

*Routledge Studies in African Development*

# EVERYDAY URBAN PRACTICES IN AFRICA

DISRUPTING GLOBAL NORMS

Edited by

Nadine Appelhans, Carmel Rawhani,  
Marie Huchzermeyer, Basirat Oyalowo,  
and Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyane



“This is a great intellectual product. Its main premise is that everyday lived experiences are neither sufficiently noticed nor accounted for in the crafting of urban policy agendas at the global level, and this book takes a bold step toward this objective.”

**Daniel K. B. Inkoom**, *Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, AAPS former Chair*

“Seen through the lens of the everyday in urban Africa as representing a multitude of both daily practices and realities, as well as a generative epistemic framework, this book brings together a varied set of thought-provoking contributions. Together, they call for a move beyond the ‘business as usual’ of development by urging us to rethink the global norms that drive the global post-2015 agenda. An important read for scholars and policymakers alike.”

**Sylvia Croese**, *Assistant Professor of Global and International Studies, University of California, Irvine, and editor of Localizing the SDGs in African Cities*



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# Everyday Urban Practices in Africa

This book disrupts the dominant underlying international norms informing urban development strategies across African cities. International policy frameworks have created a new universal agenda for developing cities. However, these frameworks have also imposed global paradigms and discourses that are often in conflict with local urbanisms. As we approach the deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, there is need for reflection and deliberation on a post-2030 agenda.

The authors identify powerful assumptions, norms, and positionalities that obfuscate the efforts to achieve sustainable development in African cities, as well as along the North–South divide. They argue that a disruptive critique of these normative concepts, grounded in the lived African urban everyday, opens up opportunities to dismantle their assumed neutrality. Through disruption, the authors critically re-interpret the meanings of policy and the praxis of local urbanism, ultimately challenging the logic of universalising concepts underpinning implementation in the current international policy system, and asserting the need for contextualised urban policies.

The book will be of interest to scholars and students of urban studies, development planning, urban governance, human settlements, development studies, urban geography, and African studies. It will also be useful for practitioners including town and regional/urban planners, urban policy consultants, and international development cooperation agencies.

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# Foreword

I feel honoured and privileged as the former chair of the Steering Committee of the 57-member Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS) to write a foreword to the book on *Everyday urban practices in Africa: Disrupting global norms*. This is a great intellectual product arising out of the “tripod cooperation” among the Technical University of Berlin (TUB), Germany, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg, South Africa, and the University of Lagos, Nigeria, under the Wits-TUB-UNILAG Urban Lab sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The book explores everyday lived experiences and practices in the rapidly growing, densely populated urban spaces and regions of the African continent. Its main premise is that these everyday lived experiences are neither sufficiently noticed nor accounted for in the crafting of urban policy agendas at the global level, and that interpretations of these experiences must take into consideration the contexts, textures, and dynamics of cities in the Global South. These postulations reflect some of the cardinal arguments that led to the formation of the AAPS in 1999 to transform planning education in the African context, advocating for sustainable, participatory, and inclusive planning practices at all levels in countries and cities across the continent. The book provides critical reflections on global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the African Union’s Agenda 2063 with its seven aspirations, and how they impact urbanites in the African context. Mid-way on a 15-year journey towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030, there is need for reflection and deliberation on a post-2030 agenda, and this book takes a bold step towards this objective.

I have a connection with the ideas expressed in the book, the cities in which the triad institutions are located, and many of its authors. The ideas are compelling, the cities fascinating, and the authors well-placed to write on topics that engender collective reflection and action. Together, the authors advocate a paradigm shift in urban development that not only is inclusive and accountable to diverse local populations and future generations but also reflects the hopes and aspirations of different segments of society, especially those at the margins and peripheries. This is a call for creating a new meaning of the urban in Africa—one that holds the possibility both of deeper

democracy on the continent and of its diverse voices participating in international urban discourses and policymaking.

A bit on Berlin, Johannesburg, and Lagos. Several years ago, as a master's student in the SPRING (Spatial Planning in Regions of Growing Economies) Programme at the University of Dortmund, I had the privilege of visiting Berlin at a time of great significance. The Berlin Wall that had divided the then East Germany and West Germany had come down and the famous "Trabis" were making their way from the East to the West. The fall of the Wall and its tremendous impact on the urban landscape of Germany and Berlin reverberated around the world. A piece of the Wall that sits on my desk remains a constant reminder of the need to be particular about context and change in the circumstances of the everyday lives of people, in cities across the world, especially in Africa, and the need for different actors and duty bearers to act in concert in their responses to issues that affect citizens' livelihood and wellbeing. That piece also reflects the urgent need for popular participation, inclusion, and active people-oriented policymaking to enhance the livelihoods of citizens, especially in the growing urban settlements in Africa. Several years later, the Habitat Unit of TU Berlin under the Chair of Professor Philipp Misselwitz hosted two PhD students from the Department of Planning at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana, as part of the DAAD-sponsored In-Country-In-Region Scholarship Programme. The lessons from this engagement with Berlin, among others, initiated cooperation that saw the staff of the KNUST Department of Planning visiting Berlin under the Erasmus Programme in 2022.

My association with the city of Johannesburg started when I served as a member of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Global Network on HIV/AIDS and Development Planning in the early 2000s, where Johannesburg served as the hub for the Network's activities in Eastern and Southern Africa. Several years later, I was invited to serve as an external examiner to the planning discipline of the School of Architecture and Planning for three years before becoming Visiting Associate Professor in 2018. These roles at Wits enabled me to participate actively in several of the Urban Lab's programmes, including its collaborations with the AAPS at the Habitat Conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2018 and the Summer School hosted by Wits in May 2023, with field visits to Soweto and other urban spaces of interest in Johannesburg. Lagos is a city I visited several times on capacity-building missions for the then Department of International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom. The city has been and continues to be a functional wonder of how ordinary citizens navigate complex city systems and processes to sustain their livelihoods and aspirations. Projected to become an African megacity with an estimated population of about 20 million by 2030, along with Cairo in Egypt, Luanda in Angola, and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Lagos continues to intrigue urbanists and academics alike. The three cities where the collaborating universities are located appear to have provided the foundations for this inspiring volume, which critically examines the everyday lives



of urban citizens in Africa. The case studies from six African and European cities and collaboration between authors from the North and South provide the background where authors argue their cases for reform in how cities are governed to respond to the everyday needs of citizens.

The book provides a good journey through 14 chapters of experiences with policies at the global and national levels and a reflection on the local space of urban actors in cities across Africa. The chapters touch on pertinent issues, including an examination of literature that forms a foundation for other chapters and a discussion of global frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda, using deconstruction as a method of analysis, as well as a chapter on how such international policy frameworks apply at the local level in terms of the disability impact of people with disabilities in Lagos, Nigeria. The chapters are fairly balanced on the critique of norms, both global and normal, as seen in the case of the former KwaNdebele homeland in Mpumalanga, South Africa, which shows how municipal officials appear to have lost control over the land administration process and therefore engage in “porous bureaucracy” in order to do the work of the state. By so doing, they add to the hybrid nature of customary tenure, whose practices and stories are sometimes convoluted because tenure security is embedded in social relations. A case study from Ethiopia interrogates the infrastructure-led development at the forefront of international development cooperation discourse and adds to the debate on the need to contextualise development discourses and practices. The final chapter of the book contributes to an unfolding discussion on different urban futures. This is drawn from the contributions on pertinent issues and topics that bring the main arguments of this book to the table. This includes alternative politics towards disrupting the dominant discourses in global policy frameworks to fundamentally challenge the logic of universal modernity within UN-Habitat and nations’ implicitly adopting a modernist mindset through the United Nations agenda. The concluding chapter looks at the policy implications of the everyday in the chapters of *Everyday urban practices in Africa: Disrupting global norms* under four themes, namely heterogeneity, fluid belongings, persistence, and interplay. What it offers is worth a read!

As an association engaged with the dynamics of Africa’s urban development and attendant challenges and opportunities, we have engaged with the Wits-TUB-UNILAG Urban Lab in several spaces and areas of interest. We are therefore pleased to welcome this book as an invaluable addition to the narratives that explore everyday lived experiences and practices in urban spaces across the continent. There should be sufficient knowledge and food for thought for all those who engage with the contents of this book. It is a welcome addition for academic institutions, public libraries, development organisations in the Global North and South, and students and experts interested in life in the urban spaces of Africa. From the uniqueness of the areas where the case studies originate—Berlin, Dar es Salaam, Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, KwaNdebele, Lagos, and Nairobi—it is likely that readers

can relate to the themes that each chapter in the book puts across. It is hoped that this book will stimulate imaginations and dialogical processes about the everyday experiences of urban dwellers in cities across Africa.

It is said that knowledge without understanding is hollow, and understanding without knowledge is incomplete. It appears to me that in matters related to understanding the everyday lived experiences of urban residents, this book provides both understanding and completeness. I agree with the remarks in the concluding chapter that call for a rigorous interrogation of the attitudes, methods, and means of policymaking, policy transfer and policy implementation in the current international policy system and . . . the need for a shift in mindset towards affirming urban Africa and the Global South in the urban discourses of the future.

Hopefully, our collective experiences after reading this book will lead to exchanges that will provide further insights and pathways to reinforce these notions.

Daniel K. B. Inkoom

# Preface

The idea for this book has its roots in the Wits-TUB-UNILAG Urban Lab project, a collaborative graduate school on urban management between the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the Technical University of Berlin (TUB), and the University of Lagos (UNILAG), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. While working jointly across and within the three partner institutions, team members decided to author a joint publication to reflect the discussions on urban management across the locations involved in the Urban Lab and beyond. Tasked with furthering the project's goal of transforming urban studies and knowledge networks in and on Africa, the postdoctoral cohort from Wits, TUB, and UNILAG took the lead in conceptualising this book as a means of academic conversation and putting it into realisation. With the team working together throughout 2021, this culminated in the initiation of the first in a series of collective thinking and writing workshops involving Urban Lab team members in Johannesburg, Berlin, and Lagos. This creative space allowed the book, from its inception, to be co-created. This first workshop, facilitated by Associate Professor Pamela Nichols of the Wits Writing Centre, enriched the early stages of conceptualising the book through innovative techniques of unlocking creative writing, for which we would like to express our sincere gratitude. The collective writing process would be continued through further writing retreats and workshops in 2022 and 2023, funded in part by the discretionary research fund and the School of Architecture and Planning at Wits.

For the contributing authors from all three institutions, participation in this project involved a commitment to explore either prior or new research through the lens of the book's core argument. The book's central theme was defined co-productively while its collective crafting unfolded. The incorporation of co-authors from beyond the current project team in the writing of some of the chapters furthered co-production and allowed a mix of established research views and new arguments and positionalities to stand alongside each other. This added to the book's efforts to interrupt established knowledge, even at the cost of exploring authors' own discomforts. Editing

the book's content and development was a similarly co-produced endeavour, with an editorial team representative of the Urban Lab's three-member institutions and academics spanning different disciplinary backgrounds, regional expertise, viewpoints, experience, and career stages. At times, the writing and editing took the form of lengthy iterative processes of reconciling divergent views among different schools of thought and navigating diverse academic cultures and practices, marked by deliberation, productive tension, and constructive exchange. Simultaneously, the writing and review process created spaces for elevating voices and positionalities that question established knowledge relating to international norms and globalised urban development policies.

The collaboration was drawn to the topic of "disruption," juxtaposing this with notions of the "everyday," out of a collective concern that using (and thereby reinforcing) the urban norms and strategies that circulate in the corridors of authority at various levels will not meet the everyday realities with which urban populations are confronted across the globe. In the face of rising socio-economic disparities, this rang particularly true on the African continent, where those in this project focus most of their research on aspects that resonate with the idea of everyday practices. The notion of disruption, directed at the normative buzzwords and concepts at the global level, therefore emerged as the most compelling point of convergence during the co-creation of the book, bridging the varying theories, methodologies, and subject matter leanings of the authors. This inspired us to organise the book not around topics that are extracted from universalising norms but rather around four themes, collectively identified, that frequently arose as disruptive concepts. This resulted in the decision to explore heterogeneity, fluid belongings, persistence, and interplay. These four themes form the structure of the book and were explored further and given meaning within the scope of the chapters collected under the theme, introduced by short pieces from the contributors acting as section editors. They reflect on the notion of disruption as the book's core topic *and* core approach. With our collective belief in the human capacity for change and in making positive contributions, we used these insights for constructive suggestions on how to re-assemble after dismantling a number of concepts across the chapters.

Within these four themes, and while still coalescing around the central topic and approach that the notion of disruption provided, we each brought our own positionalities to the book as individual and collaborating authors (in some cases, these are incorporated into the individual chapters). Our positions are not attributed to our funders or various institutional affiliations but rather find their roots in our varying identities. Some of us are local citizens while others have migratory backgrounds, our academic backgrounds range from established to early career, and our underpinnings are inextricably shaped by our diverging and, at times, conflicting orientations, cultural beliefs, linguistic roots, and geographies, as well as other intersectional

elements of our identities. Despite best efforts to work collaboratively, we are aware that this was by no means a level playing field.

We owe a debt of gratitude to many for their unwavering commitment to the project and its vision throughout the often experimental and iterative process of co-production. A group of 11 anonymous scholars took part in the peer review of the individual chapters, providing valuable provocations and prompts, thereby sharpening our arguments and approaches. Zakiyyah Ayob ensured that project administration functioned smoothly to enable essential academic exchanges and activities, which allowed the book's ideas to develop and later become chapters. Lucas-Andrés Elsner took on the role of supporting the editors with a particular focus on the book's position within the Urban Lab commitments, while maintaining sight of project finances and communications. Following the peer review process, Iolandi Pool and Sathyasri Kalyana Sundaram worked diligently under shifting timelines to copyedit the chapters. Till Sperrle assisted under similarly challenging conditions in developing and aligning the graphic language of the maps and illustrations across the book. Dilara Uçar supported us conscientiously in formatting and compiling the manuscript.

We would like to acknowledge Professor Philipp Misselwitz for initiating and co-heading the Wits-TUB-UNILAG Urban Lab. We owe thanks to Professor Nnamdi Elleh, Head of the School of Architecture and Planning at Wits University, for encouraging and supporting the Urban Lab and, similarly, to Professor Timothy Nubi, Professor Taibat Lawanson, and the team at the Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development at the University of Lagos for their continuous support. We would like to acknowledge our team of editors at Routledge—Helena Hurd, Rosie Anderson, and Katerina Lade—for supporting us along the road to publication. Special thanks also to the section editors for their guidance to chapter authors and for ensuring that sections were tied together; we're grateful in particular to Taibat Lawanson and Elke Beyer for agreeing to this role. Most of all, a vote of thanks to the chapter authors for placing their trust in this project by sharing their research through this publication, as well as being willing to revisit it from a disruptive viewpoint, interrogating their own assumptions. Finally, we'd like to acknowledge with thanks that, as an output of the Wits-TUB UNILAG Urban Lab, this book project was funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with funds from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

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# 1 Introduction

## Global Norms, Urban Africa, the Everyday, and Disruption

*Marie Huchzermeyer, Nadine Appelhans,  
Basirat Oyalowo, and Mfaniseni Fana  
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### Introduction

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, local transport providers and users contest an ill-fitting public transport investment. In Lagos, Nigeria, a wheelchair user devises his own solution for navigating hostile public spaces. In semi-rural KwaNdebele, South Africa, a self-proclaimed traditional leader sells land allocation certificates in the face of an unmet housing demand. How do we make sense of a myriad of diverse everyday lived experiences and practices in the rapidly growing, densely populated spaces and regions of the African continent? Is the real everyday noted by policymakers and, if so, can it be translated into meaningful policy undertakings? What is the role of contemporary global agendas, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the United Nations (UN) adopted in 2015, and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) adopted a year later, in speaking to and transforming local realities for the better? Are the normative terms used in these agendas and adopted into national and local policies and programmes appropriate for the task at hand? And is “everyday” itself a relevant term or concept in a post-colonial context that is still rife with othering?

In tackling these questions, which drive the enquiry in this chapter and this book, we understand the diversity, complexity, hardship, and contradictions of everyday life and the grassroots practices that respond to this reality to exist in a relationship with the norms promoted in global agendas. Whereas we acknowledge the importance of the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, among others, in the contemporary agenda, we largely focus our engagement on the “global agenda” of the SDGs and the NUA. In this “global agenda,” the norms, which we also refer to as buzzwords, may be concepts such as inclusion, integration, or innovation, which are prominent in the SDGs and NUA. Their relationship to the actually existing “everyday” may be through their imposition via adoption into local policy, through assumptions made in these policies regarding their applicability to local contexts, and through the less benign uses they may have in furthering pre-existing political agendas. Displaying these relationships may disrupt or unsettle not only the well-intended if



simplistic understandings that underpin the inclusion of these “norms” into global agendas but also the hegemonic frameworks into which they are tied. We are mindful of the danger that “everyday,” if not given a transformative meaning, itself becomes either an empty buzzword or, worse, a tool for the repression or denial of abstract, philosophical, or policy thought emanating from the streets and spaces of diverse urban formations on the continent.

Based on a literature review of scholarly work and a policy review of global and African regional agendas, this chapter places the contributions in this book in the context of contemporary knowledge, debates, considerations, and commitments. It first discusses interpretations of the urbanisation of the African continent, its dynamics and characteristics, and how the global agendas have treated the continent as a destination to which agendas are transferred and as a site for idea experimentation and development, rather than as a generator and determinant of policy and development. The chapter then turns to norms in global agendas, reviewing philosophical and critical debates on norms in policy and their more and less benign uses in relation to global and African regional agendas, in particular the African Union’s (AU’s) “Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want,” and their implementation. Following this, the chapter discusses meanings of the everyday in the Southern turn in urban research, also tracing the origin of and debates about everyday experiences, life, and practices in scholarly enquiries. This includes, on the one hand, the importance of interaction between the local and the global and the challenges this poses and, on the other, the dearth of research on the diverse everyday on the African continent. A review of the distance between global agendas and everyday realities leads to the rationale for productive disruption of the norms or buzzwords in the global agendas, demonstrating the timeliness of this. Here, we argue that the fissures between the everyday realities and global agendas require more than a localisation agenda, as is commonly called for, but rather a disruption of the norms emanating from these agendas in a way that reviews, refines, and reconsiders their adequacy and fit. In closing, we present a brief synopsis of the structure of the book and of the chapter contributions.

### **The dynamics of African urbanisation: Interactions with the shifting global development agenda**

It is widely recognised that Africa is undergoing a pace of urbanisation that is globally unprecedented, though demographic trends are significantly complicated by the prevalence of circulatory migration (Pieterse and Parnell, 2014; Grant, 2015; Albert and Lawanson, 2019). What is undisputable is that the footprint of African cities is growing exponentially; consequently, there is a rise in large cities and city regions (Grant, 2015). As Pieterse and Parnell (2014, p. 1) put it, Africa’s demographic transformation “is a profoundly spatial story.” The effects of poorly absorbed rural-to-urban migration and the accompanying spatial, socio-cultural, economic, and political

transformations manifest in the peri-urban areas or peripheries of Africa's towns and cities with a long-recognised blurring between what is commonly understood as rural and urban (O'Connor, 1983/2007; Pieterse and Parnell, 2014; Grant, 2015; Meth et al., 2021). More enduring and tangible than the rural–urban binary are the contrasts created by disparities in terms of access to land, economic opportunities, infrastructure, and protection from the effects of extreme climate events in African cities. This is in part owing to the legacy of colonial planning and the still persistent and widespread fragmentation in contemporary planning and land administration (Grant, 2015; Myers, 2011). The mutually reinforcing challenges posed by climate change and fragile systems of governance and management have necessitated attention being drawn to the crises faced by African cities (Pieterse and Parnell, 2014; Albert and Lawanson, 2019).

Dominant projections of Africa's state of development are modelled against Western trajectories and norms, although this measure or model has long been disputed (Obeng-Odoom, 2013). Grant (2015, p. 23) is adamant that “[i]t is no longer possible to defend the position that cities in Africa will evolve according to Eurocentric ‘norms’.” Such positions call for caution against not only narratives that frame Africa as failed or in crisis in the face of global norms but also those that represent the continent through “success stories,” as has been the practice of development and financial agencies with reference only to Western economic norms or trajectories (Obeng-Odoom, 2013, p. 160). Defying measurement against universalised norms is the diversity of cultures, religions, and conditions across the continent; in Pieterse and Parnell's (2014, p. 2) words, “there is no one Africa.” A further framing that takes Western trajectories of urbanisation as the “norm” is that of an “African urban exceptionalism,” against which Grant (2015, p. 23) also cautions. Turning such perspectives on their head, several scholars have observed that cities of the Global North are transforming in ways that take on characteristics long known and experienced in African cities (Simone, 2010, cited in Myers, 2011; Grant, 2015). At the risk of over-simplification, this suggests that Africa, if not becoming the new norm, is certainly a continent from which the West can gain useful insights and lessons (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012) and, as Robinson (2006) argues, on which urban theory should build.

Throughout the UN's four “development” decades (the 1960s to 1990s), which sought to focus social, economic, and infrastructural investment in underdeveloped regions of the world, poverty and inequality remained on the rise (Kamau et al., 2018). The UN's *modus operandi* was, in part, to engage member states and, increasingly, other actors in thematic conferences and summits that adopted thematic agendas, whether on environment, population, or human settlements. The iconic nature of the turn of the millennium presented the UN with the opportunity to shift gear by tying member states into new forms of cooperation with voluntary commitment to a set of 15-year development targets (Kamau et al., 2018). Grant (2015, p. 20) refers to the resulting 2000–2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

as “the broadest consensus on development priorities ever achieved” at that time. However, the MDGs were limited predominantly to social development (including the largest health barriers thereto) and a focus on the Global South (Parnell, 2016; Kamau et al., 2018). Indeed, Grant (2015, p. 20) observes how Africa became a site for experimentation and “a millennium development frontier.” However, the UN’s post-2015 agenda, in particular the 2015–2030 SDGs, which were based on an extensive review of lessons learnt from more than a decade of MDG implementation and monitoring, represent the recognition of challenges, if not crises, shared across the Global North and South (Parnell, 2016; Kamau et al., 2018). With this, and paralleling the academic discourse reviewed in the previous paragraph, there has been cautious optimism that the creativity and resilience of ordinary people in Africa, long accustomed to fending for themselves and leading development from below, may offer innovation to the Global North (Grant, 2015).

Despite recognition in policy and scholarly discourses of Africa’s diversity and the resilience, innovation, and agency of ordinary people in the face of increasingly global challenges on the continent, dominant Western models of urban development, whether replicated from cities such as Shanghai, Dubai, or the European or North American continents, continue to override knowledge of local urban forms and practices (see Chapters 2 and 8 in this book). In part, this has to do with the state of research. Policy for African cities is not formulated on the basis of significant knowledge and faces data gaps (Pieterse and Parnell, 2014). As noted by critical scholars of African urbanism (e.g. Anderson and Rathbone, 2000; Myers, 2011; Robinson, 2006), globally focused urban research has either ignored cities in Africa or treated them as different, other, not modern or in Myers’ (2011, p. 4) words “not-quite cities,” or “examples of what can go wrong with urbanism.” Brenner (2018, p. 571) argues that, whether in international agencies or in localised knowledge institutions, universalizing ideologies of ‘the city’—especially the positivist, technoscientific, entrepreneurial, eco-managerial, and/or neoliberal variants—remain powerfully operative conceptual tools for analysis, mapping, policy, planning and practice.

