crisis, the construction in Puerto Madero and other areas in the city decreased dramatically. The construction of the new buildings is postponed and that means that the construction workers have less work at the moment. That shows the fragility of the work of the slum dwellers: because they do not have official contracts, they do not have the security of a contract and thus income when the market crashes.

Also in Buenos Aires the informal sector plays a very important role in the economy, especially since the economic crisis of 2002. A big economic recession forced the government to disconnect the peso from the US Dollar, causing a dramatically devaluation of the peso, shrinking around 30% of the people’s capital. Whitson (2007) suggest that “one important result of the economic crisis of 2002 and continued economic stagnation was the increase in informal work among all sectors of society. The increasing rates of informal work in Argentina in 2002 were not caused by the crisis per se, but were a local reflection of a process of increasing globalization of the Argentine economy that began decades earlier. The form that informal work took in Argentina during the crisis and people’s experiences of it can thus be read as a reflection of the manner in which Argentina was inserted into an increasingly globalized economy”.

The loss of work and difficulties to find new employment was a big consequence of the crisis for a lot of the people of Buenos Aires. Especially the poorest members of society were hit. Frequently, they relied on the “cash economy and specialized in jobs such as domestic work and
home improvements, which were increasingly seen as unnecessary by their middle class employers or clientele who were themselves trying to make ends meet” (Whitson, 2007).

A result of the economic crisis of 2002 was the increase of the number of ‘cartoneros’, it became quite a common job for the lowest class of society, also for the inhabitants of the villas miserias. As you can see in the table of Cravino, 3.6% percent of the slum dweller works as cartonero. Cartoneros are the people who collect, separate, classify and sell trash, mainly cardboard, paper, plastic and glass. When the night falls, these people go on the streets with big baskets to search for recyclable garbage. At the end of the night, the cartoneros bring all of their collected materials to recycling factories one or two hours outside of the city, in exchange for cash. There are ‘unofficial’ trains provided by the government that run throughout the night, bringing the cartoneros to and from the city and factories.

Figure 10. Informal market at the edge of Villa 31 (source: http://ferfal.blogspot.com/)

The cartoneros are a clear example of employment in the informal sector. As suggested in my theoretical part, in many peripheral cities more than one-third of the population is engaged in the informal sector. The Argentinean newspaper La Nacion (Tomino, 2005) published some statistics
about the cartoneros. It says that in 2005 around 20,000 cartoneros existed compared to 40,000 just after the crisis. From the 20,000 in 2005, around 10,500 were officially registered by the government as recuperadores urbanos. In total they collect and sell around 400,000 ton of trash and earning 70 million pesos annually selling it. After it is passed through middlemen and back into business, it is sold for 450 million pesos.

This shows very clear the importance of the informal market and the amount of money that circulates in it. But also this informal market is connected with global fluctuations. When the global economic crisis started in 2008, the price of cardboard dropped dramatically and the cartoneros noticed this in their income. The price of cardboard before the crisis was among 40 and 55 centavos per kilo, but it dropped dramatically to 18 till 35 centavos per kilo. The demand for cardboard decreased by 25% by the fall of packaged products (Estrucplan, 2009).

Thus, there is a global economic connection even with the lowest class of society. They are very susceptible for economic changes, because they already have very low wages and every decrease is immediately felt.

### 4.3.4. Housing condition

Another interesting discovery was the fact that the slums are more civilized than I thought before.

As you can see in the table on the next page from Cravino (2006), almost 97% of the houses have walls made out of masonry and only around 3% out of cardboard, timber or sheet iron. Also the floor is mainly (91.8%) made form concrete. Around 60% of the houses have a roof of sheet iron and 30% of paving stones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Villa 31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masonry fully revoked</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masonry partially revoked</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardboard, timber, sheet iron</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>91.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceramics</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roof</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet iron</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paving stone</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Materials of the residence
So most houses are made out of stone and the table below shows that almost all houses do have electricity. In general they do not pay for it, but have it illegally. Also water supply is really common, around 93% but sewerage only exists in around 42% of the houses. No one has a telephone line, but as said before, mobile phones are really common. Cable television is available in almost half of the houses. So, the percentage of the availability of televisions is higher than of sewerage. Not in the table, but mentioned before, also internet is quite common used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Villa 31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity network</td>
<td>No 1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes 98.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply</td>
<td>No 6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes 93.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewerage</td>
<td>No 57.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes 42.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone line</td>
<td>No 100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes 0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable television</td>
<td>No 50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes 49.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 8. Infrastructural services*

The living conditions and infrastructure vary greatly from Villa 31 to Villa 31 bis (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2008). Because Villa 31 is the oldest part of the slum, houses are built more as permanent or semi-permanent structures. They are more spacious, and in certain areas, some of the structures have two or three floors. There are even houses with four or five levels. Villa 31 bis constitutes the newer part of the slum, and houses are built as semi-permanent structures with temporary roofs. The houses are far more precarious in Villa 31 bis. The roads are not paved, and as a result, the area is easily flooded. The number of houses in Villa 31 bis grew rapidly in the last years. The newest structures are wooden with tin roofs and built next to a railway line. The quality of the houses and the general infrastructure are markedly poorer as one goes from the older to the newer parts of the slum. A lot of the dwellers live in uncertainty about their house, can they stay there or not? This frustrates investments in the houses, which often are already in bad shape.