A typical lens that is blind to Africa’s “cultural pluralism” (Anderson and Rathbone, 2000, p. 1) is that of “global cultural cities” with indices that “analyse the ‘cultural’ manifestations of global- and world-city status” (Myers, 2018, p. 236, citing Caset and Derudder, 2017). Thus, the urban theory that informs policy is often “based on a few North Atlantic cities” that are treated “as universal,” although their norms are “neither applicable nor useful in the vast part of the urban world,” much of which remains under-researched (Narayanan, 2022, p. 529). Nuancing this narrative, however, Cociña et al. (2019, p. 130) examine how knowledge was “articulated, circulated and valued” in the formulation of the agendas of Habitat I (held in 1976), Habitat II (held in 1996), and the NUA of Habitat III (held in 2016). This reveals how shifting paradigms of knowledge translation allowed particular developing world/Global South approaches to become reference points in the

agendas and with this “alternative forms of knowledge production have been either misrecognised or mainstreamed” (Cociña et al., 2019, p. 132).

Against the backdrop of knowledge bias and gaps, it must be recognised that international policy frameworks are themselves “a series of socially constructed enactments that span text and practice” (Tikly, 2019, p. 223, citing Ball et al., 2012). As Kamau et al. (2018) point out, though formulated as universalising standards and bench-marking tools, they are the product of political negotiation and, as such, the result of compromise and often uneven power leverage. Here, ideational power comes into play, a dynamic that Carstensen and Schmidt (2016, p. 321) define as “individual or collective” actors’ capacity to influence others’ “normative and cognitive beliefs” by using, among others, discourse, symbols, narratives, or frames. This is compounded by a trajectory that sees contemporary policies increasingly serving the logic of the market rather than the needs of their inhabitants or the environment (Bayat and Biekart, 2009; Eisenmenger et al., 2020). SDG 17, which focuses on partnerships for sustainable development and SDG implementation, illustrates this in that it incorporates the World Trade Organization agenda into its partnership targets and its underpinning General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (Weber, 2017). This places countries on a clear path towards the commercialisation of basic services such as water, health, and education (Weber, 2017). Kamau et al. (2018) raise the concern that the social construction of the policy system remains largely unquestioned and subject to mandates of international authority. Thus, while the post-2015 global frameworks, including the SDGs, must be recognised for their promotion of an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, they are in many ways in conflict with local aspirations and realities.

### **Global norms in urban policy**

In this book, we use the term “norms” loosely to refer to universalising assumptions that inform the post-2015 global sustainable development agenda. This includes the NUA, which consists of the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Human Settlements and Cities for All and the Quito Implementation Plan for the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III, 2016). The NUA, which is directly informed by the SDGs, in particular SDG 11 (to make “cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”), was adopted at the Habitat III Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito in October 2016 and welcomed and endorsed by the UN General Assembly in December 2016 (Habitat III, 2016, s. 9). SDG 11 contains norms or ideals such as “inclusive,” “safe,” “resilient,” and “sustainable.” Slater (2021, p. 1) refers to such terms in the urban discourse as “fashionable concepts and policy buzzwords,” noting their allure to urban actors, from politicians through to academics, who fail “to call into question the prefabricated problematics and imposed categories of urban policy.” Slater (2021) takes issue with the heteronomy or the imposing and restricting nature of

these buzzwords in preventing research enquiries from asking the necessary, critical questions. In taking its cue from SDG 11, the NUA builds a normative narrative around these buzzwords in which further normative concepts feature, many of them repeatedly. In Chapter 2 of this book, Sihlongonyane deconstructs the NUA's narrative with reference to sociologist Max Weber's notion of "ideal type," which reflects simplification. Elsewhere, Sihlongonyane (2021) has questioned the normative classification implied in the term "urban" in the NUA, which is ill-fitting to many densely inhabited contexts on the African continent. Other chapters in this book interrogate individual ideals, norms or buzzwords that feature strongly in the NUA or the SDGs, for instance "inclusion" (chapters 3, 5, and 6), "innovation" (Chapter 4), the categories of "formal" versus "informal" (Chapter 8), "tenure security" (Chapter 10), "urban governance" and "decentralisation" (Chapter 11), and "sustainable" infrastructure development (Chapter 13).

The normative terms in the global agenda are often only loosely defined, fuzzy or open to interpretation. This possibly random assignment of meaning allows them to become referred to as "empty" or, in the words of Lefebvre's (1968/1971, p. 171) translator, "vacant" signifiers. They are unable to function as meaningful expressions. However, as Appelhans (Chapter 4) suggests, associated normative models such as the bus rapid transit (BRT) development are applied in a deterministic way regardless of the setting. Thus, to connect once more with Lefebvre (1968/1971, p. 175), "detachable signifiers" do not have power, but this changes when they are "included in the methods of power." This means that as signifiers for the norms underlying global urban policy, terms such as "inclusivity," "resilience," and "sustainability" are only given specific meaning through particular routes of implementation, making it vital to explore and document how they have been deployed in the urban reality.

The norms that feature in the NUA are central to the work of UN-Habitat, for which the UN General Assembly (UN, 2016, s. 13) sets the role of "providing substantive and technical support to developing countries in areas related to sustainable cities and human settlements, as reflected in, inter alia, the New Urban Agenda." Through voluntary commitments made at the Habitat III summit, the NUA's norms also inform governmental, non-governmental, and market-based urban stakeholders at all levels. UN member states are encouraged to report regularly on progress in their implementation of the NUA through a comprehensive set of indicators (in Chapter 8, Sithagu interrogates one of these, namely security of tenure). The influence of norms in the NUA is, therefore, significant. For this reason, civil society organisations deployed intense advocacy to ensure the incorporation of new rights-based norms, such as the right to the city, and of meaningful formulations around existing human rights norms, such as the right to adequate housing (Zárata, 2018). The contestation around the right to the city in the NUA's formulation is indicative of the contradicting and, indeed, conflicting interests and aspirations—both among UN member states and within the larger regime

of global governance—that define UN-Habitat’s policy framework (Parnell, 2016). However, once incorporated into the global policy discourse, the concept of the right to the city inevitably stands the danger of becoming another buzzword. As Althorpe and Horak (2023, p. 2) note, development agencies at the international level merely use the right to the city “to promote and re-legitimate preexisting development aims,” denying its radical demands. The notion of the “everyday” would fall into the same trap if it were to be promoted at that level. In certain academic discourses, it may have become an almost obligatory buzzword.

Returning to the concerns reviewed earlier about the imposition of Western norms on diverse, plural, and rapidly changing African urban contexts, it is relevant to note African country representation and agency in the negotiation of the global 2030 agenda (Croese, 2022). These negotiations included the deliberations towards the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (Croese, 2022). In the negotiations on the contents of the NUA, the representatives of African countries produced a joint position titled *Africa’s Priorities for the New Urban Agenda* (UN, 2016). African countries uniting around a common position reflects the spirit of Agenda 2063 (AU, 2015), a distinctly pan-African agenda adopted by the AU in 2013–2015. This agenda is “motivated by development based on [the] self-reliance and self-determination of African people, with democratic and people-centred governance” (AU, 2015, s. 19)—themes Huchzermeyer and Kornienko take up in Chapter 8 and Misselwitz and Roberts in Chapter 11 in this book. People-centredness and self-reliance reverberate throughout Agenda 2063, although the pathway set out in its “call to action” relies on market-oriented approaches of competitiveness, world-classness, and industrial and economic growth, a criticism also identified by Tikly (2019). This orientation implicitly informs an urban vision, which is absent in the text save for a short section on “affordable housing” and “well planned environments” for all (UN, 2016, s. 72b). Though drafted before the SDGs and the NUA, Agenda 2063’s urban vision contains the broad consensus that this global agenda represents.

*Africa’s Priorities for the New Urban Agenda* (UN, 2016) reflects Agenda 2063 but presents a mainstream urban policy position. It acknowledges both the challenges and opportunities presented by the continent’s urbanisation and human settlements and recognises the increasing complexity (UN, 2016). It seeks to harness urbanisation towards poverty alleviation and economic growth (UN, 2016), intertwined as these two objectives are in the orthodoxy of the 21st-century developmental state (Evans, 2010). The position supports economic growth ambitions with aspirations for industrialisation and modernisation in productivity and relies on partnerships with key roles played by the private sector. It recognises the need for a system that connects cities or human settlements, therefore giving prominence to interregional infrastructure (a theme that features in Chapters 12 and 13) (UN, 2016). Normatively,

it is aligned with the dominant global policy position, though not in line with the Anglo-American position in its strong support for UN-Habitat—the future role of which, as Parnell (2016, p. 538) predicted, became one of the “points of potential cleavage” in the deliberations. The normative buzzword “inclusion” features in relation to economic growth, socio-economic transformation, and participatory and consultative processes. “Integration” appears as an aspired characteristic of urbanisation and human settlement policy in terms of spatial and infrastructural linkages across the continent (UN, 2016). The formal–informal binary does not feature directly but is implied in the objective to register and title land. “Security of tenure” is mentioned in relation to slum upgrading (UN, 2016). Seen from the perspective of the chapters in this book, Africa’s priorities for the NUA seemed blind to diverse realities and potentialities, whether the agency of ordinary people and community organisations (a theme that reverberates across most chapters); active self-determination (Chapters 7 and 8) or parallel systems (Chapter 10); institutional failure (Chapter 9); forgotten contexts (Chapter 12); or protracted and ignored challenges (Chapters 11 and 13).

### The everyday in scholarship on African cities

In what has become known as the “Southern turn” in urban studies, scholars focusing on Global South cities have made demands for a new approach. Citing authors such as Bayat (2000), Robinson (2006), and Pieterse (2008), Till (2012, p. 12) notes that there have been calls “for radical retheorizations of ‘the city’ to understand how to transform structures of inequality and recognize the lived realities of most urban residents.” Research exploring local urbanisms of the Global South increasingly engages an “everyday” perspective (Robinson, 2006; Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011; Appelhans, 2017; Guma et al., 2023). To varying degrees, such studies have questioned the universal nature of the “city,” which too often “derives its authority from a colonial/Eurocentric episteme, rooted deeply” in the notion of linear progression and a “politics of knowledge production” (Narayanan, 2022, p. 528). This, as argued by (Narayanan, 2022, p. 528), “disenfranchises other forms of knowledge from *elsewhere*” (emphasis in the original).

The concept of the everyday in social research has a significant genealogy through the work of prominent theorists in the Western world. In the 19th century, Karl Marx’s interest in the “everyday existence” of the proletariat was twofold: to expose the workings of capital and to engage with the potential for working classes to rise against this (Lefebvre, 1968/1971, p. 12). In much less radical terms, Robinson (2006 p. 3), with reference to Lefebvre and postcolonial writing such as Simone (1998), calls for theory-informing research that follows “the creative paths of urban dwellers . . . as they remake cities” and “on the transformed potential of shared lives in diverse, contested—ordinary—cities to imagine new urban futures.” This points to the need for a triadic interaction between the everyday, theory, and

transformation. Lefebvre (1968/1971, pp. 13–14) discusses the relationship between everyday life and philosophy, rejecting the dominant view that philosophy stands hierarchically above and detached from the everyday and in which “‘world’ or ‘universe’ appear to contain and enclose the only world there is.” This reflects what Sihlongonyane (2021, p. 280) refers to as the “promotional material” of the promoters of sustainable, smart, creative, or eco-friendly cities, which promise “glossy, aspirational spaces to live, work and play,” noting how “this is wedded to ideals of market stability and neo-liberal governance that are inimical to the affirmation of livelihood for the poor.” Lefebvre (1968/1971, p. 174) points to the existence of an idealised “make-believe” parallel everyday life, and observes that “[u]nder the laser of critical analysis” the “true shape” of everyday life emerges. Whereas Marx and Lefebvre could not anticipate the current postcolonial situation on the African continent and align their work to this, we nevertheless draw from Lefebvre, in particular. His discussion of everyday life includes the point that if philosophy is to serve in transforming or solving the problems of the everyday, it needs to be in a “dialectical interaction” with everyday life, the latter serving as “a field and a half-way house, a halting place and a springboard” for philosophy (Lefebvre, 1968/1971, p. 14).

In contemporary urban studies research, the term “everyday” is used both in representations of the conditions or situations in which ordinary people live day to day and in the actions or activities (everyday life) through which ordinary people cope with, confront, and, at times, challenge this reality (everyday practice). Studying the everyday is attributed with particular decentering powers cemented by data evidence. A collection on everyday life edited by Storey et al., (2020) draws attention to growing inequality across the globe and its implications. Everyday practice, in turn, takes interest in agency as well as politics. Situating their study in cities of the Global North, Beveridge and Koch (2019, p. 143) invoke the notion of “everyday urban politics” to represent organised, collective practices that are strategic in articulating “a political antagonism embedded in, but breaking with, urban everyday life through altering—however temporarily—time- and place-specific social relations.” They focus on ordinary people’s autonomous practices that “decentre” the state (Beveridge and Koch, 2019, p. 143). From a post-colonial perspective, the everyday has prominently been explored by Homi Bhabha (2004), who, from the viewpoint of cultural studies, introduces the concept of “third space” in which everyday activities take place. In Latin America, Alvares and Barbosa (2018) use the concept of everyday practice to include a “politico-administrative” dimension in a multi-dimensional approach to the study of public space in Brazil, also forefronting difference and conflict in their exploration. Most recently, a publication by Guma et al. (2023) uses the term “everyday life” in a discussion of living conditions in Kenya, framing it as a struggle for survival in the city.

Inspired by both Marxist-humanist and post-colonial literature, Robinson (2006, p. 6) advocates an urban theory that promotes “strategies for city improvements that build on their distinctive and individual creativities and



resources.” Robinson (2006) argues that urban citizens should be allowed to define their own modernity and cities should improve along their own, culturally specific paths—and, one may add, religious paths. Following this argumentation, Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield (2011, p. 446) employ “everyday practices” alongside everyday politics to explore the “actual practices of local democracy” through which ordinary people in South Africa access the state. Appelhans (2017, p. 15) coins the phrase “practices of everyday urbanisation” when exploring the relationship between ordinary people’s activities and formal planning. In a similar approach, Serin and Irak (2022, pp. 2–3) examine the “dialectical relationship between local government and everyday politics,” finding that “everyday life is the place where everyday politics is being realised while also transforming institutional politics.” It follows that institutions of the state themselves are also sites of everyday practice.

Drawing on this literature, most chapters in this book engage with the everyday through empirical case studies, whereas Chapters 2, 11, 12, and 13 study processes with direct implications for the everyday. The chapters across the book differ in that they draw on and/or combine a variety of philosophical approaches, from broadly pragmatic to postcolonial, decolonial, and Africanist. In Chapter 3, Rawhani and Steigemann employ critical theory to reflect on the everyday life of ordinary people resulting in “everyday frictions” in public parks in Johannesburg compared to those in parks in Berlin. From a pragmatic perspective, Lawanson (Chapter 5) presents findings on the lived experience and agency of people living with disability in Lagos, whereas Leuta (Chapter 6) draws on postcolonial theory to engage everyday rituals of survival, security, and mutual caring among homeless residing in a cemetery in Johannesburg in the face of repeated eviction. Two chapters apply a broader political economy approach on themes that affect everyday life. Ojo, Faniran, and Huchzermeyer (Chapter 12) provide the context of the national and regional political concern of often-forgotten human settlements that develop around national border crossings and in which urban everyday life plays out. Onifade, Agbalajobi, Lawanson, and Huchzermeyer (Chapter 11) review intractable challenges in the local government electoral system in Nigeria that block the basic democratic system required for service delivery in cities such as Lagos, with direct implications for everyday life.

A number of chapters directly engage everyday practice, which we understand as deliberate as well as less conscious political engagement with everyday realities, and therefore agency. With this starting point, Misselwitz and Roberts (Chapter 7) present everyday dwelling and homemaking among refugees in Lagos and Berlin. Sithagu (Chapter 10) reflects on practices of accessing, securing, and servicing land in semi-rural Thembisile Hani in South Africa. Huchzermeyer and Kornienko (Chapter 8) adapt the concept of the everyday through African and decolonial philosophies and approaches in their study on everyday practices of community leadership in Ekurhuleni, South Africa, organising to confront and engage the state.

A further approach to the everyday across chapters in this book is that policies and infrastructure are critical to the quality of everyday life and that ordinary people respond to their inadequate implementation. State or private sector undertakings or partnerships are often exclusionary and inadvertently create fractures in existing systems of provision owing to systemic globalising forces of policy transfer. Thus, Appelhans (Chapter 4) examines how cities such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam have embarked on large infrastructure projects, and Elsner (Chapter 13) more broadly explores this for the government of Ethiopia. Oyalowo (Chapter 9) explores “informal” responses to housing deficits resulting from failed neoliberal policies in Lagos. As mentioned earlier, these chapters do not, in any systematic way, fill the gap of research on the African everyday. Notably, none of the chapters hones in on the diverse everyday struggles and realities of women, nor do they engage with the growing risks that climate change presents for vulnerable everyday lives. Rather, they represent different approaches to considering the everyday in relation to global norms, engaging in a variety of ways, to draw from Lefebvre, as “springboards” for dialectic interaction with policy at all levels, including global agendas.

### **Discrepancies between global agendas and urban everyday reality: A rationale for disruption**

In the face of a vast continent marked by diversity, the chapters in this book are mere vignettes. They offer a small window into the enormous work needed to build a critical and situated African urban policy discourse that dialectically engages the everyday and is embraced by advocacy groups and policymakers at national, regional, or global level without watering down its rich content. Whereas more research of this kind is needed, including on small- and medium-sized towns, we also argue that the African continental position, whether Agenda 2063 or Africa’s priorities in the preparations for the NUA, did not sufficiently draw on existing knowledge to nuance the norms incorporated into global policies. African leaders, in effect, ratified dominant positions in the crafting of the NUA. Put differently, knowledge of the urban everyday in the African context is inadequately noted, unvalidated, and neglected in the negotiated processes of global and regional urban agenda-setting, with the result that such agendas have limited relevance on the African ground. While conversing in the language of inclusion, integration, and decentralisation, the global agendas mobilise towards embracing a universalised system of governance and discourse. As argued by Sithagu (Chapter 10 in this book) and Buyana et al. (2022), performance measurement indices for the global agendas also reflect the uncritical adoption of norms that need more nuance. Buyana et al. (2022, p. 33) illustrate this with the example of models addressing climate change such as the Global Protocol for Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas Emissions, which relies on data that are not available and difficult to collect in African cities.

These discrepancies have been acknowledged and, as Parnell (2022) argues, owing to the unique nature of global organisations, their global agendas, such as the SDGs, need to be accepted for lack of better alternatives. Aligned with this position is the pragmatic and important focus on challenges of implementation (Lawanson et al., 2021; Buyana et al., 2022; see also Chapter 5 in this book). Local governments are critical in the implementation of global agendas yet, across Africa, their political and administrative weakness is notable. However, even if these hurdles were overcome, implementation would not guarantee the achievement of the intended outcomes. Referencing the SDGs, Croese (2022, p. 4) attributes this to the “uneven local vision” of globally signed agreements. Seen from this perspective, the weakness and sedentariness of governments in relation to localised policies are additional causal factors. Therefore, a focus on the implementation of the SDGs in policy that is informed by the norms in global agendas only speaks to one side of the coin or one side of the action required. In this book, we argue that “localising” the NUA and the SDGs, as is generally called for and necessary in its own right (see Parnell, 2022), will not resolve the continent’s urban challenges. This is especially critical, as the implementation of the policies in real-life contexts can lead to situations where local governments become accountable to international organisations or their normative frameworks, rather than to the local population (Carolini, 2021; see also Chapters 4, 5, 9, 11, and 13 in this book). We therefore insert a multi-directional focus that includes a questioning of the adequacy and fit of policy norms themselves. We seek to provoke a deep review, refinement, reconsideration, or disruption of what has come to be accepted as global urban norms.

It is encouraging that the need for deeper questioning has been articulated from within UN organisations themselves. For example, consultants as well as high-level staff and teams at the UN Development Programme and UN-Habitat participated in an evaluation of the 2018 World Urban Forum (WUF 9) in Malaysia. The evaluation report reveals a general yearning for new ideas and disruptive engagement at the biannual WUF conferences (UN-Habitat, 2019). High-level respondents had come to WUF 9 “to be inspired and to have disruptive discussions with experts from all over the world” (UN-Habitat, 2019, p. 41). The report includes the recommendation that “[WUF] themes should be ‘disruptive’ and change the course by promoting uncomfortable ideas” (UN-Habitat, 2019, p. 60). In a way, this book is a response to this call. In 2021, Cities Alliance (2021, p. 6) launched the Global Programme on Informality, which aims “to fundamentally alter how knowledge is created and shared on informal settlements and related topics.” It notes the importance of clear definitions of “informality” (a theme that Chapter 8 in this book disrupts further) and the need for research on the connection between such definitions and policy (Cities Alliance, 2021). Thus, we acknowledge a growing recognition of the fissures between reality and policy norms, both within and beyond the UN, and the potential for disrupting current global alliances and forums if these fissures are to be addressed

in recognition of Africa's urban nuances. We are hopeful that this book will motivate scholarly and policy debates in this direction.

An openness to disruption is also evident with the funder of our book project, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The project team spans Technical University Berlin, the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and the University of Lagos under the BMZ's "SDG Graduate School" programme. Our undertaking to BMZ is to promote the implementation of the SDGs in urban settings on the African continent. We acknowledge Slater's (2021) warning of financial dependency in academic work, which may relinquish intellectual autonomy and direct research towards the very signifiers that we identify as empty. We also acknowledge a variety of existing entanglements on the part of the individual authors with the policy discourse, and therefore, the book has no uniform approach and veracity to disruption across its chapters. However, its authors share and are motivated by a concern with the externalities created through the lack of consideration and incomplete incorporation of the peculiarities of African cities and urban settings in international and regional agreements. We are proposing that empirical work on African cities holds particular potential to interrogate global policies, allowing a critical reflection on them. We, therefore, put ourselves and the other book chapter authors to the challenge of using the concept of "disruption" to reflect on frameworks, path-dependencies, and alternative viewpoints, starting from our/their own localised research. With this approach, we set out to contribute to a questioning of the norms or buzzwords in global urban policies and possible alternatives, to arrive at nuanced and differentiated viewpoints on the global frameworks in relation to the urban realities. Our use of the term "disruption" therefore differs from the dominant use of this term in contemporary urban research, which is to reflect the disruptive potential of technology rather than of academic work (e.g. Odendaal, 2023). Through disruption, the chapters in this book re-interpret the meanings of policy and the praxis of local urbanism as part of critical Southern scholarship.

### **Disrupting global norms across the book chapters**

In collectively conceptualising the book, four provocative themes stood out as cutting across the envisaged chapters. They are termed "heterogeneity," "fluid belongings," "persistence," and "interplay." Rather than structuring the book through policy topics, normative buzzwords, regions of the continent, or methods applied, we use these themes to structure the book into four sections and, through this, bring together chapters in which the themes are most strongly present. The themes structure a conversation across the chapters and are used as entry points for wider reflection in the final chapter of this book. Section introductions explain these themes in detail and outline their threads through the chapters.



Figure 1.1 Overview of the book chapters' study sites.

Source: Image drafted by Till Sperrle based on material provided by the authors

Under the theme of “heterogeneity,” which brings together Chapters 2 to 4, Chapter 2 questions the ambitions the NUA sets for urbanisation and city governance as drivers of sustainable development in Africa. Sihlongonyane deconstructs the very visioning of the NUA, questioning its inherent Eurocentricity, which is devoid of the benefit of acknowledging the spontaneity of Africa’s urban trajectories. The chapter observes the lost opportunities for the creation of new knowledge, languages, and visions that expand the usefulness of the global urban agenda.

Rawhani and Steigemann (Chapter 3) disrupt the generalisation of the notions of social cohesion and inclusion in the SDGs and the NUA. Through ethnographic cases from Johannesburg and Berlin, the chapter disrupts the notion that public space can increase social contact and subsequently boost social cohesion. The chapter acknowledges individual agency and affirms that everyday patterns reflect expressions of heterogeneous needs and socio-spatially fragmented histories that are critical determinants of an inclusion-cohesion pathway.

In Chapter 4, Appelhans recalls the role of global organisations in promoting the BRT as an ideal public transportation system. Reporting on interviews with multiple actors in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, Appelhans dismantles the narrative of an adoption of innovative thinking approaches in BRT projects, showing instead how the spatial and cultural knowledge embedded in existing transportation systems was bypassed, resulting in everyday contestations, renegotiation with existing transportation providers, and compromise over the use of BRT spaces. The chapter recommends that such recognition be the normative basis of an integrated transportation system.

The theme of “fluid belongings” forms a thread through Chapters 5 to 7. In Chapter 5, Lawanson focuses on the commitment to “Leave no one behind,” that is, the normative commitment to inclusion in the SDGs and NUA. Through policy review and interviews, the chapter shows how weak planning, coordination, enforcement, and funding in Lagos became elements of policy sedentariness with limited benefits for people with disabilities. The chapter argues that, while the SDGs were an entry point for inclusion, they are divorced from the normative imperatives of redistribution and their adoption does not guarantee any change in the conditions of the people, who instead have gone ahead to shape alternatives for themselves.

Chapter 6 argues that even a repertoire of policies that align with global norms of inclusion may not hold relevance for endemic homelessness in a city. Leuta adopts an ethnographic case of a community residing in the Brixton Cemetery to show the adverse effects of such policy in the City of Johannesburg and articulates how incomplete integration of shelter with other local government systems relegated the homeless to increasing patterns of exclusion. The chapter argues that adaptive responses by homeless persons included expressing their sense of belonging in public spaces that are better suited to their needs than government-sponsored homeless shelters.

Chapter 7 is based on architectural ethnographies of spatial appropriations by refugees in Berlin and internally displaced persons in Lagos. Misselwitz and Roberts show the dislocation between global humanitarian policies and local practices of refugees, since international guiding principles have not halted continued vulnerability, unsettlement, and exclusion of refugees in either city. In response, those affected re-create assigned spaces as an expression of self-determination, even if not legally approved.

Chapters 8 to 10 fall under the theme of “persistence.” Chapter 8 dismantles the formal–informal binary, noting its power to erase local aspirations for development and its inability to deal with underlying issues of inequality and oppression. Through longitudinal engagement with the civic leadership of the Harry Gwala community in Ekurhuleni, South Africa, Huchzermeyer, and Kornienko invoke the right to development and self-determination to give meaning to a community’s resistance to imposed development. The chapter argues that the right to development, with its roots in Africa’s struggle for independence, is more relevant than the reductionist framing of a community as “informal.”

Chapter 9 questions the assumptions underpinning the international transfer of the notion of enablement as part of neoliberal policy in Nigeria’s housing sector. Through analysis of media reports on housing affordability, Oyalowo tackles the assumption that the government’s adoption of a market-driven “enabling role” will facilitate access to affordable housing in Lagos. The chapter highlights how the “enabling role” as a policy drive resonates with the free market imperative and results in low-income people defining their own, though inadequate, methods of housing construction and finance outside regulatory planning processes.

Chapter 10 questions the SDG monitoring framework as one that is based on a universalised standard and quantifiable process that diminishes formal advancements made by local people. Sithagu’s case, based on interviews with community members in a semi-rural area of KwaNdebele in South Africa, shows blindness in the indicators for perceived and *de facto* tenure security. The chapter argues that countries of the Global South are further disadvantaged when traditional and pseudo-traditional actors and their knowledge and governing systems are unrecognised in policy.

Finally, the theme of “interplay” reverberates across Chapters 11 to 13. In Chapter 11, Onifade, Agbalajobi, Lawanson, and Huchzermeyer show that the heavy political manoeuvring of local governments’ financial resources by state governments limits their capacity to deliver on constitutional infrastructure mandates, which in turn renders them incapable of delivering on assigned roles and targets in international agendas. Through a desktop review of the performance of the local government electoral system, the chapter argues that the silence in the NUA on the need for strong and fully democratic electoral processes is a missed opportunity for creating the social contract necessary for local governments to be relevant in Africa’s urban development.

Chapter 12 addresses the failure of international, regional, and national policies to acknowledge the socio-economic needs of border communities, despite long histories of cross-border mobility and long-distance trade on the African continent. Ojo, Faniran, and Huchzermeyer's desktop study shows the discordance between the fluid reality of the Nigeria–Benin border communities and state priorities for border trade and national security. The chapter draws attention to the missed opportunity for the NUA to commit member states to cross-national cooperation towards development in the context of competing states.

Chapter 13 focuses on the SDGs and the NUA, contending that African governments' access to economic resources may be a motivation to agree to international agendas. Elsner uses Ethiopia as a case to argue that the resultant predilection for large infrastructure projects, required to meet the SDGs, sees these unfold to the detriment of trans-local linkages and interdependencies. As also shown in Chapter 4, these often neglect local mobilities and interests. The chapter concludes that place-based strategies in the design of infrastructure projects will ensure sustainability benefits accrue to all stakeholders.

Chapter 14 brings the book to a close with an analysis and discussion of the findings and recommendations in the chapters. Sihlongonyane, Huchzermeyer and Appelhans consider the epistemologies needed to ensure a post-2030 agenda is fit for the diverse urban realities in Africa. This leads to a discussion on a research and advocacy agenda for the continent, based on the recommendations made in the chapters. The authors also discuss the overall implications of the disruption across the chapters. Under the four organising principles of this volume—heterogeneity, fluid belongings, persistence, and interplay—they discuss concrete recommendations on how the everyday can be framed in terms of policy implications. The chapter closes with an argument against business as usual in the international policymaking arena and recommends approaches that include African epistemic frameworks, providing space for local specificity and plurality. This includes pointers for the role of regional bodies and the academy or knowledge institutions on the African continent, which is where the project of this book needs to be taken forward.

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## Part I

# Heterogeneity

*Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyane*

The theme of heterogeneity acknowledges the complex diversity, mixity, and variety of urban processes that prevail in African cities as shaped by a myriad of factors, such as imperialism, coloniality, and Africanicity, and the mix through law, policy, strategy, plans, etc. Heterogeneity is concerned with the layers of structural accumulated influences in Africa over time. Heterogeneity can be interpreted in two ways, the first being in terms of differences between the Global North and the Global South and everything in between. While cities in the Global North are generally wealthy, technologically advanced, politically stable, and, most importantly, promoting a dominant vision of Euro-modern urban development, African cities possess a different complexity that rivals the dominant conventional understanding of urban and standard development policies. While the construct is not absolute, the geopolitical tensions of law, policy, and plans are contested within the polarity of these functions. Secondly, heterogeneity is explored in terms of the diversity of systems, processes, dynamics, and values underpinning the art of urban citizenship, some of which are known, for example, informality (though contested—see Part 3 of this book), but much of which is unknown (at least in the European knowledge canon) or indeterminate and invisible. Heterogeneity here recognises informalised systems of governance, for example, non-municipal structures, the blurred processes of legal control, the othered dynamics of normative practices, and the objectified values of the Other.

The scholars in this theme are, respectively, investigating “the urban,” “cohesive city,” and “innovation” as features of the dominant Eurocentric discourse of urbanisation and point out the consequential distortions, misappropriation, and misfit arising from the application of policies associated with this. While grounding their focus in the struggle for urban equality and rights, they argue for a multicultural revision of knowledge, policy, and practice so that new politics can emerge to transform reality rather than merely idolising the dominant models of urban development. Working across disciplines under the *heterogeneity* theme, the authors are wary of Western or Euro-American centrism, as manifested in forms of Orientalism towards development. The chapters assert that many of the international policy

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frameworks implemented on the continent are inimical to the interests of most citizens in African cities.

In Chapter 2, Sihlongonyane observes that there is marginalisation of African cities in the conception of the urban. He astutely maps the (mis)location of African cities in the international urban frameworks as well as the production of concepts, theories, methods, and approaches that are not well suited to the African context. He recognises the rapid growth of African cities but raises caution about the dangers of embracing a condescending urban discourse on the continent. He recognises that the sweeping influence of the urban-centric discourse is diametrically opposed to the whims, fluidity, and transitory configurations of African cities. While reckoning with the complex history(s) of African cities, he recommends an “urban paradigm shift” towards creating new vocabularies to describe urban realities in the African context—vocabularies reckoning with the rural—urban continuum and an ecosystemic approach to urban development that emphasises the interaction between the various parts of territories with different functions, textures, and tapestries of urbanity.

Rawhani and Steigemann (Chapter 3) look at Johannesburg and Berlin, and how these cities have adopted the “cohesive city” paradigm incorporating the concept of social cohesion into the heart of the development of public spaces, for example, parks. The chapter demonstrates that there is a convergence of thought around the notion of a cohesive city in the two cities largely influenced by the prevailing discourse of globalised urban development policy norms. They demonstrate that the concept of a “cohesive city” is part of the globalised ideals of Euro-modern urbanism prevailing in politically driven urban projects by national governments in the developing world. Although they do not dismiss the concept of a “cohesive city” as derisive, irrational, or hopelessly idealistic, they do disrupt it by rattling the hidden assumptions underlying the idea of a cohesive city. Against the notion of public space as a generator of social cohesion, they argue that public spaces are also influenced by external factors, such as the exposure, experience, and learning of an individual, rather than just by the sheer physics of space. Rawhani and Steigemann point out the need to recognise that “space alone is not an agency to engender cohesion simply by being public.” They argue that it is highly situational, noting many externalities that may create cohesion but just as easily may produce different outcomes depending on local stimuli. This chapter disrupts the false assumptions of a cohesive city in the prevailing urban discourse and calls for a more pragmatic justification of policy and a more realistic expectation for practical outcomes.

In Chapter 4, Appelhans questions inscriptions of innovation policies in transit-led development, looking at the cases of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. She notes that the bus rapid transit system has entered the urban development discourse as an important vector of urban change. For most African countries, this occurs amid the expansion of the practice of policy transfer from the Global North to the Global South and in the midst of the infrastructure

renaissance on the continent. She notes the coercive elements of international institutions as transfer agents in developing countries, often arising from the conditions imposed on loans. In such cases of coercive policy transfer, the interaction of transfer agents is dominated by international agents and the role of domestic transfer agents is limited. Appelhans is critical of collaborators in developing countries as something that generates path dependence and discusses how local circumstances differ from externally driven policy experiences. Using the two case studies, she demonstrates that local realities are inimical to the policy imperatives of externally driven policy transfer. She recommends a bottom-up participatory approach to encourage local adaptation of a new technology system to support innovation and calls for local agency in policymaking so that it is adaptable to local contexts. She also argues in favour of local assessment criteria for project viability of transport needs in order to address systems integration rather than systems substitution.

These chapters look at the influences of discourses of knowledge, practice, and behaviour that are embedded in prevailing international policy frameworks and their effects on local practices. They identify their negative impact on cities on the African continent. The chapters identify the asymmetry in knowledge production and its negative effect through policy influences. They reflect on how the hierarchy of knowledge between the West and the rest of the world renders the urban practices of the West visible and legitimated, while the knowledge of the rest, in this case practices of African natives, is rendered visible. Therefore, the specific imaginaries and creative solidarities through which urban Africans understand order and stake claims around the rights, rewards, and spaces in the city are deemed illegitimate or informal, or invisible in law and development frameworks. These chapters are against “business as usual” in policy practice.



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## 2 Questioning the Urban-Centrism of the New Urban Agenda and Its Implications for African Cities

*Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyane*

### Introduction

Habitat III, the United Nations (UN) Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, took place in the city of Quito, Ecuador, on 17–20 October 2016, with participants filling the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana situated between Quito’s old city and the Mariscal district. The conference drew together over 25,000 participants every day and a total of 45,000–50,000 registrants (Currie, 2016). On 20 October at 4:02 pm, the conference adopted the New Urban Agenda (NUA). In his closing statement, Dr Joan Clos (2016), then executive director of UN-Habitat, said,

This is a timely moment for the New Urban Agenda and its commitments for the implementation of a more sustainable planet for the immediate urban future . . . not many people understand that urbanisation generates wealth: Bang! Bang! Bang! . . . Just by the fact that you design an urban plan, you are creating money—because the value of this land, once the design is approved, increases 10-fold.

There was palpable excitement in the venue, with the NUA’s inception seeming a decisive victory. Numerous LED screens with flashing headlines proclaimed the NUA to be the start of a new urban era.

Like all UN agreements, the NUA is broad-ranging, comprehensive, and ambitious. It lays out a sweeping set of visions, pledges, and commitments for local governments predicated on overarching and precarious assumptions about implementing sustainable development. The fundamental question is: How does the 24-page, 175-paragraph document speak to the urban dynamics of African countries? Are there “urban whims, mosaic, patchwork,” heterogeneity, fluidity, and transitory configurations (Sihlongonyane, 2021, p. 284) in African cities that upset the NUA’s vision? These questions are timely, given that the deliberations leading up to the new global agenda for the post-2030 era need to be revised to improve the conditions of African cities.

This chapter adopts deconstruction as a method of analysis of the NUA. Deconstruction is a way of reading a text and exposing the instability of



meaning, which is covered up via the text. It reveals how the NUA text is internally conflicted and far from achieving the serenity of a definite meaning. Using examples from cities on the continent, this chapter explores the “interiority” and “exteriority” of African cities in relation to the NUA and highlights the dangers of the agenda’s rhetoric, essentialism, and “organismic” approach. It disrupts and unsettles the NUA by arguing that it remains little more than rhetorical in terms of many of the developments embedded in the geographic locales of African cities. This argument is grounded in the historical making of the urban agenda and the preceding research informing the Habitat urban discourse, as discussed later.

### **Conventional wisdom informing the new urban agenda and its blindness to African realities**

The emergence of a new form of urban optimism in European and North American social science in the early 21st century has been significant in legitimating the claims made for the importance of cities in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 agenda (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 91). This optimism is predicated on the realisation that the world consists of an increasing number of cities and that a growing proportion of the global population is living in urban settlements (UNDESA, 2018). In 2016, it was estimated that, globally, 120,000 people moved to cities each day (Jones, 2016). This dynamic is predicted to lead to 70% of the global population living in cities by 2050, ensuring that cities define the social, economic, cultural, and ecological quality of human life in the 21st century (Provoost, 2016)—“the future of humanity is undoubtedly urban” (UN-Habitat, 2022, p. xv).

Barnett and Parnell (2016) identified three fields of academic research that played an important role in legitimising this “new conventional wisdom” about cities within policy circles in the Global North and reflected in the NUA. These are agglomeration, scales of governance, and data complexity (Barnett and Parnell, 2016).

Firstly, in the fields of urban and regional economics within the so-called “new economic geography,” emphasis has been placed on the positive effects of economic agglomeration and the central role of cities in driving economic development processes. Cities are seen as “centres of capital accumulation globally” and as places that “serve as commercial, administrative and growth centres . . .” (Carmody and Owusu, 2017, p. 61). Secondly, academic research about scales of governance has emphasised the ways in which various state competencies have been reordered away from national towards subnational levels of regions, cities, or localities (Carmody and Owusu, 2017, p. 91). Within this research, cities are seen as loci of democracy (Kahkonen and Lanyi, 2001; Kessy, 2013). Thirdly, debates about “big data” and “data analytics” have facilitated the rise of contemporary urban optimism within the intellectual milieu of quantitative social science. Such debates increasingly define cities as experimental sites in which new forms of technology,

new social practices, and alternative models of economy and governance can be tracked and refined (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 93). However, “[t]hese claims are heavily dependent on stylized interpretations of North American and Western European experiences” (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 94). In this respect, the NUA provides a conceptual template—and, in some instances, a set of practices—that operates within the Eurocentric domain of power, presented as universal, while, in reality, it is neither applicable to nor useful in a vast part of the urban world (Connell, 2007; Lemanski, 2014; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014). The NUA comes with undercurrents that include what Maldonado-Torres (2004, p. 40) calls “different voices in Eurocentric sites of conversation, where difference is domesticated to become palatable and confirm the universalism of European reason.” From a Southern theory perspective, “the effect is the erasure of the experience of the majority of humankind from the foundation of social thought” (Connell, 2007, p. 46).

Much of the pro-urban policy consensus can be traced back to the setting up of the “urban SDG.” Barnett and Parnell (2016) relate that the urban SDG itself was the result of a public campaign in 2013 and 2014 to consult various actors in drafting and promoting the case for adopting a dedicated Urban SDG by the Sustainable Cities Thematic Group of the UN, but “differences in views were set aside or were obscured in the lead-up to the SDG approval, as it was always uncertain that it would be possible to secure the focus on cities in the agreement” (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 88). It was finally approved in September 2015 by the 69th General Assembly as Goal 11, marking a commitment to “[m]ake cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable” (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 88). The success of the campaign for the urban SDG was therefore the outcome of a concerted mobilisation effort overseen by European-dominated international networks of local government organisations such as United Cities and Local Governments and ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability, in collaboration with UN-level organisations such as the Cities Alliance and other university-affiliated groups and networks (Barnett and Parnell, 2016, p. 89). Barnett and Parnell (2016) conclude that the process in 2012–2015 can be likened to a form of *overlapping consensus*, in which parties to an agreement lay aside fundamental differences that divide them in favour of emphasising common understandings in the pursuit of a contingent objective.

The “urban” metaphor therefore became “a new systemic—functional grammar,” to use Halliday’s (1994) terminology, emphasising the lexicon of “rapid urban growth” and the imaginary “urban future” in a process largely patronised by European domination. This new discourse has become a carrier of conviction in the form of careful, rationalised, organised statements backed by recognised validation procedures, sorted into discursive formations, and made within communities of experts (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983; Escobar, 1995). Stamm (2003) refers to urban-centrism as the tendency to pay more attention to the problems of cities and suburbs than to those of rural areas. The urban-centric discourse and its ideas have been propagated

by academic and UN agents and disseminated into media—national and international newspapers, dailies or weeklies, popular magazines, and news and commentary shows on television and radio (see Caprotti et al., 2017). Its logic is reinforced through formal, institutional mechanisms such as UN conferences, congresses, forums, and campuses.

Fox (2014), however, argues that the patterns of contemporary urban growth and economic transformation in Africa and Asia might well undermine these assumed theoretical associations. There are growing arguments that the idea of sustainable development does not always coincide with these notions of urbanisation (UNDESA, 2012; Cobbinah et al., 2015). Recent studies indicate that many “urban” areas in Africa find it increasingly difficult to deal with intensive, unplanned, and unsustainable urbanisation, which is believed to erode the socio-economic and environmental benefits associated with urbanisation and sustainable development (UNDESA, 2012; Darkwah and Cobbinah, 2014). Therefore, sweeping generalisations about “the urban” provide a conceptual template—and, at times, a set of practices—that operates within a Eurocentric domain of power deeply antagonistic to the experiences of many African cities.

### **Deconstructing the new urban agenda: The Northern city as the ideal type and its legacy in African cities**

The fundamental challenge of the NUA is that the “ideal type” of the “urban” is conceptualised as an accentuation/approximation of the Northern city, and as such is blind to significant other realities and the potentials they hold for the future. According to Weber (1949) trans. (Shils and Henry, 1997, p. 90), the ideal type is not meant to refer to perfect things, moral ideals or statistical averages but rather to stress certain elements common to most cases of a given phenomenon. The ideal type (Weber, 1949, trans. Shils and Henry, 1997, p. 90) constitutes a

conceptual construct (*Gedankenbild*) which is neither historical reality nor even the “true” reality . . . [but is] formed by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.

Thus, an ideal type stands at the very beginning of an investigation and is the conceptually “pure” type or heuristic against which social behaviour and cultural change can be assessed (Segardy, 2014). The NUA fails to question the dominant Anglo-American models of urban development, which have facilitated and continue to preside over huge urban inequalities, especially on the African continent. It is well known that theory and models for urban development were largely transferred from Europe and the US and overlaid onto traditional African systems of society, patronisingly seeking to modernise

(and thus colonise) them through new systems of housing, standards, public services, and development control procedures characterised by top-down approaches (Shalaby, 2003; Smyth, 2004; Ndura, 2006). Urban development sought to assimilate African societies economically, socially, and culturally. As Mbembe (2004, p. 373) writes,

The Western imagination defines the metropolis as the general form assumed under the rationalization of relations of production (the increasing prevalence of the commodity system) and the rationalization of the social sphere (human relations) that follows it.

Applying Mbembe's (2004) critique, the NUA stands out as being symptomatic of colonial amnesia, presented from a neutral epistemic subjectivity, and ignoring knowledge being produced outside of the global metropolises, that is, from the locations off the map of urban studies (Connell, 2007; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012).

What on the surface appears as a neutral position in the NUA is, in fact, highly loaded. Decolonial philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2004, p. 30) explains that such a text "reproduces blindness, in relation to non-European heterogeneous ways of thinking and to the production and reproduction of the imperial/colonial relation." Therefore, he argues, there is an underlying current of systemic amnesia that forgets the geopolitical relations at work in the making of urbanisms. This provides a lens on the NUA that exposes its omission of questions of spatiality and coloniality. For example, the repeated emphasis on "urban development" (s. 9); "development of cities" (s. 10); "urban paradigm shift"; "urban policies and legislation"; "urban governance"; "urban development plans"; and "urban form" (s. 15) in the NUA (Habitat III, 2016, p. 8), among other sections, points to a failure of the agenda to leverage the interests of rural and peri-urban areas, predominately in African cities, that cannot be defined as "urban." Invariably, this does not challenge the urban geopolitics of knowledge at the heart of Western discourse; instead, the praxis of urban development reproduces European thought. This silence re-affirms the metropolitan centres (London, Paris, New York, and Tokyo) that for much of the Global South continue to represent the imagined future of modernity—not unappealing to politicians shielded from the nuances of critical urban discourse. This representation of cities as necessarily modern is a function of a hegemonic urban view that focuses on certain visible economic distinctions, overlooking alternate, often invisible patterns that make "other" cities work, in alternative ways (O'Shaughnessy, 2008, p. 5).

Invariably, this discursive practice promotes the orthodoxy of modernist urban change that is fundamentally defined by the logic of urban plans, zones, building codes, schemes, etc. I refer to this as the "grid logic," that is, the organisation of the urban in terms of lines, nodes, corridors, and intersections. These are anchored in legislation, policies, strategies, and plans created

to legitimise a modernist order (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1993; Myers, 2003; Njoh, 2007; Watson, 2009). It finds renewal in contemporary “worlding practices” on the African continent with the emergence of large-scale, high-profile, and upmarket urban developments, which Carmody and Owusu (2017), borrowing from Foucault, refer to as “heterotopias” The “grid logic” in many African countries is based on a colonial system of control and thus anachronistic. For example, urban development in Eswatini operates according to the Town Planning Act of 1961. As during imperial imposition, the grid logic remains exclusionary to the subjectivities of the Black Other. Black people are systematically marginalised because of perceived group differences that defined socio-economic contours or chasms in society and which today are perpetuated through planning standards inherent in the grid logic that UN-Habitat’s Clos unquestionably views as tools for creating money. Consequently, the tools of planning (e.g. land-use zoning, building law, and property law) are integral to the organisation of a speculative land market unrelated to the interests of ordinary people, contrary to the NUA’s “vision of cities for all, referring to the equal use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements” (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. 5, s. 11). As reflected in Chapter 10 in this book, the tools of planning do not apply universally, owing to different land tenure systems on the continent.