Dutch journalist Robert-Jan Friele (2009) says that it is not easy to find a piece of land and build your own house in Villa 31. Despite of the fact that the land officially belongs to the state, a
residence has to be rent from some kind of slum mafia. This is a really lucrative business and the mafia maintains the current structure and system of the area. The dwellers pay quite a lot of money to rent a (part of a) house in Villa 31. Friele says they pay almost the same as they should pay for a normal 2-room apartment outside of the city center. For a room of around 10 m² the rent price is around 600 peso (125 euro) a month, almost half of the minimum wage. Of course, it is all about the location of the slum. Argentinean newspaper Clarin (Hendler, 2007) tells the most expensive zone is in front of the bus terminal, the place with the most economic activity of the area.

![Figure 11. House in Villa 31 (source: http://ferfal.blogspot.com/)](source: http://ferfal.blogspot.com/)

Interesting in this is the fact that the special location of Villa 31 creates some remarkable characteristics. The people living in Villa 31 are willing to pay a very high price for a shack. So, the proximity to (global) economic activity is more important than living in a formal house.

And of course, the living circumstances are bad. After rain, the streets flood frequently. The 5-floor buildings are often very unstable. But, as you can see in table 9 (next page), the most
important issues are violence and addictions. 44% of the dwellers indicate that these are their main concerns.

![Pie chart showing the main concerns of inhabitants of slum Villa la Cava](image)

**Table 9. Main concerns of inhabitants of slum Villa la Cava**

The biggest problems and concerns in the slums are safety and drugs. Especially *paco* – a rest product of cocaine, also known as crack – causes a lot of problems and violence expands. It was told me that previously, there was some kind of community-feeling, today with all the drugs problems, a neighbor can be shot and robbed. So besides the poor housing conditions, this safety aspect is an important issue of the slums.
Conclusions and discussion

In this research I have looked at the global connections that can be found in slums, in this case Villa 31 in Buenos Aires. First I made a theoretical framework about world cities in the globalizing world. After that a description and empirical research about Villa 31 followed. As said before, this research is far from complete, so this conclusion may be a starting point for new investigations.

The central question of this research was:
*How and to what extent do the inhabitants of the slum ‘Villa 31’ participate in the global network of which Buenos Aires is part of?*

What can be concluded is that Villa 31 is more civilized and global connected than generally assumed. The global connections are mainly subtle, but exist. Of course, the inhabitants are not world citizens who travel around the world, but they do have some interesting connections. Especially their social global participation is quite extensive. Internet is very common used and I noticed a very active digital life. Internet provides the slum dwellers knowledge about other parts of the world and enables them to stay in touch with family back home. Especially, because a lot of the slum dwellers are migrants originally from the north of Argentina, Peru, Bolivia or Paraguay.

Also economic connections are fairly clear. The informal economy offers opportunities for slum dwellers to gain income and for the economy of Buenos Aires they are cheap labor possibilities. However, construction work or *cartoneros* are quite vulnerable for global fluctuations of the economy. Changes in the world economy are felt heavily by the lowest part of society, who already is struggling to gain a sufficient income.

The attraction of Villa 31 causes remarkable things. The rent for example, which is comparable with the rent of a normal 2-room apartment, but then 2 hours away from the city center. A whole network, or slum mafia, exist, renting the rooms or houses to the dwellers. Because of this lucrative business and the continuing demand for living space in Villa 31, houses with 5 floors exist inside the slum, with all its risks of collapsing.

While there are a lot of global links, also the slum itself provides a lot of services and products. Almost all daily purchases can be done inside the slum and also bigger goods can be provided. So there exist an internal structure and society in the slum, but it is connected with global flows.
The Western bias of globalization, Grant and Nijman (2006) talk about, is really important. A lot of times, when I was talking about my experiences in Villa 31 and telling about their brick houses, electricity, Internet and mobile phones, the people in the Netherlands asked me: ‘that does not sound like a slum, is it actually a slum?’.

During the conversation I had with Luis Baer, of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, he did not really understand my research subject, until I told him about the perceptions the Dutch (in my case) have about slums and their structure. ‘We’ do not expect slum dwellers with mobile phones, Internet connections and Facebook, with knowledge about Dutch football or music, drinking Coca Cola and organizing a huge goodbye barbeque for a Dutch guest. Our Western view and expectation of a slum is based on the images shown on television or in movies like Slumdog Millionaire. Images of African or Indians slums shape our view of slums, but Villa 31 showed I different sort. But of course, the living circumstances are bad, violence and crime are common and the people are poor.