The dominant Western practice of colonial planning perpetuates a negative view of Black people in general and Africans in particular. These building codes, standards, development permits, land-use by-laws, ordinances, planning regulations, and zoning rights are largely antithetical to the customary land-use management systems in many African cities (see Chapter 10 in this book). This is motivated by planning curricula in Africa that still follow the older British or French system of town and country planning education, focusing on physical planning and technical design (Watson and Odendaal, 2013). Watson (2003) has drawn attention to the conflicting rationalities of Western planning modernity versus culturally informed understandings in the informal settlement of Crossroads in Cape Town, South Africa. This conflict was also demonstrated in Morningside, a suburb of Durban, South Africa, where a family brought 100 sheep and goats to be slaughtered during Eid al-Adha (Wicks, 2017, p. 5). The smelly “newcomers” did not get a warm welcome from the eThekweni metro, health department, or Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Interestingly, the focus of officials was not on supporting the neighbourhood to maintain good sanitation; instead, “sanitising” was used as a proxy for “sanitation syndrome”— that is, using sanitation to object to practices of non-white subjectivities (Swanson, 1977).

This signifies some of the “urban whims” of the African city ignored by the orthodoxy of modernist planning still prevalent on the continent (if mostly functioning ineffectively), thus necessitating so-called “informal” city-making practices. It exemplifies one of the many ways in which current neo-colonial planning practices remain galvanised by precepts of Euro-modernist planning, where systems of public health are predicated on the

colonial instruments of master planning, zoning, and building regulations to the utter exclusion of subjectivities of the Black Other. The embrace of the “city for all” in the NUA therefore is contradicted by the undercurrent of modernist thinking. While adopting the NUA, countries should thus consider the epistemic grounds/premise on and by which it constructs the agenda. Maldonado-Torres (2004) has cautioned those of us who are critics of neo-colonial modernity and Eurocentrism that, by embracing certain grand roadmaps/policies such as the NUA, we may be rescuing the rogue side of modernity by other means.

The second drawback of the “ideal type” around which the NUA is framed is that it is constituted in terms of an “urban discourse”—of a world made up of cities, and with humanity’s future problems resolved in cities. Thus, the NUA represents the doctrine that the future lies in cities. This rationale is no doubt based in part on Europe and the Americas’ being already highly urbanised, as well as on Africa and Asia’s rapid urbanisation (UN-Habitat, 2022). Cities are growing at an unprecedented rate. The 2022 World City Report points out that in Sub-Saharan Africa, “the number of cities with at least 1 million inhabitants will increase from 60 to 134 over the next 50 years and those with at least 5 million will increase from six to 28” (UN-Habitat, 2022, p. 50). Indeed, the “tipping point” thesis asserts that the future is “urban” and that “cities are the fulcrum upon which climate change must be addressed” (Buckely and Simet, 2015, p. 65). Consequently, to many international organisations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Urban Forum, World Economic Forum, and Cities Alliance, cities become a space where innovations take place that intervene in urban contexts to respond both to specific urban problems and to global environmental challenges (Bulkeley and Broto, 2013; McCorming et al., 2013).

However, this overarching discourse can be disconcerting from an African perspective. To deconstruct the NUA from the perspective of the African continent requires one to ask a number of questions: How sustainable is such an urban focus for African cities? Is this not missing the mark in Africa where, even by 2050, only 55% of the population will be living in urban areas (UN, 2014)? Should global agendas not be advocating for a more nuanced approach? What underlies these questions is that while urbanisation is occurring at a high rate in Africa, the character of that urbanisation is diverse, complex, and constantly changing from place to place, such that cities are not shaped simply by the rate of population growth but also by multiple factors in a particular context (Gunalp et al., 2017). Urban realities indicate that there is no linear trend of urban growth. Instead, urban growth in African cities is motivated by different factors that result in a fluidity across “formal and informal, colonial and postcolonial, global and local conditions, resources, technologies and environmental requests—making them interconnected and interactive” (Viana, 2009, p. 179). In many African countries, rapid urbanisation does not uproot people totally from rural areas. Instead, labour migration, flows of information, and services such as education and

healthcare enable people to keep one foot in the rural economy and the other in the urban economy (Sihlongonyane, 2021).

Many studies, such as those on rural–urban migration (Potts, 2015, 2016), the remittance economy (De Haas, 2012; Mendola, 2012), and burial research (Cohen and Odhiambo, 1992; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2001; Mendola, 2012), indicate the dual rootedness of urban residents in migrant cities such as Johannesburg, Lusaka, Mbabane, and Dar es Salaam. An illustrative indicator in Johannesburg is that on significant religious holidays such as Good Friday and Christmas, large numbers of African people visit rural homes. Local media report considerable road congestion (*The Southern Courier*, 2019). The overwhelming narrative is that people possess multiple belongings (Simone, 2004; see also Chapter 8 in this book). They are in transitivity, which marks the spatial and temporal openness with multi-dimensional, multi-cultural, and multi-locational identities and belongings. “Home” is not single rooted but located in a pluralistic world with multiple possibilities for finding belonging—a hybrid sense of belonging that is transitory (Simone, 2001) through the varied spatialities of connectivity and transitivity that cross a given region, with the inside and the outside no longer locationally defined.

### **The “urban” conundrum**

The “urban” and its role in development as currently conceptualised in the NUA and when read from an African perspective are problematic in several ways. Firstly, although the NUA highlights the importance of the rural–urban continuum (UN-Habitat, 2016, s. 26, 72, 82, 95), the retreat into an “urban focus” nourishes the notion of modernity or urban reductionism, especially against the backdrop of a Eurocentric urban epistemology. The real challenge is that the “urban” is conceptualised more ostensibly in physical terms as discrete locations. The acknowledgement of “effective urban policies and legislation for sustainable urban development” in the NUA text (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. 8, s. 15 (b)) demonstrates how the NUA is anchored on urban physics (meaning, fixated on cities as physical locations only or as distinctive “nodal” forms in space), justified through prescient population numbers. This presents a node-centric approach to the spatial understanding of urban development rather than a full account of its variegated nature, especially considering peripheral perspectives located outside the core of Anglo-American urban epistemologies.

In this sense, there is a risk that the category of the “urban” within this node-centric approach will be used by African leaders as an instrument for controlling resources and development in general. Thus, many of the peri-urban areas that are rapidly expanding into towns may not be declared “urban” so as to withhold resources and ensure party-political or traditional authority control. Sihlongonyane and Simelane (2017) reflect on the case of a development project in Manzini, Eswatini, in which the provision of

infrastructure and informal housing upgrades was hamstrung by resistance from a traditional authority for over a decade through a jurisdictional dispute. More worryingly, the kind of planning anticipated by the NUA would not be fair or just in countries that lack the regulatory mechanisms and institutional capacity to carry out urban obligations equitably and to adjudicate disputes (Khan et al., 2006; Kanyane and Koma, 2006).

Secondly, this node-centrism (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. 5, s. 11, 12, 13) ignores the vast landscapes of human development, for example, rural areas, islands, suburbs, small states, small and medium-sized towns, and villages (Caprotti et al., 2017). In particular, the node-centric approach assumes a disjuncture in the governance of people between rural and urban areas, disregarding the strings of connections and control of so-called “urban” residents to rural areas (Durand-Lasserve, 2003; Wehrmann, 2008). In countries such as Ethiopia (Adam, 2014), Ghana (Akaateba, 2019), Kenya (Wamukaya and Mbathi, 2019), Senegal (Pinard, 2021), South Africa (Dubazane and Nel, 2016), and Eswatini (Sihlongonyane and Simelane, 2017), traditional authorities are found to influence urban land markets and urban growth through land-selling and decision-making processes in their communities, often determining the impact (positive or negative) of the prevailing urban planning frameworks of municipalities. This signifies how urban governance—conceptualised in the NUA exclusively as statutory and urban—can be undercut by traditional governance in rural and peri-urban areas. Most importantly, this signifies the connectedness of the rural and the urban beyond urban zones of population concentration. It also suggests that the balance of evidence for the case of the “urban focus” will need further inspection in many African countries, avoiding its uncritical acceptance.

Traditional chiefs have been ignored and/or undermined in the city-centric discourse of so-called modern municipal institutions of urban governance. Invariably, chiefs are criticised for being instruments of disruption for local development, while municipal councillors are criticised for meddling with their customary rights of government (Madumo, 2015). This is among the most dominant unresolved conflicts on the continent (Ntsebeza, 2006; Dubazane and Nel, 2016). Cities such as Kampala (Uganda), Kumasi (Ghana), Maseru (Lesotho), and Mbabane (Eswatini), which are surrounded by land under traditional authority, encounter obstacles to physical expansion, economic growth, and democratic governance because of the long-standing impasse between so-called modern municipal government and traditional authority (Palmary, 2004; Khan et al., 2006).

Thirdly, so-called slum and informal housing emerges in transitional peri-urban areas where statutory and customary laws co-exist and formal and informal land-market transactions are equally important (Colucci, 2017; see also Chapters 9 and 10 in this book). These areas are often subject to intensive construction through statutory, traditional, and informal processes. The impetus to expand “informal” housing may lead to internal displacement owing to wars and resettlements (e.g. Nakivale, Uganda; Dadaab, Kenya;



Maiduguri, Nigeria), and cross-border dynamics in areas close to national boundaries (see Chapter 12 in this book). Such housing may emerge in areas governed by chiefdoms, in areas designated by the government as resource frontiers,<sup>1</sup> or on farms or in their proximity (e.g. Siphofaneni, Eswatini). The complexity of these settlements is compounded by layers of colonial and postcolonial legal matters; conflict between norms and regulations of traditional and municipal authority; and tensions between international human rights conventions and national politics and between individual rights and communal rights. Although many are linked to or form extensions of recognised urban areas, their “mosaic and patchwork” qualities compound the meaning of “urban,” given that many so-called cities in Africa are mimetic representations themselves (Sihlongonyane, 2021). In addition, many sub-Saharan African countries have faced not only widespread civil–military tensions but also a succession of civil wars since the end of the Cold War, all of which compound the unique political mosaic of African cities (Fraenkel, 2004).

The reality of these peri-urban landscapes destabilises what is assumed to be urban, city, and town as opposed to rural. Their internal dynamics do not fit into the current descriptions based on the dominant urban theory perpetuated as universal. Brenner and Schmid (2014) argue that new concepts and terms are urgently needed to help us, both analytically and cartographically, decipher the differentiated and rapidly mutating landscapes of urbanisation being produced across the planet. With the African reality in mind, this suggests that there is a need for a new vocabulary (outside a universalising frame) to engage these areas before they can be initiated into the urban agenda. Such vocabulary intrinsically should be dependent on the local social and historical context in which urban spaces are produced. Hence, this chapter argues that we need new names to engage the reality of “developed” landscapes across Africa—and this calls for more local research.

Lastly, there is always the danger that the concept of “urban” promotes a dichotomous approach to development. This has undermined the effort to plan for trans-local challenges such as pollution, conservation, and diseases (e.g. HIV/AIDS), especially in an environment where people live between the urban and the rural. For this reason, planning for issues affecting rural–urban dynamics such as mobility, climate change, urban agriculture, and informality has largely remained at the margins of the urban-centric worldview. The urban-centric approach to planning in African countries has thoroughly negated the fact that cities and rural areas are enmeshed in a rural–urban continuum characterised by structural social, economic, cultural, and political relationships (Ndabeni, 2015). In so doing, planners have shunned engaging the mutual constitution between the rural and urban, blurring the entanglement, interaction, and continuity of relations, connections, and dynamics. This shunning has shown a lack of relational thinking and displayed a development approach that is oblivious to the effects of the spatial turn (“the move from a ‘container’ image of space toward an acknowledgment of its

mutability and social production”; Kumin and Osborne, 2013, p. 307). By and large, this has rendered planning a failure in the facilitation of integrated development in many African countries.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the discursive impact of the NUA through the deconstruction of its urban-centric approach to sustainable development. From this reading, it has been argued that the pursuit of urban-centrism in most African countries is fraught with challenges, some born historically in modernist planning systems founded on colonial legislation, policies, and plans. Such master plans, regulations, zoning rights, and building codes are inimical to African informal land tenure systems. With African cities imagined through externally determined and hegemonic discursive formations originating in the metropolitan centres of the Global North, many of these modernist planning approaches have failed “urban Africa.” Compounding this is the dearth of resources and capacity within African governments. Protracted conflicts between regions or groups further undermine the institutional conditions needed for development to be carried out. A direct step from this reality to the implementation of the NUA is neither realistic nor able to resolve the challenges at hand.

This suggests that the implementation imperative for the NUA on the African continent will require a substantial investment in research to understand African environments *katika mazingira* (in context). It also suggests that a pan-Africanist and decolonial perspective needs to be adopted to engage urban development in many African cities. This should focus on examining the flows of people, goods, money, and information between “rural” and “urban” areas in view of developing people and all the spaces where they are. This has implications for opening policymaking to new visions, vocabularies, and ways of understanding development. From this perspective, multiple insights would help question, if not reject, the current urban-centric discourse and contribute to the definition of Africa’s own, diverse “urban” trajectories and futures.

## Note

- 1 An area on the periphery of a country or territory that is being opened up for resource extraction as older, more accessible resource locations become exhausted.

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### 3 Disrupting the Myth of Cohesion-Generating Public Space

#### Contrasting Narratives from Johannesburg and Berlin

*Carmel Rawhani and Anna Steigemann*

The optimal contact strategy invites researchers to discover an ideal world, a world in which the superlative conditions for contact apply and the opportunities for reducing prejudice are maximized. . . . Something that is easily hidden by this research enterprise is that everyday contact between groups bears little resemblance to this ideal world.

(Dixon et al., 2005, p. 699)

#### **Introduction**

Globalised norms dominant in urban development policy promote social cohesion through public space by assuming physical space has the agency to make society cohesive. For example, the New Urban Agenda (NUA) notes that future cities should “engender a sense of belonging . . . prioritize safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces that . . . foster social cohesion” (Habitat III, 2016, p. 5) and asserts that “well designed and managed public spaces . . . foster social cohesion and equality.” In suggesting that physical design on its own can foster cohesion, these statements obscure the complex agency of the public using the space. They create an ideal world, which, as Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (above) suggest, is not reflected in everyday experience (2005). There is therefore a blindness to the actual drivers of social cohesion based on the assumption that space can be cohesive (here cohesive space refers to the assumption of cohesion-generating space).

This assumption that physical space can foster social cohesion is reflected in legislation, policies, and plans where policymakers and planners intervene spatially in the creation of public spaces. Influenced by these overarching globalised normative statements, South African and German policies have followed suit, assuming that well-designed public spaces can increase social contact and subsequently boost social cohesion (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2016; State of Berlin, no date). These policy claims follow what is referred to as “social contact theory.” A social

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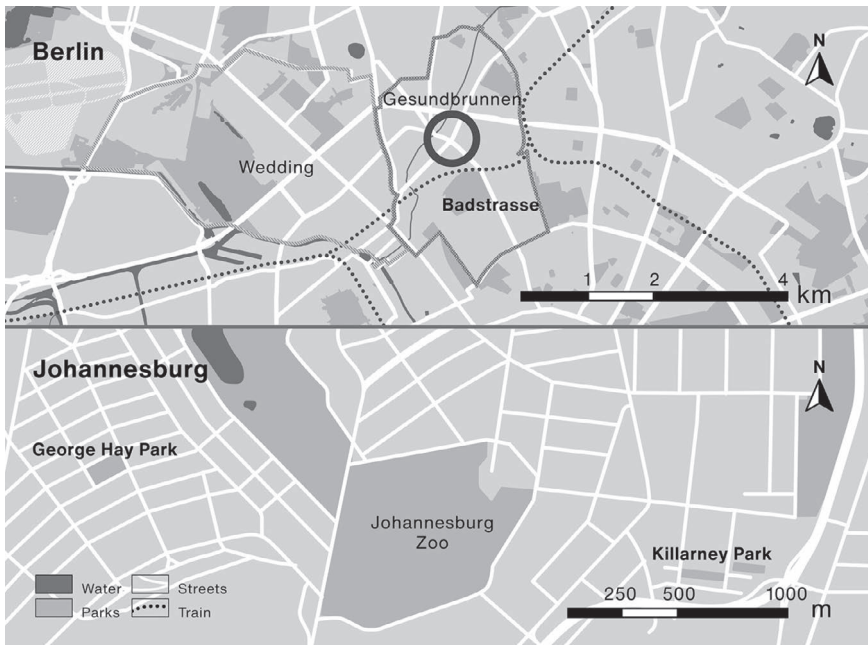
psychology theory and tool, “social” or “intergroup contact,” refers to the notion that social conflict can be decreased, and social justice safeguarded and promoted, through interactions taking place in optimal conditions present in shared space. While a large body of research has shown this to be true, applying this theory to attempts to reduce prejudice is problematic at best (Durrheim and Dixon, forthcoming). This thinking assumes merely including individuals in public spaces where they encounter the general population will result in their spontaneously acting on their instincts towards social cohesion, and that the ensuing cohesion can heal variously divided societies. This theory was derived in the Global North in contexts where it was assumed that challenges to cohesion could easily be overcome in this manner (Afacan and Afacan, 2011; Seyidov, 2021).

In reviewing the dominant global norms of inclusion and cohesion through the lens of the everyday in Johannesburg and Berlin, two heterogeneous cities with complex social fragmentation, this chapter identifies limitations in the applicability of cohesion norms that only speak to the physical characteristics of public space. In referencing Johannesburg and Berlin, we aim to disrupt the myth that public space generates cohesion simply by including city residents in shared space. Here, we focus on Myambo (2018), who argues that Johannesburg, because of its history of apartheid and its spatial legacy, provides a look into the future of many increasingly globalising cities that are becoming more unequal, among them Berlin and Lagos (see Chapters 7 and 9 in this book). As such, in Johannesburg, we explore George Hay Park—situated in one of the city’s more affluent and majority-white neighbourhoods generally composed of large free-standing homes, many with tennis courts and private pools—and Killarney Park, set in a densely populated, racially and ethnically mixed neighbourhood composed almost entirely of mixed-income apartment buildings. In Berlin, we draw on parks in Neukölln and the Gesundbrunnen and Badstraße neighbourhood areas of Wedding. These are both former working-class tenement areas, gentrifying since the 1990s, where public spaces are the main zones of interaction, including conflict, between long-standing poorer residents and the more recent upper-middle class. Cognisant of the existing knowledge hegemonies that might elevate learnings from Berlin and apply them indiscriminately to Johannesburg, we begin with Johannesburg and discuss Berlin in the context of emergent learnings from the South African context.

We argue that cohesion norms translated into practice create a focus in the first instance on space rather than on the public who use it. However, the observed urban everyday disruptively demonstrates that transforming the public is as important as transforming public space. We propose a shift towards asking where and how certain spaces (including spatial and social dimensions) enable solidarities among their users (even if only temporarily time-space bound for the use of that space). This is only possible if public agency occupies as much space in policy framing and implementation as do interventions into the physicality of space.



Here, we build on five years of respective research involving immersive participant observation, some interviews, and in-depth research of literature at the meeting point of public space and social cohesion. To contribute meaningfully to this literature, we purposefully selected spaces other than those landmark public areas that are overstudied, as well as spaces where there might be complex and unanticipated (from the view of global policies) challenges to cohesion. In line with this book's desire to disrupt, we contextualise our approach with a reflexive acknowledgement of self and the inevitable impact on our arguments. We acknowledge not only our own limits but also those of the authors of the established knowledge we question, and in doing so we are better able to disrupt. We are both female researchers of public spaces and the urban; one of colour, born and residing in Johannesburg although ethnically Middle Eastern, the other a white ethnic German residing in Berlin. Unavoidably, our observations and understandings of public space, cohesion, and inclusion are shaped by our positionalities and academic backgrounds, which dictate how we understand and report on what we observe.



*Figure 3.1* Berlin (top) and Johannesburg (bottom) with case study locations highlighted.

*Source:* Image drafted by Till Sperrle based on the material provided by the authors

Beginning with an exploration of Johannesburg's public spaces, we move to include cases from Berlin before concluding by demonstrating that the myth of cohesion-generating space draws our focus to transforming space rather than the public. This leaves us with space that engenders social cohesion only in its potential, and a public who, unless their agency is actively directed towards cohesion or even solidarity, may choose any range of dynamics instead, including contestation or fragmentation.

### **Tracing the roots of the social cohesion—public space myth: 'Irritating' historical globalised notions**

The exact meaning of social cohesion remains unclear, particularly when applied to aspirational spatial policy. Drawing on Bernard (1999, p. 2, cited in Schiefer and Van der Noll, 2017), we view the current framing of social cohesion as a simultaneously specific and open “quasi-concept, that is, one of those hybrid mental constructions that politics proposes to us more and more often in order to simultaneously detect possible consensuses on a reading of reality, and to forge them.” Social cohesion is a normative term encompassing the aim to keep a society together within a pre-defined territorial unit. It is associated with social interactions characterised by belonging, mutual trust, and willingness to take part in mutual help (Chan et al., 2006). Here, Kearns and Forrest (2000) propose that emotional attachment to and identification with a geographical location wherein interactions unfold are demonstrations of shared values that give individuals and groups the confidence and desire to build social networks. Without that, these same qualities of cohesion simply reflect “general humanitarianism” (Schiefer and Van der Noll, 2017, p. 588). This is why the question “What is urban social cohesion?” is often unanswerable, which in turn reflects the “social tensions and the conflictive, rather than integrative, nature of cities” (Miciukiewicz et al., 2012, p. 1866).

These normative qualities of cohesion are important in the context of the established paradoxical quality of public space, which might be inclusive or even cohesion-generating while also being fragmentary, contested, tense, or exclusionary (Landman, 2016, 2019; Mowen and Rung, 2016; Qian, 2020). A dominant theme in the literature framing public space is the notion that it creates the potential for social mixing. This mixing is assumed to be potentially cohesive by providing opportunities for people to be exposed to others, albeit for a short time and in an unfamiliar environment (Cattell et al., 2008; Dempsey, 2008; Aelbrecht and Stevens, 2019). In this argument, the impetus for this mixing is often rooted in the physicality of the space and, specifically, its design and accessibility, which are assumed to be able to play a leading role in generating cohesion (Madanipour, 1999; Afacan and Afacan, 2011).

Generally, social cohesion is assumed to be undermined by globalisation's impact on economics, migration, and increasing ethno-cultural diversity (Schiefer and Van der Noll, 2017). It is important to note that social cohesion policies, directly relevant to diverse and variously divided cities such as

Johannesburg and Berlin, are influenced by the perceived threat of difference (Ballard, 2004, 2019; Holtug, 2016; Ballard, Hamann and Gauteng City-Region Observatory, 2019). In reaction to this growing diversity, social cohesion has been prioritised in the political agenda, both globally and locally, since the late 2010s. In increasingly diverse societies, the obvious commonalities between people are reduced. As a result, multicultural policy approaches become dominant as “normative political doctrine that requires the accommodation of group differences in the public sphere” (Holtug, 2016, p. 72). South Africa’s own “Rainbow Nation” aspiration to multiculturalism is an example of such an approach, suggesting a peaceful and tolerant coexistence without necessitating significant bonds across and within groups. However, Holtug (2016) has demonstrated that such approaches may have the opposite impact, particularly where the local context differs from the assumed one, for instance where minorities are marginalised, where xenophobia exists or where tolerance and trust are not commonplace.

Such assertions arise from the fact that increased collective use of public space is correlated directly with increased conflict, thereby disrupting the assumption of a natural tendency towards cohesion. Scholars such as Barbosa and Pereira (2018), Carlos (2018), and Queiroga (2018) observe that individuals and groups are engaged in actively defining themselves in public spaces in relation to others, often with fragmentary results, despite policy aspirations towards inclusionary, shared space that engenders social cohesion. Thus, inclusive public spaces potentially undermine cohesion by reinforcing existing social divisions. Further, beyond the call to disrupt cohesion, which is suggested by the problematic assumption of inclusive public space as potentially cohesive, there is another core body of literature that contradicts the assumptions of the generative force for cohesion. Specifically, we refer here to the assumption that the design of space alone can create the impetus for cohesion. The contradiction of this assumption is articulated in the placemaking or spatial activation discourse in urban geography (Courage et al., 2021). These studies have critically examined practices of programming space in a particular way to compel those who use and experience the space to “imagine the ways in which we might view, create, and maintain our places to accommodate different communities of people” (Schenter, 2018, p. 21). These studies contribute to our drive to disrupt by indicating such spatial interventions have, at best, limited success when public space is approached as a physicality only and not acknowledged as the locus of complex and asymmetrical agencies on the part of the public (Hobbs, 2022).

Examples of spatial activation practices involving a wide range of actors have been studied in cities as diverse as Amsterdam (Janssens and Sezer, 2013), Hong Kong (Rossini, 2018), and Johannesburg (Appelbaum, 2016). The primary motive of many spatial activations is to increase the potential for space users to interact with “the other,” whoever that may be for each individual using these spaces, and that however minimal these interactions are, even if only a smile or a wave, they lay a foundation for enhanced

communal bonds between individuals. Doing so is understood to create a sense of place and belonging, associated with meaning and new positive behaviours (Pannone et al., 2019). Potentially, if approached with cohesion in mind, this may lead to (less conflicted) socially cohesive places (Fassi and Motter, 2014). Hidden within this conceptualisation of public space activation is the hope and assumption that activating a space or place can “transform urban space both socially and physically” (Janssens and Sezer, 2013, p. 246), and in doing so, the potential is created for the focus of public space to shift to from space to people, thereby refocusing on the public (Pannone et al., 2019).

Our intellectual prompts to disrupt the assumed causal relationship between public space and cohesion derive not only from the literature on the Global South but also from literature from Europe. Specifically, our one case study country, Germany, offers contributions to critiquing the primacy of physical public space. Here, Läßle (1991) “irritates” (author’s translation) the space–social relationship and unearths a tension between conceptualisations of social space rooted in globalised knowledge and the real everyday locations where social contact takes place—be they physical locations or otherwise (for example, virtual public spaces). He highlights the importance of understanding that public interaction is also constitutive of space, rather than simply rooting our assessments thereof in limited understandings of physical space. Further, Steets (2008) reminds us that reducing explanations of the city and its inhabitants to spatial categories is no longer possible, or even meaningful.

### **Everyday disruptions of social cohesion in Johannesburg’s public parks: Cohesion, conflict, friendships, and frictions**

Public space in South Africa has long been one of the stages on which colonial segregation has played out. During the country’s colonial period, severe Eurocentrism and racism underlined fragmentary public space design and policing to include a privileged minority and exclude the majority, a practice intensified during apartheid (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo, 2009; Strauss, 2019). Policies, legal frameworks, and daily encounters with signage anywhere from park benches and bus stops to public toilets entrenched the cultivated need to avoid the “danger” of encounters with Black people (Coggin, 2021). This cemented the idea of strangers as dangerous: intimacy was to be feared (Posel, 2011).

Today, in the 2020s, Johannesburg’s public spaces are a far cry from their officially segregated past, although some vestiges of apartheid linger as exclusivity, exclusion, and space still go hand-in-hand in many places, as the stories we share will demonstrate (Rawhani and Middelman, 2023). On paper, however, South Africa’s Integrated Urban Development Framework assumes that “good quality public spaces encourage the interaction of people from various social and cultural backgrounds” as they are “shared

centres of community life and generators of social inclusion and cohesion” (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2016, pp. 66, 94). The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act of 2013 calls for new norms to be realised for urban development goals to become achievable. Foremost among these is the notion of inclusive cities. Further, Johannesburg’s 2016 Spatial Development Framework seeks to implement this by focusing on “the creation of public spaces and amenities to create opportunities for interaction” (City of Johannesburg Department of Development Planning, 2016, p. 75). Finally, the City of Johannesburg’s Parks and Zoo Department plans for “safe, inclusive, accessible, functional and sustainable parks and open public spaces . . . [because] public spaces promote sociability, cohesion and well-being” (2021, p. 3). It is thus evident that South African policy at various levels aspires to change the spaces in which public encounters can occur, with the assumption that such encounters will create a cohesive public.

The everyday reality of Johannesburg’s parks, however, reveals a more complex range of experiences that are (often simultaneously) socially cohesive yet conflictual, inclusive yet fragmentary, or transformative. Visits to the small Killarney Park, which is the length of one street block surrounded by apartment buildings, reveal that people ordinarily arrive at the park with the group with which they will spend their entire time in the park. Alternatively, they spend time with individuals and neighbours already known to them. Park users seldom change patterns of behaviour and interaction engrained outside the park (Rawhani, 2021). The park is well maintained through public and private funding and caters to a range of interests and needs and therefore appears inclusive, but it does not automatically generate a new social milieu. This is despite the park’s position as the only public open green space in a neighbourhood of diverse incomes and racial, linguistic, and religious groups with a range of sexual orientations and gender expressions (Frith, 2011).

In George Hay Park, situated in a more affluent suburb where residents live less densely in freestanding houses, regular park users such as parents and childminders also appear rarely to mix across income and employment status and associated class barriers. Despite engaging in the common activity of accompanying children who play in the park, adult users regularly self-separate and congregate in different sections of the park. There are no clearly discernible barriers, structures or rules determining this behaviour, which instead appears to result from race, class, language preference, and other identifying qualities and related power dynamics.

On the other hand, moments of social cohesion or accounts thereof do exist. Without negating this chapter’s overarching argument, we do acknowledge that nuance exists. Despite space not being generatively cohesive all the time, there are cases where it can be. For example, a series of interviews with eight individuals frequenting Killarney Park in 2022 highlighted the instance of a local group of dog walkers brought together

through the originally unintentional pattern of walking dogs at the same time (Rawhani, 2022). In 2022, they purposefully congregated once a day to socialise, building bonds that transcended the park and impacted their private lives. While the park facilitates these lasting encounters spatially, the more-than-human component of animal ecology supports active socialisation between the dog owners. In George Hay Park in 2018, we witnessed homeless park users being treated with suspicion and refused food scraps when begging. Then, in 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, a community food garden appeared. Here, vegetables were available for free, and the park became a pop-up area where the homeless were fed by a neighbouring church (Anonymous, 2021). Such instances of the park operating as a space containing dog-walking groups and food-security initiatives demonstrate moments of collaboration. These span social cohesion, which is rooted in mutual liking (the dog-walking group) and solidarity that supports shared rights and concerns (the food-security initiative). While it goes beyond our scope to comment adequately on power asymmetries, it must be acknowledged that behaviours such as social dog walking or recreational gardening may be limited to a particular class and that understandings of desirable and acceptable interactions in public space may also differ based on class and ethnicity. These nuances further point to the need to disrupt generalised assumptions about cohesion and space that assume a monolithic public who will think and behave in predictably similar ways.

These everyday experiences in Killarney and George Hay parks provide a sample of observed shared moments that are complex, refusing the unnuanced label of cohesive public space. The strong agency demonstrated by the observed public indicates that, despite the intentions of the state as custodian of space and the commitment to not only provide but also improve these spaces, public behaviour determines what will happen within that space—particularly how people are treated. This is seemingly unanticipated in policy and disrupts the assumption that space alone has the agency to engender cohesion simply by being public. Despite the policy assumption that space made inclusively public might generate social cohesion, the reality of actual interactions demonstrates that it is not space alone that generates social dynamics. Rather, the public who use space decide, regardless of intentions in policy and plans, how to act and interact and with whom and where. This disrupts the notion that social cohesion is a by-product of increased interaction among the public through their presence in shared space, and that social cohesion can be achieved without the agency of the public. The theories we explore in this chapter assume sharing cohesive public space should engender cohesion. However, cohesion-generating interactions were not the dominant behaviour pattern we witnessed. Instead, the public agency was in many cases used to avoid interaction altogether, pushing back against assumed usages of public space at many levels. Before reflecting further on this, we turn to examples from Berlin.

### **Social cohesion and neighbourhood management programmes in Berlin: Inclusive local participation as a tool for social cohesion?**

Berlin's roots are closely intermingled with considerations of public space. The city as a municipal entity extended its boundary significantly in 1920, incorporating different towns and villages, each with its own central public place and historical, cultural, and social centre. In the era of the garden city, the first plan for Greater Berlin in 1910 envisioned interconnected forests, parks, and green corridors. Accordingly, "all strata of the population were to be provided with the space and the opportunity to spend time in the public parks at any season of the year" (State of Berlin, 2022b, p. 7). Public space took on a different role as the city was divided in 1961, with the Berlin Wall indiscriminately cutting through streets, squares, and public spaces. Commemorative and inclusionary redesign of the very same public spaces followed the proverbial "fall" of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Public space policies in Germany submit to the country's federal system. As Germany's capital, Berlin enjoys the status of a regional hub within a network of potential Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and NUA implementers (State of Berlin, 2022a). While suggesting commitment to the SDGs and NUA, public space policy in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany does not draw its cues directly from these global policies. Germany's contemporary national policy on public space is informed by the European Commission's approach, guided by policy mechanisms such as the New Leipzig Charter (2020) and the Urban Agenda for the EU (most recently renewed by the 2021 Ljubljana Agreement). This agenda is rooted in the broad assumption associated above with contemporary global and South African policy statements. The belief is that "fostering the quality of spaces . . . contributes to more sustainable and inclusive societies, respectful of cultural diversity, social equity, [and] cohesion" (Ricci, p. 13). However, the 2021 German Sustainable Development Strategy (Federal Government of Germany, 2021) is more nuanced, bringing people's agency into assumptions of how social cohesion is achieved. It asserts that an open society in which everyone can participate in social, cultural, and political life is key to achieving cohesion. This assumes that "[e]ach and every individual can also make a real difference with their day-to-day actions" (Federal Government of Germany, 2021, p. 17). This line of argument was already contained in the German Socially Inclusive City Programme of 1999. This programme, in turn, was built on local programmes from the 1970s and 1980s that tried to tackle social and spatial injustice (without using the term as such) and inequalities. The underlying normative framework continues to be that, anywhere in Berlin and more broadly in Germany, residents should have equal opportunities to improve their lives, with inclusion and cohesion being key to this.

Signifying the growing importance given to social cohesion, in 2020, Germany's Socially Inclusive City programme was rebranded as the Social

Cohesion Programme (*Förderprogramm Sozialer Zusammenhalt*). Its sub-programme for Berlin, however, has remained the Neighbourhood Management Programme (*Quartiersmanagement/Land Berlin*). Unlike the spatial design determinism in South African policy, this adopts a participatory approach to achieving social cohesion. It supports socially and economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods by promoting social cohesion through the involvement of residents in decision-making processes affecting their local neighbourhood, combining social and physical interventions in public space.

A more recent local project that has had mixed results but has been relatively successful in linking and networking local residents, institutions, organisations, and associations in multi-scalar ways is Badstraße's neighbourhood management project, the Project Budget and Neighbourhood Cosmos (*Projektfond KiezKosmos*), a fairly new venture established in 2016. The neighbourhood management area Badstraße is close to the main transport hub Gesundbrunnen in Wedding. Wedding is a spatially fragmented section of Berlin with high rates of unemployment, child poverty, inadequate services and infrastructure, and high levels of air and noise pollution. Besides neighbourhood councils, neighbourhood management involves localised offices (*Quartierbüros*) with interdisciplinary teams made up of social workers, geographers, architects, planners, etc. These are based in each of Berlin's 32 neighbourhood management areas (as of 2021), building a bridge between inhabitants, institutions, and the administration. However, while social inclusion, cooperation, and organisation among neighbours remain the overall goal, between 1999 and 2019 most of the project's budget was spent on upgrading public space and developing more integrated and intersectional social infrastructure (State of Berlin, no date).

As an experimental project in public and semi-private neighbourhood spaces, ranging from local parks, schools, and playgrounds to commercial and cultural facilities, the Badstraße neighbourhood management area probes and tests different interactional formats. It explicitly aimed to create social cohesion in the neighbourhood even before the umbrella programme was renamed the Social Cohesion Programme (*Programm Sozialer Zusammenhalt*). It links neighbours through low-threshold cultural and social events such as flea markets, neighbourhood festivals, walking tours, open-air operas, concerts, public readings, and group activities such as singing and cooking. These activities are partly in Turkish, Arabic, and other local languages to ensure inclusion. Our content analysis, observations, and interviews showed that local actors' participation was key in the joint development and execution of the project's offerings. Despite the main programme having been called Social Cohesion since 2020, the Badstraße neighbourhood management project seemed to avoid the term "social cohesion" in communications with residents, local institutions, and other local stakeholders, though it was not clear why.

Owing to the lack of high-quality green spaces and based on a survey of and interviews with local residents and other stakeholders, the Badstraße local



office decided in 2022 to redesign Blochplatz, one of the main local squares or parks. Blochplatz suffered from physical decay and the absence of lighting, planting, and street furniture. It was a frequent meeting hub for people suffering from addiction or homelessness, while local children, senior residents, and parents felt excluded. While policy is not explicit on whether all these groups are local stakeholders to be consulted, the Badstraße local management team hoped to bring them together, to work out what each group's needs, agendas, and expectations were regarding Blochplatz and its future design and uses. The aim was to achieve interaction and social cohesion between local social groups that used or wished to use the square and thus to turn Blochplatz into a park that attracted all such groups and served their needs without conflicts or exclusionary dynamics between them. We also observed that the local neighbourhood management officials arranged regular neighbourhood meetings. These meetings brought together local social groups to learn about each other's ideas, needs, and expectations regarding the redesign and future of Blochplatz. The groups included immediate neighbours, different age and gender groups, people who consumed substances on the square, and parents of toddlers using the local playground. Two concrete projects were implemented: NeighborhoodCosmos (*KiezKosmos*) and Construction Budget Blochplatz (*Baufond Blochplatz*) (Quartiersmanagement Badstrasse, 2022a, 2022b).

### **Demystifying the complex everyday: Analyses from Johannesburg and Berlin**

At the core of our observations, we uncovered a focus in practice on public space as “space” first and “public” second, without first determining who and where and how people interact with each other. This disregards the fact that fleeting and planned interaction is the basis for more solidary relationships. Consequently, the public, who not only use public space but also shape it and are shaped by it in turn, are often ungoverned (by policy) or govern themselves and their spaces in more bottom-up or informalised—if not criminalised—ways. While their contributions are sought when it comes to deciding on components related to the physicality of space (globally informed), government policy and practice are largely blind to the public's agency and accountability in practising cohesion, behaving cohesively, and actively opposing norms to the contrary. Hence, many of the cohesion policies are also unsuccessful in grasping what actually builds solidarity or more cohesive relationships in cities.

Our analysis revealed that local social cohesion activities aimed at linking, networking, and bringing residents and local institutions together require appropriate spaces to do so. A physical space, whether public or semi-public, for interaction between diverse social groups is crucial. In Johannesburg, the problem lies in the fact that the local everyday practices that we observed and studied largely deviated from the assumed traits of cohesion or inclusivity, often pulling these norms into simultaneous coexistence with entirely divergent ones such as exclusion or conflict. Further, we observed that the

decisions made by individuals and groups, rather than the space they were in, created these variations from cohesion in everyday life. This observation—that the agency to direct interaction in public space lies with the public and that they might not choose to behave cohesively—appears largely unconsidered in the policy’s normative take on cohesive public space. Specifically, despite acknowledging the possible endurance of apartheid-entrenched socio-spatial norms, it is left unclear how these norms could be replaced, and the public who enact these norms are somehow anonymised in policy framings and therefore absolved of any responsibility.

In Berlin, the problem stems from a lack of such multi-purpose, accessible, high-quality, and thus more “inclusive” public space. Conversely, in Johannesburg, policies that went beyond simply providing space and making it public were lacking. Here, a few examples illustrate the disruptive incidents we build on in this chapter. For example, during our research in Berlin, the local neighbourhood team was trying to turn Blochplatz into a central meeting point and interactional space for “all” local social groups. In order to achieve this ambitious goal, the redesign and renovation of the square were accompanied by diverse participatory formats, intended to appeal individually to different ethnic, lifestyle, social, and age groups. This required an acceptance and understanding of criminalised practices such as the consumption of substances or public sleeping. The willingness to embark on this route contrasts with the accounts from Johannesburg and actively challenges the assumption that space alone can achieve social cohesion, while showing the extent of efforts required when social cohesion in diverse communities is taken seriously. It further disrupts notions of cohesion by highlighting its nuances, demonstrating, for example, that the acceptance of practices that appear anti-social from a legal perspective, such as recreational drug use, may lay the foundation for cohesion across socioeconomic groups. Meanwhile, in Johannesburg, instances of the park being used in line with the purposes of particular design interventions such as play areas, or in line with the law in terms of regulations around vagrancy and homelessness, highlight how cohesion can be subverted even in theoretically inclusive space. It is therefore clear that the everyday reality of public space experience and interaction in South Africa powerfully disrupts the policy framing of social cohesion as universally desirable and inevitable. By highlighting this disruption, we demonstrate the inadequacy of prevalent approaches and argue that they be replaced by a policy shift towards transforming the public who inevitably share space.

### **Cohesion interrupted: What do Johannesburg and Berlin’s everyday frictions allow us to conclude about cohesion and public space?**

Setting out to problematise assumptions of social cohesion as a spontaneous characteristic of public space, this chapter examined cases and discourses in Johannesburg and Berlin. In the course of our analysis, we looked at policies

at the national and local levels, tracing their roots to the international development agenda for cities. Instead of cohesive public space and against the backdrop of a socio-spatially fragmented past, in the cities we studied we found that the agency of people within space is a powerful force expressed in the form of cohesion as well as tension resulting from potentially conflicting desires, motivations, and internalised othering. This is important if we consider that ideas rooted in multilateral transnational organisations and their policy frameworks (largely of the Global North) similarly influence policies at the national level, often lacking an informed perspective of the everyday reality of the Global South. Thus, it is unsurprising that, while cohesion occupies centre stage in the imagined version of public space put forward by policies and those who draw them up, we found it to be more globalised myth than matter of fact.

Instead, we found concrete material and spatial negotiations in and around public space produced ever-new situated forms of organisation, group formation, and constellations of actors. In other words, when we rejected the homogenising framings of cohesive public space couched in international development norms, we could see that solidarity/-ies in cities resulted from concrete spatial adaptation and appropriation in very individual ways by individual actors, depending on their needs, positionalities, motivations, and agency. Interestingly, this agency is often forgotten and presents a significant blind spot in conceptualisations of public space.

We argue that cohesion norms translated into practice create a focus in the first instance on space rather than on the public who use it. We propose a shift towards asking where and how certain spaces (including spatial and social dimensions) enable solidarities among their users (even if only temporarily time-space bound for the use of that space). This is only possible if public agency occupies as much space in policy framing and implementation as do interventions into the physicality of space. On the one hand, our observations confirm that many fleeting or time-space bound exchanges with others in public spaces, be it in Johannesburg or Berlin and often embedded in the course of everyday routines, eventually impact the ties we build (Granovetter, 1973). On the other hand, this public among whom policy appears to anticipate an emergence of relationships tending towards cohesion build relationships in unanticipated ways. Put together, our emergent argument confronts the mythical mutual causality of cohesion and inclusion in public space policy and design as more powerful than the agency of the public for whom these spaces are produced. It reorients focus to agency or the ability of the public to express norms and their needs in spaces whose designs alone cannot erase enduring conflict, contestation, and fragmentation. Thus, we conclude that the myth of cohesive public space serves to exclude the real public—particularly more vulnerable marginalised urban dwellers—from a dynamic relationship with public space and leads to urban development and management that is transformational in its aims but limited in its outcomes. It is for these reasons that we argue policy and urban practice must shift

towards an acknowledgement and harnessing of the agency of the public in attempting to render public space cohesive. This, in turn, must be informed by an analysis of the heterogeneous everyday rather than being uncritically shaped by internationally hegemonic and homogenising norms.

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# 4 The Hybridisation of Public Transport in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi

## Challenging Inscriptions of Innovation Policy in Bus Rapid Transit Systems

*Nadine Appelhans*

### Introduction

Sustainable transport is explicitly mentioned in the United Nations (UN) 2015 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (UN, 2022). This is an acknowledgement that, linked to rapid urbanisation, transport needs in African cities are also growing and diversifying (Behrens et al., 2016; Appelhans et al., 2021). After decades of incremental development in urban Africa’s transport systems, many decision makers are now looking for technical solutions to increase transport capacity (Wood, 2021). In this course, bus rapid transit (BRT) has been promoted by international organisations and several influential actors, including the UN, the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), and the World Bank, explicitly to provide sustainable transport (Rizzo, 2014; Wood, 2014, 2015 and 2021; Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), 2016; UN-Habitat, 2017; Jacobsen, 2021; Diallo, 2022).

BRTs are road-based public transit systems in which high-capacity buses operate on (partly) segregated lanes to improve travel times (see Deng and Nelson, 2011, p. 70; Holzwarth, 2012, p. 32). BRT is framed by its promoters as a replicable, cost-efficient, reliable, and affordable transport system (Deng and Nelson, 2011, p. 83; Holzwarth, 2012, p. 32) with climate-friendly technology (ITDP, 2016). However, these categories are relative and, as Wood (2021, p. 134) points out, BRT can be framed to fit a large variety of meanings and attributes, such as being “resilient,” “safe,” or “gender focused,” and can be read as being compatible with questions of social mobility, governance, and poverty alleviation. While this makes it widely acceptable, it also highlights the aspirations and unpredictable effects of BRT implementation. Rizzo (2014, p. 254) criticises the positivistic expectations regarding BRT technology as “evangelical.” An early version of BRT gained wider popularity across Latin America after its implementation in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1974 (Deng and Nelson, 2011, p. 73) before being implemented as



the TransMilenio in Bogotá, Colombia, in 2000 (Rizzo, 2014, pp. 225–257). It was the Bogotá system that sparked global promotion and that was introduced to policymakers in Accra (Ghana), Dakar (Senegal), and Cape Town and Tshwane (South Africa) early in the millennium under the lead of the ITDP. The promotional tour was headed by Enrique Peñalosa, former mayor of Bogotá, and ITDP board member (Wood, 2014, 2021, p. 126). Since then, BRTs have been set up in Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, Johannesburg, Lagos, Nelson Mandela Bay, Rustenburg, and Tshwane, with another being planned in Nairobi (Rizzo, 2014, p. 249; Wood, 2021, p. 125). However, BRT planning in Accra stalled and policymakers reverted to a regular bus system (Asimeng, 2021).

Heinze (2020, p. 116) points out that the way BRT routes are planned along long axes in African cities emphasises colonial city layouts and structures the urban space to dominate local mobilities. Yet, in the light of growing transport needs, political interest in the technology remains high among decision makers in African cities. However, when studying BRT diffusion not only as a technology but also as being embedded in a policy set, Wood (2014, 2021) elaborates on how the diffusion of BRT as a travelling policy (see King, 2003; Healey, 2013) is a heavily mediated process. Thereby, BRT needs to be understood as forming part of a wider transit-led development agenda led by the institutions promoting it (Wood, 2014). It is further framed in the expectation of economic reciprocity, with the BRT being performative in creating conditions that allow industry, commerce, and the service economy to thrive (see ITDP, 2016), thus adhering to a “Global Cities” image (Jacobsen, 2021). While it must generally be questioned whether a commuter transport system is suitable to a context with a high percentage of households depending on the subsistence economy, as in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, or if this is aspirational planning (see Watson, 2014), BRT has nevertheless been leveraged into transport concepts in these cities.