As suggested in the literature, global actions take place on al local scale. In essence, slums itself are not a globalization problem, they already exist for a really long time. Like Villa 31, which started in the Thirties. But the increasing interconnectedness of the world sharp the differences between the rich and the poor. As seen in Buenos Aires, the slums are still growing and the circumstances are getting worse. The arrival of the drug paco (crack) – a rest product of cocaine – and its importance for drugs mafia, who makes really good money with it, is a major cause of the deterioration of living conditions. Transportation is easier, so migration to the city (even from other countries) is better possible than ever. This urbanization is continuing and causing many problematic situations. But the globalization also offers chances. Chances for (informal) work and income and chances to get connected with other parts of the world. Compared to the lives at rural areas, cities provide many more opportunities for global connections.

An important discussion, followed on this research, could be the continuing Western bias of underdeveloped areas. As Nijman and Grant (2006) suggest, “The world city literature is mostly aimed at cities at the top of the urban hierarchy”. As I also showed at the beginning of this research with the study of Foreign policy, in the literature “cities in the lower strata of the global hierarchy – particularly cities in the less-developed world – are neglected”. I noticed the limited general knowledge about the ‘developing side’ of the globalization. The surprised reactions on my research results shows there still is a lack of knowledge and an image based on prejudices.
The (academic) debate should involve more the positions of slum dwellers in the globalizing world.

Also the social participation I noticed in the slum, can be an interesting subject for further studies. What is the influence on their lives of the connections and knowledge slum dwellers can gain from websites as Facebook? Do they get in touch with foreigners or is it only used as a social network with their friends from the slums?
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World Port Source:
Attachment 1. Background Argentina

The biggest part of Argentina is thinly populated. The population of Argentina is more than twice the size of the Netherlands – Argentina has 40.9 million inhabitants (Central Intelligence Agency, N/A) –, its surface, with 2.7 million square kilometers, is more than 70 times the Netherlands and after Brazil the second largest country of Latin-America. It makes Argentina the eight biggest country in the world. It is a diverge land. Behind mega city Buenos Aires the pampas stretches out, into the south they transform in the desolate lowlands of Patagonia. Even more south Tierra del Fuego and the glaciers of Antarctica arise, it gives the feeling of reaching the end of the world. At the western side, the Andes-mountains form the border with Chile, in the northwest the mountains become the highland of Bolivia. In the subtropical lowlands of the northeast the Parána river flows out into Paraguay. Argentina has a length of 3500 kilometers and a width of 1500 kilometers. Argentina’s population seems to be very European, together with Uruguay it’s the whitest country of the Latin-American Continent. Almost 98% of its population is white. A big part of the Argentinean people have their roots in Europe, mainly Italy, Spain and Germany. These European migrants wanted to create a Neo-European Argentina, based on the ideas of the Enlightenment and French Revolution (Ter Steege, 2001). This European roots creates a complicated identity of Argentina and the Argentinean people. “The country is based on a lie” psychologist and columnist Norma Morandini says in the book ‘Argentinië, het land van Maxima’. “We’ve always thought that we are European, but we aren’t. My whole childhood I had to hear we came from Europe, that Europe was better and that Argentina in fact is an European country”. This makes that Argentina is very often compared with Europe. “Buenos Aires is a mixture of Paris and Madrid, the Retiro-trainstation looks like London’s Waterloo Station, the Palermo-park is quite similar to the Paris Bois de Boulogne and the Teatro Colón is the little brother of the Scala in Milan”. Also the rest of Latin-America looks different to the Argentines; “they’re Italians who speak Spanish, grown up as French and think they’re British” they often say. There’s a culture of the rich, but in reality the country is poor. Just around 1900 Argentina was wealthier than the Netherlands. However, the former first world
country transformed into a more or less third world country. The country paid her price for an era of political mismanagement, wars and economical turbulence. The *Central Intelligence Agency* (N/A) describes the modern history of Argentina in the World Factbook on their website. “Up until the mid-20th century, much of Argentina’s history was dominated by periods of internal political conflict between Federalists and Unitarians and between civilian and military factions. After the Second World War, a period of Peronist populism and direct and indirect military interference in subsequent governments was followed by a military junta that took power in 1976. Democracy returned in 1983 after a failed attempt to confiscate the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands by force and has persisted despite numerous challenges. The most terrible of which was an enormous economic crisis in 2001-2002 that led to violent public protests and the resignation of several interim presidents.”
Attachment 2. Global City Index, Foreign Policy

According to the research of Foreign Policy in 2008, Buenos Aires is ranked as number 33 in their Global City index, based on 5 indicators: I) Business activity II) Human Capital III) Information Exchange IV) Cultural Experience and V) Political Engagement.