The global diffusion of BRT on the policy level has been discussed academically (Rizzo, 2014; Montero, 2017; Jacobsen, 2021; Wood, 2021; Diallo, 2022). However, less attention has been given to the actual implementation process of BRT in Africa, which this chapter offers by exploring the acts of BRT adaptation in urban contexts on the continent. Unlike policy diffusion, driven by “sustainability” and transit-led development agendas, BRT’s technical planning and technology roll-out are strongly shaped by innovation thinking, as this chapter will argue. Wood (2021, p. 133) briefly touches on the subject by pointing out that BRT implementation is either led by engineering-headed teams or managed by politicians. She notes that while engineer-driven projects have had more struggles with the political elements of BRT adoption, policy-led ones have run into a large array of difficulties (Wood, 2021, p. 133). It is this conflation of policy framings—centred around transit-led development promoted by the SDGs—with the techno-centric engineering thinking of the implementation phase of BRTs that this chapter explores in the case study contexts of everyday transport in

Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. It elaborates how, against the policy advocacy for contextualised and integrated BRT systems outlined earlier, innovation thinking often underlies de-contextualised transport planning around BRT and shows up the ambiguity the technology roll-out has brought about in relation to local transport needs and existing transport provision. Based on empirical findings, it argues that the BRT implementation process in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi was initially driven by pre-conceived norms inscribed into innovation thinking, rather than spatial and cultural knowledge of the local transport situation. Everyday contestations, however, have led to compromises away from BRT standardisation towards greater hybridity of the transport design.

The findings are based on a literature review, systematic analysis of relevant policy documents, and analysis of 20 in-depth interviews conducted in 2015 and 2016 with experts from ministries, municipalities, local and international development organisations, members of transport associations, residents, elected government representatives, academics, and transport professionals in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Additional mapping was conducted with the help of local research assistants in both cities. This focused on constructed and prospective BRT stops, adjacent land use, and interaction with other modes of transport. Passengers were given qualitative questionnaires in both cities to document their travel routines and multi- or intermodal use of transport. Subsequent developments were followed up on through a literature review and analysis of the policy and local media discourse. The material was structured using a content analysis based on criteria by Geels and Schot (2007) for “typologies of sociotechnical transition pathways” and assessed by framing this against the transport needs identified by the research and insights from de-colonial transport discourses on Africa.

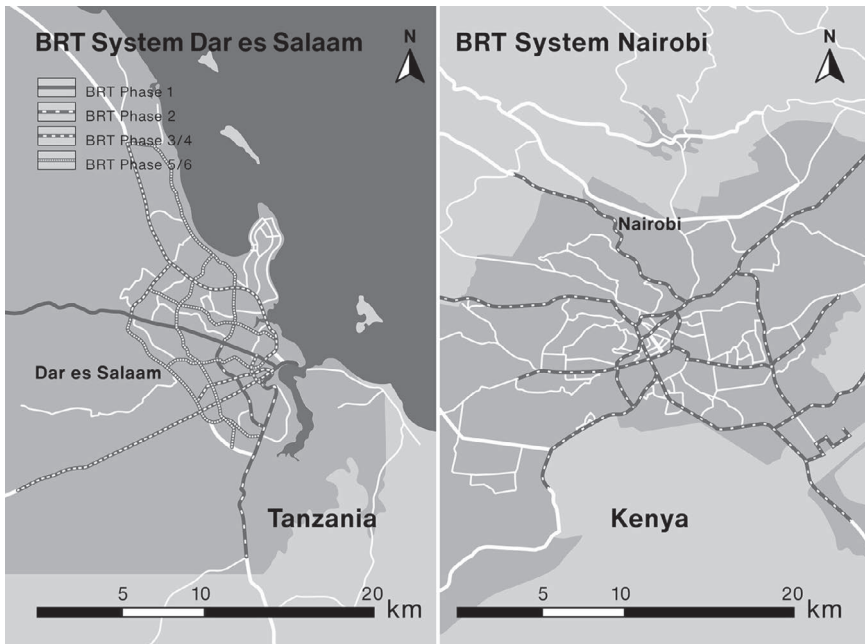
## **Background**

Nairobi and Dar es Salaam are situated in East Africa, the world’s most rapidly urbanising region (UN-Habitat, 2014, p. 144). In 2020, Dar es Salaam’s size was estimated at about 6.7 million inhabitants, having rapidly increased over the previous five decades (Rizzo, 2014, p. 257; Appelhans and Magina, 2021, p. 81). The 2009 census estimated Nairobi’s population at 4.4 million inhabitants (KNBS, 2019), and it has one of the highest urban population growth rates per year in Africa (UN-Habitat, 2006; Lubaale and Opiyo, 2021, p. 62). During this rapid urban growth, both cities have faced transport challenges in the form of congestion, pollution, accessibility, and road safety (Klopp, 2011; Rizzo, 2014; Klopp and Mitullah, 2016; Jacobsen, 2021). Based on technical assessments of the transport systems in place—largely consisting of paratransit (Behrens et al., 2016)—policymakers in both cities decided to introduce BRT systems.

The first BRT corridor in Dar es Salaam was put into operation in May 2015 after a 14-year planning and construction phase (Wood, 2021, p. 128).

The newly introduced Dar Rapid Transit Agency (DART) is funded through a US\$290 million loan from the World Bank to the government of Tanzania, and in its final iteration, the DART will be one of the largest BRT projects to have been launched in Africa (Wood, 2021, p. 128). It includes the rebuilding and doubling the width of the main arteries of the city in six phases, with a total construction of 137 km of new road networks, 18 terminals, and 228 stations (Wood, 2021, p. 128). The BRT system in Dar es Salaam follows the existing radial road network directed towards the city centre and is projected to run on the main traffic arteries in lanes closed to all other transport. The first operating corridor connects a few neighbourhoods (including some low-income neighbourhoods) to the central business district (CBD). Transportation of goods is prohibited on the DART, and outside of peak times, the number and frequency of trip offers drop sharply.

The BRT in Nairobi entered the construction phase in 2020 and was not yet in operation at the time of writing (Saunyama, 2022). Planning was based on household surveys and traffic counts, resulting in the demarcation of five selected corridors as BRT routes (Nairobi City County Government, 2017). The routes will affirm the monocentric city structure, except for one north–south connection on the Ring Road in the east of Nairobi, linking residential zones to the industrial and commercial areas around the airport (see Figure 4.1).



*Figure 4.1* BRT networks in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi.

*Source:* Image drafted by Till Sperrle from material provided by the authors

A future rise in demand for transport owing to population growth and the changing spatial configurations of the city have not sufficiently been projected for consideration in the plans for the BRT system in Nairobi. The first corridor, which leads from the airport to the CBD along Mombasa Road, was expected to open in 2023 (Saunyama, 2022). Funding for the Nairobi BRT will come from different donors for each of the corridors (Osano, 2016). It is noteworthy that the vehicles operating on the Nairobi BRT will be electric. (Nyanja, 2022).

### **Transport practices in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi**

Dar es Salaam's road system has mostly followed the low-density housing growth of the city and expanded extensively to the newly built-up areas on its outskirts (Appelhans and Magina, 2021). In Dar es Salaam, 62% of trips are carried out by minibus taxis, known locally as *dala-dalas* (Appelhans and Magina, 2021; Jacobsen, 2021). Meanwhile, walking remains a prevalent mode of transport within the city (Mpemba Lukenangula, 2021). The 2009 National Road Safety Policy (cited by Rizzo, 2014, p. 257) ascribes partial responsibility for the inefficiency of the transport system to "the rapid [sic] increased car ownership." It claims the city has "120 000 private vehicles that carry only six percent of residents with 480 000 of their seats lacking passengers" (Rizzo, 2014, p. 257). As a result of political discontent at the national level with existing paratransit systems in Tanzania, it was decided in 2002 to accept international finance explicitly dedicated to BRT to reform the existing transport system (Rizzo, 2014, p. 257; Wood, 2021, p. 133).

Meanwhile, since colonial times and until recently, Nairobi's transport planning focused on road building and individual car ownership (Manji, 2015). However, the city's urban expansion is described as largely vertical and achieved through densification (Hou et al., 2016). The relative number of private cars has thus increased in the modal split on the roads (JICA, 2013). Since road expansion is not keeping up with densification and the increase in car numbers, this convergence is leading to higher traffic loads.

Nairobi's history is marked by deliberate inequalities in transport provision for different residential areas, which have resulted in disparities yet to be addressed by transport planning (Heinze, 2020). The various neighbourhoods are thereby not equally connected, nor is transport equally accessible to urban residents. UN-Habitat (2006) estimated that 75% of Nairobi's urban population growth had been in informal settlements, while the number of urban inhabitants was predicted to double between 2005 and 2020 in the same study. These informal settlements were said to cover only 5% of the total residential land area of the city but to be inhabited by at least half of the city's population (UN-Habitat, 2006). Informally constructed neighbourhoods and high-density areas were mostly intended for pedestrian use or smaller vehicles. In informally constructed neighbourhoods, space for transport facilities is a contested good and, depending on the level of dispensable

income available for transport, walking tends to be a major means of transportation (Lubaale and Opiyo, 2021; Nthoki Nyamai, 2021). There are thus considerable differences in neighbourhoods' connection to and accessibility by motorised transport, which influences distinctions in transport patterns and the cost of fares. This low-income population is largely dependent on paratransit. The Urban Public Transport Survey 2004 for Nairobi (quoted in Aligula et al., 2005, p. 126) shows “that the share of organized public transport in the modal split has been declining rapidly from 36% in 1994, 17% in 2000 to 3.5% in 2004.” The paratransit vehicle fleet was estimated to consist of 9 554 vehicles in 2012, and the share of paratransit in the public transport market was estimated at an overwhelming 87% (Behrens et al., 2016, p. 81). Along the main service routes, surveys showed paratransit carried more than 70 000 passengers per day (Behrens et al., 2016, p. 81). The *matatu* system in Nairobi still lacks legal security and remains informal (Rasmussen, 2012), despite the state's having formulated bylaws and setting standards for *matatu* operation. *Matatu* owners are further required to form associations named SACCOS (Klopp and Mitullah, 2016, p. 86; Behrens et al., 2016, p. 80).

As the political economy has framed congestion as a cost factor in national productivity (Saunyama, 2022), the transport policy for Nairobi now addresses the need for mass rapid transit (MRT) systems. BRT networks were identified by UN-Habitat by tracking mobility patterns on existing transport modes (UN-Habitat, 2017), using data from the “Digital Matatu” research project (Williams et al., 2015). The routes were modelled on GPS data from minibus taxis (*matatus*) and therefore also follow the main road corridors towards the CBD and reflect current commuter patterns (Williams et al., 2015). The data were not intended for use in the modelling of bus corridors by the researchers, but instead was appropriated by UN-Habitat for this purpose (UN-Habitat, 2017), creating a conflict of interest with *matatu* operators on these routes.

While political rhetoric concentrates on “solving” the congestion issue, the urban transport issue must be viewed as larger than this. One of the reasons why BRT was introduced was to improve transport for the wider urban population in both cities. However, this was not further specified. Looking at actual transport needs in summary, passenger demands and needs vary across areas and population groups, owing to the marked disparities within the cities. Overall, the demand for trips is expected to increase, and the changing spatial configurations will lead to changes in mobility practices and patterns. In the official conceptualisation, such needs are currently modelled following quantitative measures and user streams. However, it is also the very young, the aged, the physically handicapped, and those carrying luggage or transporting goods who are dependent on public transport in the city. The accessibility of public transport in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi is therefore a challenge, especially for marginalised user groups (Appelhans and Magina, 2021; Lubaale and Opiyo, 2021; Mpemba Lukenangula, 2021; Nthoki Nyamai, 2021; Cooke et al., 2022). Existing transport needs are diverse and

will diversify even more, owing to a small-scale economy producing irregular patterns of movement and a stratification of livelihoods causing diversification, as well as gender-specific transport experiences and needs.

### **Innovation policy: Facilitating BRT implementation in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi**

To implement BRT with the aim of gradually replacing existing paratransit systems, new institutions and organisations were set up in both Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (Appelhans and Baumgart, 2020). According to Schumpeter, innovation must be understood as the introduction of a technological invention into a new context (see Halbritter, 2016, p. 30). Innovation theory notes that the actors involved in innovation processes can often neither foresee nor control the circumstances of implementation (Bauer, 2016, p. 37). As more than 80% of innovations fail, failure rather than success is the rule (Bauer, 2016, p. 37). While it can be argued that large-scale innovation inherently requires acting under uncertain circumstances (Pearman, 1985; Bauer, 2016, p. 37), Rizzo (2014, p. 254) doubts whether all information from the impact assessment and all alternative technologies were considered in the BRT decision-making in Dar es Salaam. In contrast, Bauer argues that for an innovation to succeed, it is necessary, paradoxically, to risk its failure—owing to incomplete knowledge of the impact (Bauer, 2016, p. 37). To prevail over possible setbacks, innovation theory, however, suggests that several context-specific factors are critical to innovation projects. Bauer (2016, p. 38, translation by the author) lists typical factors in the failure of innovation as:

1. Insufficient advantages of the new technology over *persisting* systems.
2. Miscalculation or failure to fulfil the designated user's needs.
3. Exceeding radicality of technology.
4. An unstable context of implementation.
5. A closed context of implementation.

Reversing this logic, to succeed by these criteria, BRT requires sufficient advantages over the persisting (currently operating) transport system to meet designated users' needs, moderate radicality of the technology, and a stable and open context of implementation. Innovation research views it as a given that radical technologies are more likely to establish in geographical contexts termed “niches” where the relational assets needed to accommodate radical innovations already exist (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 168). According to Sengers and Raven (2015, p. 167), historical analysis shows that alternative technologies initially develop in so-called “protective niches.” Progress under these conditions “eventually enables the innovation to compete in mainstream markets or empowers it to change regime selection environments in ways beneficial to the alternative” (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 167). Niches are considered to ease selection pressure from persisting rationales

and “nurture radical innovation through (i) stimulating social learning, (ii) the shaping of new social networks, and (iii) articulating shared expectations” (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 167). Geels and Schot (2007) argue that in a multi-level perspective, transitions come about through interactions between processes on three levels:

1. Niche innovations gradually build up internal momentum (through learning processes, price/performance improvements, and support from powerful groups).
2. Changes at the landscape level create pressure on the regime. [and]
3. Destabilisation of the regime creates windows of opportunity for niche innovations.

The alignment of these processes is thought to enable novelties to enter mainstream markets where they compete with the existing regime (Geels and Schot, 2007). The proliferation of these steps can be traced in the BRT implementation in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi as follows.

#### *Niche innovations gradually build up internal momentum*

After the successful promotion of BRT to Dar es Salaam and Nairobi and its adoption in respective local political agendas, a range of international agents facilitated the system’s introduction, as outlined earlier. In innovation studies, innovation is considered to benefit from the exchange of knowledge between nation-states or different institutional contexts during planning and implementation, while a “lack of cognitive, organizational, social, institutional and geographical ‘proximity’ between the actors” is seen as a disadvantage (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 169). Instead, the processes are required to be globally connected, while local politics should facilitate translating this knowledge into the contingent context of the specific place (see Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 168). This process of translating innovation is described as iterative rather than “straightforward ‘global diffusion of innovation’” (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 168). As outlined by Wood (2015), the BRT’s introduction to Johannesburg, where the decision-making, planning, and construction of the “Rea Vaya” BRT system was characterised by gradual, repetitive, and delayed processes, is such an example (see also Diallo, 2022, on the case of Cape Town). The same iterative process can be traced in Dar es Salaam, where a general plan is being realised corridor by corridor, as well as in Nairobi, where a slightly different approach of parallel planning and construction has led to an incremental construction process yet to be put into operation. However, as Sengers and Raven (2015, p. 167) argue, from an innovation perspective, local actor networks in experimentation generate contingent practical knowledge on the technology in question. This act of sharing knowledge within the local community is assumed to aggregate generic knowledge, while the knowledge is fostered by “global actor

networks” involved in finance, political support, technical specifications, or generating spaces in which local actors then work to realise the innovation (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 167). According to them, the “global network and knowledge field” not only provides coordination and guidelines for local experiments but also allows local interpretation and alteration (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 167). Evidence from Nairobi and Dar es Salaam supports this, with the introduction furthered by the same set of international policy consultants active in South Africa and Latin America (Wood, 2021).

*Changes at the landscape level create pressure on the regime*

While urban studies researchers have discussed policy transfers largely critically, innovation thinking emphasises global connections and diffusion as a prerequisite for technical innovation. It is in this positivistic outlook that policy promotion takes place (Wood, 2021), and technology is sold. Similarly, in the implementation phase, the cities implementing BRT look to each other to adapt organisational and procedural measures. This is termed the “broader context of wider ‘landscape’ pressures and opportunities” by Sengers and Raven (2015, p. 167). The receiving structures for BRT in Dar es Salaam were created by establishing new organisations intended to manage and mediate the roll-out (Appelhans and Baumgart, 2020). In Nairobi, the political decision to introduce BRT was supported by a restructuring of the institutional landscape (Appelhans and Baumgart, 2020). A new agency, the Nairobi Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (NaMATA), now handles all related responsibilities. It consists of transport officials from Nairobi and the surrounding counties of Kajiado, Muranga, Kiambu, and Machakos, as well as the national Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, and Urban Development (Appelhans and Baumgart, 2020). The structure of NaMATA is modelled on the example of Lagos, where a BRT system was implemented and is operational under the newly formed Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (Nairobi City County Government, 2015; Appelhans and Baumgart, 2020). The challenges NaMATA could face while preparing for the construction of the BRT are expected to be particularly tough. Private landownership and dense informal settlements mean dealing with large numbers of individual owners and occupants when purchasing land for the road expansion needed for the BRT lanes. Despite the prioritisation of the BRT in decision-making, this chapter will show that this broader context with its variety of actors, settings, interests, practices, and dynamics can be neither fully anticipated nor controlled.

*Destabilisation of the regime creates windows of opportunity for niche innovations*

In previous research, I described how the transport systems in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, before the introduction of BRT, could be described as a “heterarchy,” in which paratransit plays a dominant role and different



organisations are connected via “loose couplings” (Appelhans and Baumgart, 2020). With political support, these systems and the spatial conditions were transformed to leverage the BRT. Most controversially, paratransit is banned on BRT routes. In African cities, BRT specifically must compete with the production, distribution, and use of steel-made, carbon-fuelled private cars (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 167) as well as existing paratransit systems (Behrens et al., 2016). It is largely around these paratransit systems that systems of “incumbent actor-networks, material infrastructures, routines and institutional frameworks” (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 167) have historically evolved. Alternative technologies in the early stages of development (such as BRT) are said not to be able to “compete on the basis of regime-derived selection criteria” (Sengers and Raven, 2015, p. 167). BRT, consequently, claims exclusive rights of service provision along the corridors on which it operates in Dar es Salaam. To reach the critical number of passengers and to lower vehicle numbers on BRT routes, competing systems such as *dala-dalas*, *bajaji* (three-wheelers), and *boda-boda* (motorcycle taxis) will successively be pushed out of business on the BRT routes as their operating licences will not be renewed. *Dala-dalas*, *boda-bodas*, and *bajaji* are not permitted in the two lanes exclusively set aside for the BRT and are also not allowed in the lanes open to private vehicles. This requirement, set during the design and implementation phase, goes against the recommendation made when BRT was promoted to policymakers that it should function alongside existing paratransit operators (Wood, 2021, p. 126).

The BRT’s introduction in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi has thus followed the multi-level interactions typical of innovation projects. However, as the next section will show, these innovation regimes have not gone uncontested.

### Transport system hybridisation

The introduction of the BRT in Dar es Salaam was strongly challenged by minibus taxi owners and their representative body, the Dar es Salaam Commuter Bus Owners Association (DARCOBOA). Dar es Salaam has more than 6,000 *dala-dala* minibuses that run 43% of passenger trips (Rizzo, 2014, p. 257). The drivers operate in shifts, and a conductor accompanies each *dala-dala*. Ownership of the *dala-dalas* is in the hands of private individuals. *Dala-dalas*, licenced (car-)taxis, *bajaji*, and *boda-boda* provide the primary transport in the city. Despite the disproportionate share of cars on the road (Rizzo, 2014, p. 257), *dala-dalas* have been framed as the source of the city’s congestion. Politicians have held them responsible for transport issues far beyond questions of road safety related to aged and overloaded vehicles (Rizzo, 2014, p. 257), using this argument to justify the renewal of the transport system to the public. However, as *dala-dalas* were initially not part of the planning process and thus feared losing their incomes through displacement by the BRT, *dala-dala* operators occupied the newly constructed BRT lanes before the official opening of the system. The *dala-dalas*, as the prevailing

transport system, interpreted the introduction of the BRT as a threat to their own business models and were not satisfied with being reassigned to feeder routes. Despite having vested interests as the donor agency for the first corridor, the World Bank was called on to mediate between the government and DARCOBOA. In the bank's own interest of stabilising the context, an agreement was negotiated that allows *dala-dala* owners to buy shares in the BRT system as an alternative way to profit. Some former *dala-dala* drivers were trained to drive BRT buses and DARCOBOA became a joint operator of the BRT system. After negotiations, *dala-dalas* will only act as feeder systems to and from BRT termini, with their main routes being phased out. It is not clear yet whether this shareholder system will be successful in keeping peace with the *dala-dala* operators. However, it must be noted at this point that the BRT system was tied into a larger hybrid transport system based on the success of the association's campaign.

Far more difficult to trace are the neglected passengers' needs. While the BRT seems to be accepted and has a growing number of passengers, its focus on commuters excludes large parts of the transport needs of people who depend on irregular forms of income. While passengers voiced disapproval at the limitations of BRT service during interviews at transport stops, there has been no organised protest and there is no representative body for passenger rights.

Beyond the problems encountered in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi faces additional challenges. Nairobi is a site of vehicle manufacturing. The persisting systems of transport are therefore also represented in the city's industry. *Matatus* and other vehicles are assembled along the designated first BRT corridor on Mombasa Road. The GM factory builds chassis and interiors, while several small-scale workshops specialise in the decorative finishing of vehicles. The local transport industry and practice in Nairobi, specifically in the area around Mombasa Road, is thus a major employment sector with links to institutions and actors overseas. The new electric BRT vehicles will only bring income to the local manufacturing industry if they are produced and serviced locally. So, while the potential advantages of the BRT in terms of shorter travel times in a closed-off lane free of congestion are potentially even higher than in Dar es Salaam, the conflicting interests of people linked to or dependent on persisting transport systems are stronger and more complex. Yet, at the time of data collection in 2016, the *matatu* SACCOS had not been informed about the BRT plans and had not been part of planning debates or negotiations. The question of integrating BRT into the local context is still open at this point.

### **Inscriptions of innovation into Dar es Salaam's and Nairobi's BRT systems**

BRT only serves a specific set of transport needs that can be depicted by conventional transport modelling approaches. The realities of transport requirements, with a diversity of options and levels of flexibility in terms of provision,

are not sufficiently considered in the innovation-led planning process. BRT is, consequently, facing academic scrutiny for excluding low-income transport needs and requiring accountability to international organisations rather than the local urban population (Rizzo, 2014; Wood, 2022). Instead, the introduction of a BRT system, with its claim to introduce standardised service to the main transport corridors of the city, is undertaken within the organisational logic of innovation projects. These processes of BRT implementation can be described as a local adaptation of a new technology system and thus innovation in the respective urban contexts. Donor agencies and BRT advocates assume that the introduction needs to be accompanied by supportive political, financial, and institutional measures if the system is to endure. BRT was promoted by the ITDP with a rhetoric of innovation and a narrative of replacement regarding other (para)transport systems. It facilitates the dominance of BRT rather than placing it within the heterarchical transport landscape and does not encourage adaptation of the system to local spatial conditions (Appelhans and Baumgart, 2020). So, while the successful implementation of the technology is assumed to profit from a protected set-up, creating these niches is not unproblematic. Democratic decision-making and the balance of interests in the face of land-use pressures that integrated urban planning would seek to mediate can only acknowledge the BRT requirements as one of various claims to urban space. By adhering to innovation principles instead, the technology's requirements are per se prioritised over users' and stakeholders' needs. As the BRT in Dar es Salaam lacks the level of flexibility of the other transport providers and has yet to prove its reliability, its advantages need to be questioned. Despite justified calls for renewal and improvement of the persisting transport system, it is unclear if alternatives for achieving these improvements were discussed. As Rizzo (2014, p. 257) puts it: "It is important to ask whether there was no alternative to the phasing out of *dala-dalas* and to question the rationale for providing two exclusive lanes to BRT buses." Yet, currently, efforts to provide such integrated transport plans are insufficient (Appelhans and Bwire Magina, 2021).

Meanwhile, in both Nairobi and Dar es Salaam the de facto hybridisation of the transport system—the arrangements of BRT made with local transport providers as a feeder system—counter BRT standards (see ITDP, 2018) that imply exact replication and formulate this as the factor of success, regardless of the transport needs in the specific implementation context. As can be observed in these two cities, this process is also iterative rather than a "straightforward 'global diffusion of innovation'" as described by Sengers and Raven (2015, p. 168) and Wood (2015). This can be seen as "translating" into a local system characterised by the institutional setting, the arrangements of running transport operators, and the socio-spatial morphology (see Wood, 2021). From this viewpoint, the BRT is shaping socio-cultural urban mobility practices in the contexts into which it is introduced. This process is not unidirectional and contains elements of institutional re-configuration, social learning, and spatial transformation that differ between Dar es

Salaam and Nairobi. In line with Sengers and Raven (2015, p. 167), the local actor-networks in experimentation in both cities generate contingent practical knowledge of the technology. However, while it can be argued that the BRT is therefore adaptable to a variety of contexts, its focus on commuters and lack of consideration for more irregular mobility patterns shows that it requires a context- and user-sensitive approach to transport conceptualisation rather than just an optimisation of the technology.

So far, a projective analysis of transport needs based on the contingent transportation practice on the ground lacks in the conceptualisation of local BRT transport systems in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. It also remains intransparent how decision-making for the large-scale and long-term investments was conducted, which alternatives (including light-rail systems or upgrading existing transport systems) were considered, and how BRTs are embedded within and aligned to existing modes of transportation. The high cost of network expansion, disregard for the local transport sector in the globally competitive operation concept with international tenders, dependence on tax funding for BRT loans in contexts with subsistence economy, and the disadvantages of the BRT in terms of climate adaptability in relation to persisting systems are particularly critical in this respect and the source of many actions of hybridisation. These issues could be more effectively addressed if municipal planning and decision-making power in the public interest were strengthened and integrated and intermodal transport planning were pursued.

### **Conclusion: Promoting integrated transport planning for sustainability**

This chapter has outlined how innovation policies come into play in implementing BRT technology after a larger transit-led development agenda has been adopted by policymakers. BRT has been criticised for being embedded in transit-led development but, as this chapter outlines, its implementation is also embedded in innovation thinking. By shaping the context to increase the success of the technology, BRT in its current framing, as promoted by international agencies, disregards local diversity and instead seeks to assimilate and standardise the urban surroundings of its operation. Consequently, the lack of engagement with individual urban contexts in the sites of implementation of the BRT is inherent; in fact, stabilising and hence standardising the context is a prerequisite for introducing BRT, which is rooted in innovation rationales. Picking up on this point, this chapter argues that not considering contingent information from the local context in BRT diffusion is, therefore, not coincidental but rather the result of following innovation policy approaches. The extent to which this logic of innovation and technology roll-out is geared to rather meet corporate and financial interests related to BRT requires further research, in order to interrogate the current ethics of transport planning made accessible to Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and other African cities by international donor institutions. In everyday practice, BRTs have already been contested,

and the restrictions and claims for exclusivity that were meant to close off certain risks of competition could not be upheld during implementation. Negotiation and compromise led to hybrid transport systems that should have been at the centre of BRT introduction into African cities from the outset.

While this conflict of interest needs to be considered in transport planning and actively addressed in technology roll-out, urban development needs to look beyond and ask what an MRT system would look like that does not prioritise transit-led development and innovation principles but is rather aspirational regarding local transport needs. To acknowledge these needs systematically, transport planning must move away from promoting travelling policies towards prioritising integrated transport planning from a local perspective. Decision-making power therein needs to lie with municipalities, which need to be capacitated to take informed transport decisions on behalf not only of commuters but also of the wider population. Taking such a common goods perspective would result in the assessment criteria for transport changing to address systems integration rather than systems substitution. It would result in a paradigm shift towards strengthening aspects of flexibility, multi-modality, inclusivity, affordability, accessibility, climate adaptability, and carbon neutrality. BRT technology would then not be viewed as “the transport solution” but rather as an optional component of a diversified, heterogeneous transport system, into which BRT needs to integrate. The next-generation goals to follow the SDGs should therefore not just consider transport provision a field of action but rather promote integrated, context-sensitive transport planning to achieve sustainability.

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## Part II

# Fluid Belongings

*Taibat Lawanson*

Urban residents (especially the vulnerable) often deploy ambulant tactics when navigating the complexities of life in the city. When the aspirational policies and programmes of city development, neoliberal governance paradigms, and the domestication of global frameworks designed to protect the vulnerable intermingle, these tactics become increasingly important for our broad understanding of how development policies impact the lives of the vulnerable. The chapters in this section explore how people with disabilities in Lagos, Nigeria (Lawanson, in Chapter 5), homeless populations in Johannesburg, South Africa (Leuta, in Chapter 6), and forcibly displaced communities in Lagos, Nigeria, and Berlin, Germany (Misselwitz and Roberts, in Chapter 7) cope with and/or respond to city-level interpretations of urban access and inclusion. From housing to transportation and access to basic services, these chapters highlight tensions between institutional arrangements for social inclusion and the very lived realities of the vulnerable.

Lawanson, in Chapter 5, tackles the wide claim by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to “leave no one behind” (LNOB) in public space. Through a case study of Lagos, she argues that LNOB is a faulty rhetorical campaign, since the policy framework is limited and ineffectual in improving urban access for people with disabilities (PWD). This systematically subjects them to deep exclusion that prevents them from effective participation in society. She recommends properly registering PWD, applying accountable legislation that shifts from benevolence to a more pro-active empowerment approach premised on fully integrating the needs of PWD into governance, and ensuring their full participation in co-creating solutions for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

In Chapter 6, Leuta focuses on homelessness in Johannesburg, looking at how the homeless appropriate public space, in this case “deathscapes” or graveyards. She looks at the pathologising of the homeless and how neoliberal city development policy promotes the use of necropower against the homeless. Necropower is the use of social and political power by the state/authority to dictate how some people may live and how some must die. In spite of the fact that the City of Johannesburg’s primary policies addressing homelessness are aligned with broader international and national goals of human rights and the right to adequate housing, some of the local instruments (e.g. public open

space by law) and practices instead undermine the rights of homeless people. This perpetration of structural violence corroborates earlier work by Watson (2009), who alluded to the dehumanising and marginalisation of the urban poor through state-sanctioned techniques of exclusion, criminalisation, and eviction. Yet, as her chapter shows, homeless people vacate and return to the graveyards in spite of cycles of forced evictions.

Misselwitz and Roberts's chapter explores how the place-making practices of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in Lagos and Berlin contradict the operational paternalistic humanitarian regimes instituted by state and city governments. The chapter sheds light on the gaps in current humanitarian policies and, by highlighting the agency of forced migrants, situates IDPs and refugees not as mere victims of protracted conflict but rather as important urban actors actively contributing to the upgrading of marginal urban spaces. Interestingly, the chapter also points out the hypocrisy in humanitarian governance, with refugees who had fled their home countries often finding it easier to access structured assistance than IDPs who are citizens and are merely removed from their hometowns to other places in their own countries. In the case of Berlin, well-intentioned interventions to "change the refugees into independent, autonomous, and responsible citizens" resulted in further policing and control, which only succeeded in alienating them from the very communities into which they were meant to be integrated.

These chapters all allude to the ambitious designs of international development frameworks, including the SDGs, to promote a rights-based approach to development, and attempt to domesticate them in local-level regulations. In the generalising interpretation and contextualised implementation, entrenched rights are often trampled, thus exacerbating vulnerability. The reality is that, oftentimes, vulnerable groups become an exemplar of subversive and evasive tactics deployed in response to the very policies developed to protect them. These vulnerable urban residents are simultaneously included and excluded, visible and invisible, recognised and marginalised—resulting in a situation of "fluid belonging" in which they are empowered *de jure*, but confined *de facto* to the margins of urban life.

These case studies are not representative of all vulnerable groups; after all, the SDGs identify vulnerable groups to include diverse groups such as children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, Indigenous peoples, refugees and IDPs, and migrants, as well as women, local communities, and communities that are most vulnerable to disaster according to the New Urban Agenda. However, together they show how the rhetoric of inclusive development policy often results in less-than-stellar outcomes for the targeted groups.

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# 5 The Faulty Premise of “Leave No One Behind” in Lagos

## A Focus on People Living with Disabilities

*Taibat Lawanson*

### Introduction

The 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is the international development community’s most inclusive roadmap for change (UN-Habitat, 2016). About 15% of the world’s population lives with a disability (World Bank, 2022), and they are considered critical to the realisation of the goals. In fact, the UN Secretary General, António Guterres in 2018 stated, “Societies will never achieve the SDGs without the full participation of everyone, including people with disabilities.” There are 11 specific references to people with disabilities in five of the SDGs, covering access to education (Goal 4) and employment (Goal 8); the availability of schools that are sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities, and the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities (PWD) (Goal 10); accessible transport, and public and green spaces (Goal 11); and building the capacity of countries to disaggregate data by disability (Goal 17). In addition, there are 18 references to vulnerable populations in the SDGs, which include PWD (International Disability Alliance and International Disability and Development Consortium, no date). This is in addition to the overarching commitment to ensure that all 17 goals be implemented “for all,” encapsulated in the principle of “leave no one behind” (LNOB).

LNOB, also the title of a United Nations (UN) Framework of Action (UN, 2017), is the central transformative promise of the SDGs (UN, 2015), suggesting the unequivocal commitment of all UN member states to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole (UN, 2015).

It is grounded in the UN’s normative standards, which are the foundational principles of the UN Charter, international human rights law, and national legal systems across the world (UN, 2017). Operationalising the commitment to LNOB at the country level requires a comprehensive approach with a series of steps, including identifying who is being left behind and why; identifying effective measures to address root causes; monitoring and measuring progress; and ensuring accountability for LNOB. Ensuring the free,

active, and meaningful participation of all stakeholders is a key component in all steps and phases of policy, planning, and programming for LNOB (UN, 2017).

Nigeria is a signatory to the SDGs and is committed to the principle of LNOB (Samman et al., 2021). The country ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and its Optional Protocol in 2010 (Ewang, 2019). In 2019, federal legislation—the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018, which provides for the full integration of PWD into society—was passed (*Discrimination Against Persons with Disability Act*, 2018). It stipulates a five-year transitional period for disability mainstreaming, including modifying public buildings, structures, and motorised transport vehicles to make them accessible and usable for PWD. Four years after the passing of this law, only marginal progress had been made in mainstreaming disability rights, with just four out of 36 states having developed state-level legislation (Thompson, 2020).

Lagos, Nigeria's largest city, established the Lagos State Office for Disability Affairs (LASODA) in 2011 after enacting the Special Peoples' Law in 2010, long before the federal legislation was passed. LASODA is mandated to *uphold the rights of all persons living with any form of disability . . . by safeguarding them against all forms of discrimination and giving them equal rights and opportunities* (Lagos State Special Peoples' Law, 2011, p. 1). The State Government's vision to be "Africa's model megacity" (LASG, Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, 2013) aligns with the SDG targets and indicators, and by establishing the Office of SDGs and Investments, it has shown its commitment to leaving no one behind (LASG, 2020a). However, there is limited actual or disaggregated data on the number of people with disabilities, and how many of them are integrated into existing social systems and labour markets.

With PWD often experiencing severe limitations as they navigate daily life, the principle of LNOB becomes especially critical in the design and management of public spaces (Open Access Government, 2018). The *World Report on Disability* (WHO, 2011) highlights the importance of "enabling environments" for PWD and defines these as physical, social, and attitudinal environments. Both Goal 11.7 and the UN's New Urban Agenda advocate the availability, access, use, and design of affordable and good-quality public spaces that respect, protect, and promote the human rights of everyone, including the most marginalised and vulnerable populations (DIAUD/CBM, 2016).

Inclusive design and management of public spaces can be an effective way of ensuring that no one is left behind. Public spaces are generally understood to be open and accessible areas where people engage in individual or group activities (Sendi and Marušić, 2012). They are central to the political and social life of cities, with streets, squares, and parks used for socialising and encountering differences and/or inclusion (Amin, 2006). They contribute to

cities’ reputation for vibrancy and liveability, and to the well-being of urban residents (Collins and Stadler, 2020), and can be considered a physical arena for the manifestation of the LNOB principle. The design of, access to, and management of public space infrastructure critically influence the social and behavioural factors that shape health and wellbeing (Rydin et al., 2012). How streets, pavements, transport hubs, parks, green spaces, sports facilities, and bicycle lanes are designed and managed determine the extent to which people engage in physical and social activities and their ability to access institutions and facilities across the city.

Although the Lagos State Government has made considerable progress in policy interventions for PWD inclusion over the past 20 years, this has not translated into significant benefits for PWD. There are numerous accounts of PWD being unable to access public education, recreation, healthcare, and banking facilities. More worrisome are cases in which poor infrastructure has resulted in PWD being injured or killed in public space from avoidable accidents such as falling into uncovered drains or getting hit by cars or motorcycles on poorly designed pedestrian crossings and pavements (Mickute and Kim, 2022). Such incidents raise concerns about the practicality of PWD-related policy interventions in Lagos and the level of commitment of the Lagos State Government towards LNOB.

This chapter aligns with the social model of disability conceptualised by Oliver (1990) and reflected in the CRPD. It argues that the disadvantages experienced by PWD are the product of social and environmental factors which, in interaction with the individual’s impairment, present barriers to full participation and inclusion. Through a combination of policy reviews and the analysis of a small cross section of purposively sampled in-depth interviews with PWD and relevant care agencies in Lagos, the chapter seeks to address the following questions: Firstly, how well is the LNOB commitment integrated into urban development policies and plans in Lagos? Secondly, how do city-making practices in Lagos include/exclude PWD and their needs in navigating public space? And lastly, have the emergent reforms towards LNOB resulted in real change for PWDs? These questions become critical in light of the disparity between the city’s LNOB commitment and the real challenges PWD encounter as they try to navigate the city.

The chapter seeks to unravel how PWD overcome institutional barriers to their access to public space. Interviews were conducted with seven PWD: a senior officer at LASODA; two disability rights advocates in the Lagos State chapter of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), and two male and two female PWD living in Lagos. This small sample size is justified by the narrow scope of the subject matter (Malterud et al., 2016). Furthermore, the interviews, which were each around an hour long, were conducted in public spaces and voice recorded with the respondents’ consent. They were conducted in English and pidgin Nigerian English, depending on the respondent’s preferences.

The following section discusses the practicalities of LNOB and disability mainstreaming in enhancing social inclusion. This is followed by a review of PWD and urban development policies in Lagos and an empirical assessment of how these policies impact the everyday experiences of PWD in Lagos's public space. A discussion of the policy and empirical assessments highlights gaps in and barriers to proper implementation of LNOB in Lagos, while the conclusion recommends strategies for enhancing action to prioritise disability mainstreaming in policy and programming, thereby bridging identified gaps.

### **Is disability mainstreaming and social inclusion possible in Lagos?**

There is no accurate census of the PWD population in Nigeria, and various sources provide conflicting prevalence rates, the result of differing definitions of disability, different methodologies used, and variations in data quality (Holden et al., 2019). For example, data from the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey showed an estimated 7% of the population having some level of difficulty in at least one functional domain—seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, or self-care (NPC/Nigeria and ICF, 2019). At the same time, Leonard Cheshire's (2018) disability data review reported that, based on a general household survey, the prevalence of disability in Nigeria was 2.0%. According to Khan et al. (2018), there were an estimated 3.3 million people with disabilities in Nigeria, with a disability prevalence rate of 2.3%, while the World Health Organization (2011) estimated there to be 21 million PWDs in Nigeria and JONAPWD (2017) 25 million, with 2 million in Lagos. The conflicting figures do not bode well for effective planning and/or programming of an inclusive city. Moreover, there is not any publicly available, disaggregated data based on the type of impairment. This makes targeted action practically impossible and so negates crucial steps in the commitment to LNOB: identifying who is being left behind and why, as well as monitoring and measuring progress.

In Nigeria, essential infrastructure services for PWD are often unavailable or of poor quality, and PWD persistently face stigmatisation, discrimination, and barriers to accessing basic social services and economic opportunities. This systematically subjects them to deep exclusion, which prevents them from participating effectively in society. According to Miliband (2006, p. 5), deep exclusion refers to people who are excluded from multiple or overlapping dimensions, for example, having no access to mobility, which restricts the ability to go to school, see a doctor, vote during an election or even make a living.

Consideration of the needs of PWD in terms of access to urban public spaces is often neglected during the planning and deployment of infrastructure, whether in the Global North or the Global South (Blaser, 2016), even though appropriate infrastructure facilitates PWD independence, improves

their chances of living a better life, and can open the road to inclusion (Kett et al., 2020). Where PWD needs are considered in policy action, the “hierarchy of impairments bias” often comes into play, as the needs of those with specific physical disorders are prioritised above those with developmental, behavioural or emotional, and sensory impairments (Deal, 2003). Nigeria’s foremost PWD association, JONAPWD, comprises associations of people with specific disabilities, such as cognitive, sensory, physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities. Laws, policies, and intervention programmes reflect this bias (Amucheazi and Nwankwo, 2020).

Beyond poor data, the approach to operationalising the LNOB principle as it affects PWD is also problematic in Nigeria. PWD in Nigeria typically receive limited support from the government and instead rely on family members, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and religious groups (Arimoro, 2019). At both governmental and non-governmental levels, a charity/welfare approach is dominant, as opposed to a rights-based approach that engenders empowerment and social inclusion (Lawson and Beckett, 2021). This is at variance with the SDGs, which promote a rights-based approach to development (Nabarro, 2016, p. 23). A rights-based agenda differs from a welfare approach in that it recognises citizens’ rights and seeks accountability (Broberg and Sano, 2018). The charity approach to disability inclusion severely limits the opportunities of PWD to engage in free, active, and meaningful public participation and inadvertently leaves them behind by not securing their voice. Further, by failing to mainstream disability issues into development systems, the charity approach perpetuates discrimination, leading to exclusion that in turn violates human rights. However, disability mainstreaming also does not necessarily guarantee the rights of disabled people. This is because the actual implementation of policies often leaves a lot to be desired, in that the processes meant to ensure effective policy implementation are flawed. As Bacchi (2004, p. 130) pointed out,

[I]t remains crucial to examine the ways in which dominant frameworks of meaning affect reform proposals if the reforms are to deliver on the promise of real and meaningful change.

The current policy thrust of the Lagos State Government, reflected in the Special Peoples’ Law, shows a willingness to embrace a rights-based approach to disability issues with clear provisions for ensuring public spaces are accessible to PWD. However, it has been ten years since the enactment of the Special Peoples’ Law and one question arises: in what ways have emergent reforms, that is, the enactment of the Special Peoples’ Law in Lagos, and the public commitment of the State Government to leaving no one behind resulted in real change for PWD? In the following section, I attempt to answer this question by assessing Lagos State’s legislative and practical approaches to disability mainstreaming.



### Operationalising LNOB for PWD in Lagos: From policy to action

The Lagos State Special Peoples' Law was enacted in 2011 to safeguard people living with disability against all forms of discrimination and equalise their opportunities in all aspects of living in society and for related purposes. This law aligns directly with the CRPD and its Optional Protocol of 2010, as well as the SDGs, although predating the latter. It thus promotes the principle of LNOB. In 2012, the law established LASODA with ostensibly a governing board and a requirement that 20% of its employees be PWD (*Lagos State Special Peoples' Law*, 2011). The law outlines various public protection measures for PWD, including access to education, employment, and health. In Section 29:5–6, it reinforces the PWD right to access public space in the recommendations on disability considerations in the design of public transport, car parks, and public buildings. It sets out PWD rights to freedom, communal life and participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport, stating, Government shall take appropriate measures to enable persons living with disability to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities (*Lagos State Special Peoples' Law*, 2011, s. 38.4d).

The Lagos Resilience Strategy of 2020 (LASG, 2020b) also advances specific steps for disability mainstreaming and scaling up the implementation of the law.

These provisions are laudable and align directly with the LNOB principles, but implementation is less impressive. According to a disability rights advocate (Adebayo, 2022),

The law contains all the ideals [34 safeguards]; however, there is little impact in Lagos to show that such a bill exists.

The Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD, 2020) explains this by pointing out that the law is not fully complemented by relevant state- and national-level sectoral, legal, and policy frameworks. Further, my interviews showed that many policy actors have limited capacity on or knowledge of the law's provisions and have yet to consider disability rights in their own policy documents or programmes. Where disability rights have been included in the text, the effects are often tokenistic. For example, the various model city plans for Lagos only mention disability mainstreaming in the context of social inclusion and not in terms of access and facility provision. Regarding transportation, Elekwe and Ebenso (2016) highlighted in the mid-2010s that, while the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) scheme supports disability access, the design and location of many bus stops are not disability-friendly as they lack barrier-free access and appropriate ramps for wheelchairs. The situation has not changed since then (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

From planning and coordination to enforcement, LASODA is unable to effectively implement the Special Peoples' Law owing to the failure of the Lagos State Government to constitute a governing board for the office, weak legislative oversight, and a lack of cooperation from other government



*Figure 5.1* A BRT bus.

*Source:* Photo by Bola Oguntade (2019)



*Figure 5.2* A BRT bus stop lacking disability access.

*Source:* Photo by Bola Oguntade (2022)

agencies, as well as the technical capacity limitations of LASODA (CCD, 2020). For these reasons, it is currently not prioritising the implementation of the law. According to a LASODA official,

[t]here is a wide gap between what the law sets to achieve and what is currently obtainable. We are working on focusing on the little things that will create a wider ripple effect and get people more conscious on the rights of persons with disabilities. After that, we will engage on more complex issues that speak to policies, programmes and services provided by the government and the private sector.

(Anonymous, 2022)

Ten years after the establishment of LASODA, there was still no official data on the number of PWD in Lagos (Oladunjoye, 2021). The LASODA official confirmed this, stating:

There has been no attempt at a total headcount and any attempt at estimating cannot be relied on. In future, we may be able to rely on census figures, where the respondents specify disability. What we currently do is that we try to register people with disability who come to our office for any reason—complaints, enquires, requests, etc. For them to enjoy any of our benefits, they have to complete our registration process. After completing the registration, they are issued a registration number, an ID card, and a certificate.

(Anonymous, 2022)

This method of PWD registration excludes many who may need help but have limited funds or mobility and cannot make their way to the LASODA office. In 2020, the initial distribution of COVID-19 relief materials for PWD failed as it was based on only those registered with LASODA and the Lagos State Residents Registration Agency (Lagos Civil Society Participation for Development, 2020). This exclusionary welfarist approach is frowned upon by PWD support groups, with a disability rights advocate stating:

The disability law is designed to address the use of charity-based approach and to promote the social and rights-based model of disability—this means I don't need to know anybody or belong to any political party before I can benefit from the provisions of the law.

Adebayo Lanre (lawyer and disability rights advocate)

While Lagos may have made progress on PWD legislation, the systemic lack of commitment to LNOB is also evident in the inadequate budgetary allocation. According to a disability rights activist, The government doesn't fund LASODA properly. Even at federal level, PWD programme priority is based on the interest of the funder—usually international NGOs or agencies. Adebayo Bukola (Development practitioner and disability rights advocate).

An assessment of budgetary allocation reveals that, in 2020, 0.65% of the state budget was allocated to social protection (of which disability forms part) and no specific budgetary allocation was made for LASODA-mandated empowerment or entrepreneurship programmes, or the procurement of assistive devices for PWD (LASG, 2020c). In 2021, evidence suggests that the budgetary allocation of NGN 487 million (the equivalent of US\$1,217,500) for LASODA’s capital projects was not disbursed (LASG, 2021). Furthermore, budgetary allocations to other ministries and agencies did not indicate any provisions for disability inclusion initiatives. This raises questions on how these gaps in policy implementation and disability mainstreaming affect the everyday experiences of PWD in Lagos.

### **Lived experiences and coping strategies of PWD in Lagos**

In this section, I narrate the lived experiences of four PWD in Lagos and assess how they navigate Lagos’s public transport and public space. I also look at their knowledge of the government’s LNOB policies and/or programmes, and the coping mechanisms they adopt in response to the challenges of urban life. All four respondents are identified with pseudonyms.

Bimpe (female, aged 35) is trained as an accountant and was involved in a motor accident in 2012 in which she lost the use of her legs. She moves around either on crutches or in a wheelchair. Following the accident, she tried in vain to find another job as an accountant and eventually became a cosmetics trader. Mariam (female, aged 55) was a fabric merchant until she lost her eyesight in 2013 in a motor accident. She is currently unemployed, surviving on the benevolence of family members. Sanya (male, aged 28) is a bricklayer who was born deaf. He could not continue his education beyond primary school as there was no secondary school nearby catering for the needs of hearing-impaired children. He learnt bricklaying from his father primarily because that was the only option available to him. There are no organised special schools or vocational training centres for people with disabilities within travelling distance from his home. Aminu (male, aged 33) is a panhandler who migrated to Lagos from Kano as a teenager in search of economic opportunities. He was an informal worker for 15 years until 2017 when, as a labourer on a construction site, he sustained a spinal cord injury and became a paraplegic, using a wheelchair to move around.

All four respondents have experienced a curtailment of social and economic opportunities—and with this, a loss of dignity—owing to their disabilities. While Sanya was unable to continue his formal education, Aminu had to make the move from informal sector employment, unstable as it was, to panhandling.

I came to Lagos as an able-bodied man. I was working and making money until I had [an] accident on the site. After the accident, I went back to Kano. I was at home for two years doing nothing, which made me so

angry and violent. I felt like a burden to my family because, as the head of the family, I am meant to provide for them and not the other way around. One day, a friend told me that I should start doing *almajiri* [panhandling], but I refused, I thought it was an insult to me. I tried to get other jobs but no one wanted to hire me. So, I have no choice than to be an *almajiri*—at least I have returned to being the breadwinner and head of the family.

(Aminu, 2022)

Even though Aminu is able to earn an income through panhandling, accessing public space is challenging for all the respondents. Aminu experiences public discrimination owing to his disability and his panhandling status. Bimpe, Mariam, and Sanya are often fearful in public spaces because of their disabilities and are therefore overly reliant on the help of family members. As a result, they seldom go out socially.

Going out to places is not really easy for me. I remember the first time I had to go to Oyingbo. I was alone and I couldn't hear where the buses were going. I tried getting people to help, but everyone was in a hurry. I remember that I mistakenly entered a bus going to Iyana Ipaja, because I was tired of trying to figure out the destination of the numerous buses at the park. There were no signs. It was a kind-hearted woman, a passenger, who finally helped me. She even came down from the bus and took me to where I would get [the] Oyingbo bus. After that day, whenever I am going somewhere, I take a neighbour or a friend to the park to help me with the buses.

(Sanya, 2022)

Mariam's disability has even resulted in the loss of her citizen rights.

I cannot go anywhere on my own unless one of my children takes me there. I have not been able to vote since I had this problem, because of the distance to my house. Even my SIM card has been barred because I don't have a NIN [national identification number]. I cannot get it because I have to appear there in person. The place is far from my house and my children have not had the time to take me there.

(Mariam, 2022)

For PWD, navigating public space can be an uphill task. All the respondents have experienced various inconveniences, especially from the lack of pedestrian- and disability-friendly road infrastructure.

It is not easy just walking out of my house. I always hit my foot or hand or body on someone or something and it is so embarrassing. Taking buses is another issue entirely; I always hit my head whenever I enter the bus. I even get injured sometimes. Crossing the road, which I hated

even when I had my full sight, is now a complete nightmare. Even with roads that have pedestrian bridges, it is just so difficult.

(Mariam, 2022)

Avoiding these challenges can be expensive and time-consuming.

If I went the normal route of going to the bus stop and getting *okada* [commercial motorcycles] or *keke* [commercial tricycles], like other pedestrians, I would spend like NGN 300 to and from my shop, but now I spend NGN 1 000 because I have had to get a permanent *okada* rider to [take] me from home to the shop and back on a daily basis. The difference of NGN 700 daily is a lot of money. But I have no choice, I need to do it for my protection and sanity. Even then, I have to wait to leave home around 11am after the rush hour.

(Bimpe, 2022)

Even though the Special Peoples’ Law and LASODA have been in operation for some time, none of the respondents were aware of any government social protection policies for PWD.

I don’t think there are government programmes for us, maybe for other physically-challenged individuals but not for the deaf community. We always feel neglected and we just want to be provided for in every plan and development of the government.

(Sanya, 2022)

Bimpe was also quite sceptical.

How many good policies or programmes have they even implemented for ‘people without any disabilities’? I don’t believe they have our interest at heart at all. I don’t know of any government policies for PWD. I don’t know if they exist because I don’t think they consider us as people, not to say citizens of this country.

(Bimpe, 2022)

From access to education and economic opportunities to mobility, it seems clear that PWD are inadvertently being left behind in the LNOB agenda of Lagos, especially given the lack of funding for LASODA, the failure to mainstream disability issues into other aspects of governance, and the very real lived experiences of PWD.

### **Leaving PWD behind in the Lagos public space-making process**

The SDGs and preceding UN convention for PWDs were good entry points for PWD inclusion in Nigeria, in that they led to robust regulatory frameworks

meant to protect the human rights of PWD and legislate their consideration in public space-making practices. However, this has not translated into significant improvements on the ground, especially considering the fact that Lagos has had a head start in terms of establishing institutional and regulatory benchmarks. The study of the Lagos Special Peoples' Law and attendant operational frameworks, as well as the interviews with selected PWD in the sections earlier, underline this.

While the Special Peoples' Law is comprehensive and largely fit for purpose, the lack of institutional support for its implementation reveals a significant departure from the Lagos State Government's purported commitment to LNOB. This lack of commitment is clear from its poor budgetary allocations, the lack of disaggregated data on disabilities in Lagos, and the inadequate enforcement of PWD-friendly or barrier-free construction practices, and is reinforced by the study respondents' claim of being unaware of relevant government interventions or the Lagos Special Peoples' Law. This underlines a lack of recognition of the agency of PWD and a neglect of their voice. While JONAPWD is a good platform for bringing together PWD from across the state, its focus has been more on expecting the government (LASODA) and donors to lead rather than exploring collective action to demand the full actualisation of their right to access public space and urban resources or participating more actively in urban decision-making.

In restricting the promotion of disability rights to LASODA, a small government agency on the margins of city development, there is limited mainstreaming of disability rights into all government legislation and activities. As a result, we can conclude that the Lagos State Government is promoting the charity/welfare approach to disability inclusion, which inadvertently perpetuates structural violence towards PWD citizens, denying them adequate rights to the city (Muderedzi et al., 2017).

This separation of disability from ongoing governance and development perpetuates the understanding that disability inclusion can be treated as a marginal part of the urban process, as disability here is considered a category (physical impairment) to be administered and provided for with a design fit (wheelchair ramp). The problem with this subjective approach is that it considers PWD as passive users and consumers of public space, and thus produces specific treatments or interventions that set PWD apart from everyone else, further reinforcing the sense of disability as abnormality (Imrie, 2015). Inaccessible environments reinforce disability by creating barriers to participation and inclusion, thus threatening the urban citizenship of PWD. Barriers that PWD often encounter include limited physical access to public space, inaccessible communication and information, and lack of affordable support services (Thompson, 2020). The four PWD respondents in this study had encountered all of these to varying degrees in Lagos and had to modify their behaviour in these spaces of encounter with society. There is thus a need to critically examine the PWD–society relationship, especially as it relates to engagement in public spaces. Disability issues impact not only PWD but

ultimately also broader society. Socialising disability shifts the focus away from concentrating on physiology “in order to view more critically the society in which individuals and their impairments are contextualized” (Butler and Parr, 1999, p. 4). Dominant responses to PWD in Lagos range from poor social acceptance and prejudice to outright hostility and discrimination, as well as pity/benevolence, none of which enhances the agency or capacity of PWD to realise full urban citizenship. Opportunities for educational and economic empowerment are also severely limited; hence, PWDs in Lagos continue to operate in economical precarity, which reinforces long-standing linkages between poverty and disability (Buckup, 2009).

The neglect of the needs of PWD in Lagos public transport renders public spaces in the city places of fear—the antithesis of the ideal of public spaces as places of solidarity and cohesion (Amin, 2006, p. 1018). In navigating public access and in the absence of adequate or appropriate social safety mechanisms, we find that PWD are resigned to patronising prohibited public transport modes—*okada* and *keke*—that inadvertently make them perpetrators and/or accomplices in unlawful conduct in the city. In addition, with the Lagos State Government criminalising street begging through Section 157 (1(b) and (e) of the Lagos State Criminal Law 2015, the urban citizenship of PWD who have no alternatives to panhandling is further threatened.

## **Conclusion**

The UN’s CRPD and SDGs are potentially strong avenues for including disability in development and ensuring that PWDs are not left behind. The optimism that is apparent from the inclusion of disability in the SDGs needs to become evident in urban planning, especially since urbanisation has the potential to engineer sustainable and inclusive development for all (UNDESA, 2016). This chapter has explored how disability inclusion plays out in the Lagos scenario.

Lagos, through the Special Peoples’ Law, has the appropriate institutional and regulatory structures for ensuring PWDs are not left behind. However, the state government has not gone beyond that to effectively mainstream disability rights or ensure real inclusion of PWD in public spaces. More is needed than mere rhetoric and waiting for philanthropic organisations and/or development agencies to determine the implementation approach to the Special Peoples’ Law. Budgetary allocations and active programming should go beyond current activities that limit PWD issues to LASODA.

The lives of physically impaired persons can only improve if attitudinal, physical, and institutional barriers are removed (Ganle et al., 2020). With the removal of these barriers, PWD should be able to transit from passive to active citizenship. Rather than being limited to invited spaces of public participation, they must be able to actively invent their own spaces and thereby claim the city. Invited spaces are the ones occupied by local organisations (in this case PWD) that are authorised and mediated by government



interventions, while invented spaces are the collective actions deployed by these organisations as counter-hegemonic practice in defiance of the status quo and the limits of government authorisation (Gaventa, 2003; Miraftab, 2004).

Participating in invited spaces alone can be limiting, especially taking into consideration the reality of asymmetrical power relations among city stakeholders (Phillips, 1995; Miraftab, 2004). They often offer mere tokenistic participation and therefore fail to ensure inclusive representation and the delivery of full development benefits for affected communities. This manifests in Lagos in the minimal impact of LASODA, despite its being headed by a PWD, in amplifying the priorities of PWD beyond the jurisdiction of the parastatal.

It is crucial to ensure the full integration of the needs and interests of PWD to strengthen governance frameworks that address the urban challenges of the most vulnerable members of society. Strategies include the proper mainstreaming of PWD needs into the development agenda of the state. The activities of LASODA should be strengthened with capacity development programmes for its staff, as well as the institutional support required to enforce an accountability process across all government agencies to deliver PWD-friendly change. Critical disaggregated data relating to PWD should be collected consistently and should inform contextualised decision-making for key urban infrastructure, employment, empowerment, and the development of an effective social protection structure that specifically addresses PWD issues.

At the same time, active citizenship on the part of PWD is required to demand public funding and the implementation of existing laws that expand the rights of PWD to access and navigate public space safely. Finally, the full engagement of PWD in co-creating solutions for vulnerable and marginalised groups should be incorporated into the larger urban governance and development framework. Only then can we say that Lagos is serious about leaving no one behind in its development trajectory.

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## 6 Living among the Dead

### Disrupting Narratives on the Inclusion of the Homeless through a Case of Public Open Space in Johannesburg

*Tsepang Leuta*

#### Introduction

The right to adequate housing is an important basic human right that is recognised in the South African Constitution and in international human rights agreements to guard against homelessness. Internationally, the right to adequate housing and protection from eviction is enshrined in Article 25 of the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948) and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UN General Assembly, 1966). Likewise, Comment 4 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 1991) compels states to prioritise people without access to adequate housing. It states that the failure to guarantee access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing contravenes several human rights related to human health, access to employment and social services, and to be treated with dignity (OHCHR, 1991). Equally, in its transformative commitment, Sustainable Development Goal 11 discusses the need to create sustainable cities and communities by prioritising the provision of stable housing, which can be a step closer to mitigating the effects of poverty and homelessness (UN General Assembly, 2015). To this end, the NUA obligates governments to take positive measures to improve the living conditions of homeless people with the intent to facilitate their full participation in society and to prevent and eliminate homelessness, as well as to combat and eliminate its criminalisation (Habitat III, 2016, p. 12).

In the same vein, the right to housing is enshrined in Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa. It states that:

- 1) Everyone has a right to adequate housing;
- 2) The state must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of this right; and
- 3) No one may be evicted from their home or have it demolished without an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances.

To give effect to this obligation, the state has enacted various pieces of legislation, including the Housing Act 107 of 1997 (which came into effect on

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1 April 1998), to provide for the establishment of structures to facilitate sustainable national housing development processes within the framework of the national housing policy. The Housing Act works together with the 2004 Breaking New Ground policy (Department of Human Settlements, 2004) and the 2009 National Housing Code (Department of Human Settlements, 2009), which provide for the facilitation of a sustainable housing development process. Ancillary to this, the White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Social Welfare, 1997) recognises the unmet needs of communities such as the street homeless, who lack social support systems. The White Paper requires the Departments of Social Welfare and Public Works to work with municipalities to respond to the needs of people living on the streets (Naidoo, 2010).

Although international development frameworks, as well as the South African Constitution, advocate for the inclusion of all, this is not easily achieved in relation to homelessness, given its complex causes and the extreme nature of deprivation and exclusion. Overall, homelessness is criminalised at the local level to a point where homeless people have become disposable, as they do not meet societal standards of acceptance. In many instances, city policies still view the homeless as a deterrent to safe and hygienic urban spaces—analogue to the apartheid-era Sanitation Syndrome (Swanson, 1977). Society broadly views the homeless as restricting their peace of mind, despite the UN’s prioritisation of homelessness and pushing this agenda forward substantially (UN Human Rights Council, 2009). For example, the City of Johannesburg’s (CoJ’s) Public Open Spaces by-laws of 2004 include broad prohibitions such as “contravening the provisions of any notice” and “causing a nuisance” that could lead to a fine or a maximum of six months’ imprisonment (CoJ, 2004). Killander (2019) argues that the by-laws infringe on the right to equality in the Bill of Rights, discriminate on the basis of poverty, and violate the right to dignity, as the CoJ does not take sufficient measures to protect these vulnerable groups. It is thus ironical that some local policies conform to national policies and international conventions, while others fail to align to the lived experiences of the homeless and punish them for trying to survive.

It is against this background that this chapter uses Brixton Cemetery in Johannesburg, in South Africa’s Gauteng province, to explore the faltering discourse and practice of inclusion between national policies and international policy frameworks and the local realities of homelessness on the ground. It disrupts norms of inclusion applied in public space management by adopting a fluid understanding of belonging in public space. The chapter makes an argument that international and national policies are rhetorical to local circumstances, in that they are not aligned with the lived experiences of homeless people, thereby amplifying their marginalisation. Consequently, it demonstrates that national policies render the meaning and implications of inclusion useless when they conform to international conventions without interrogating their applicability to the local context.

The chapter also draws from literature underpinning the criminalisation of homelessness and the homeless through isolation, confinement, victimisation, and elimination by security forces. It points out moments of precarity marked by necropower (Mbembe, 2003), bare life (Agamben, 2000), structural violence, subjugation, and subjection to violence in the life of homeless people as an indictment of international and national policy frameworks. The chapter discusses the management of homelessness in Johannesburg and the experience of a homeless group of people at Brixton Cemetery in the city. It draws on individual interviews conducted over several visits with 12 homeless people at Brixton Cemetery over a period of three years from 2018 to 2021. Participant interviews were voice recorded, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. The objective of the interviews was to understand experiences of homelessness at the cemetery.

The chapter starts by defining the concept of homelessness, followed by a discussion of the history and policy discourses that shape homelessness in South Africa. The next section looks at spatial implications and social dynamics associated with homelessness, using the case study of Brixton Cemetery. It explores the discord between national and international policy as shaped by the discourse of inclusion vis-à-vis real experiences of the criminalisation of homelessness and the homeless.

### **Defining homelessness**

The concept of homelessness is a challenge for almost all urban communities. It has been argued that although the distinction between street homelessness and living in informal housing is unclear, globally, homelessness is mostly determined by whether one has a roof over one's head or not, and the number of days one sleeps rough (De Beer and Vally, 2021). This makes it difficult to derive a universal definition of homelessness. Variations in the definition of homelessness depend on, for instance, the country, its socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, the groups of people affected, and the purpose for which it is defined (Sinxadi and Campbell, 2020). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), statistics show that different countries consider various factors in determining what qualifies as homelessness. For instance, in Australia and New Zealand, homelessness includes the inability to acquire secure housing and living in uninhabitable housing (OECD, 2021). In the Czech Republic, the definition of homelessness is extended to include staying in conditions that do not meet minimum living standards (OECD, 2021). The UN Statistics Division (UNSD) describes homelessness as a state of being without shelter and having to sleep in the streets or other open or public places (UNSD, 2004). The UNSD further describes secondary homelessness as people who have no "usual place of residence" and thus who move around quite frequently or live in transitional dwelling spaces (UNSD, 2004).



For some scholars, homelessness is a state of “extreme poverty” that results in living in “inadequate housing and living conditions” (Paraschiv, 2013, p. 1405; see also Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016). Other scholars refer to the concept of “concealed homelessness,” denoting a group of homeless people who live with relatives and are unable to afford shelters of their own (Tipple and Speak, 2005; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016). The UN-Habitat (2001) Global Report on Human Settlements also distinguishes between forms of homelessness, indicating that people sleeping rough are the homeless who sleep on the streets, in open spaces or in other spaces inappropriate for human habitation. People who live in cemeteries fall under this group, as they dwell in open spaces unplanned for human occupancy. Ironically, while these definitions seem robust, many international and national policies tend to focus on homeless people on the streets and in abandoned buildings, while those living in graveyards are easily ignored and rendered invisible. Nevertheless, it has been observed that many homeless people do live in cemeteries around the world (El Kadi and Bonnamy, 2007; Lapatha et al., 2019; *Northcliff Melville Times*, 2020a, 2020b, 2021).

As early as 1897, over 30,000 people occupied cemeteries in Egypt, and the number doubled by the 1960s (Fahmi and Sutton, 2014). A more recent and modest estimate states that over 1 million people live in Cairo’s cemeteries, which are referred to as “Cities of the Dead” (Fahmi and Sutton, 2014). According to El Kadi and Bonnamy (2007), the root causes of people moving to cemeteries in Egypt are closely linked to housing crises in different eras. In the Philippines, cemetery dwelling has existed since the 1950s (Lapatha et al., 2019). A recent film, *Tombstone Pillow*, followed 6,000 Filipino people living in Manila North Cemetery (Gulyansky, 2022), while in their study, Lapatha et al. (2019) estimate there to be 10,000 dwellers at the same cemetery. Still within Manila but in Cebu City, approximately 30 families were recorded as residing at Carreta Cemetery (Lapatha et al., 2019). The real challenge with international and national policies is thus that homelessness in cemeteries remains a blind spot and may point to particular challenges, including attempts at criminalisation instead of measures to address the root causes—a possible legacy of earlier policies on homelessness (see Cross et al., 2010). For example, the CoJ’s (2022) Policy on Adult Homelessness addresses homelessness as it manifests in people living “on streets or pavements or open spaces, under bridges, in carports, bushes or next to rivers or *spruits* [streams]” (CoJ-DSD, 2022, p. 13). Literature on this form of homelessness in Johannesburg notes in particular the use of public open spaces such as parks, recreational spaces near affluent suburbs, and pavements near the inner city, as well as the use of major road reserves and vacant lots (Charlton and Rubin, 2021). Not receiving specific attention in the literature on policy for Johannesburg is the phenomenon of the homeless residing in cemeteries, particularly historical cemeteries that have reached full capacity.

### **Causes of homelessness in South Africa**

UN-Habitat (2001) affirms that homelessness stems from a lack of affordable housing, a drop in earnings, job insecurity, mental illness, etc., in developed countries. The causes and experiences of homelessness in South Africa are different but also overlap with those in the Global North. These differences arise from South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid. The two systems were underpinned by the introduction of segregationist laws that manifested in the fragmentation of the country's spatial form. These laws prescribed better treatment for the White minority and left the African majority displaced and without land. White supremacy and capitalist regulations marginalised the majority to areas of no or low development, with poor infrastructure and lack of services (Schensul and Heller, 2010). These policies led to the creation of inequalities owing to differential incomes and location in far-flung areas. This was exacerbated by economic and commercial instruments such as redlining African areas, placing limitations on economic opportunities for Africans, black-balling African businesses, etc. (Crankshaw and White, 1995). The restriction of Africans to categories of cheap and unskilled labour yielded an asymmetrical distribution of opportunities and ensured uneven business skills and capital among different strata of the population (Bhattacharya and Lowenberg, 2010). This left a long-lasting negative legacy whose effect is felt to this day.

In the post-apartheid period, the government adopted a neoliberal package of macroeconomic policies known as Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). As experienced elsewhere, neoliberal policies such as GEAR had a negative effect on many people. It shifted the economy towards jobless growth and gave rise to structural unemployment, loss of employment, house foreclosures, etc. (Streak, 2004). In the African community, this was exacerbated by an already marginalised economic position resulting from the apartheid past. The legacy of apartheid that confined the African population to tribal homelands and urban townships lived on high unemployment rates, as noted in provinces such as Limpopo and the Eastern Cape (Leibbrandt et al., 2010). This affirms the observation that the structural nature of unemployment contributes to long-term unemployment (Department of Trade and Industry, 2004). These levels of deprivation have rendered many people homeless. For some, the inadequacy of housing facilities, rural-urban migration, and poverty have led to a proliferation of makeshift settlements within cemeteries (Fahmi and Sutton, 2014). In the neoliberal ideology that informs many of international and national frameworks, homelessness is attributed to individual failings such as poor life choices and laziness, despite being inherited from the systemic structures of these policies themselves.

In the transition out of apartheid in South Africa, the restructuring of government involved the amalgamation of previously fragmented and racially based local governments to enable more redistributive and effective

governance. The accompanying and ongoing institutional restructuring affected homelessness (Leuta, 2017). In the CoJ Metropolitan Municipality, various departments were formed into municipality-owned entities, among them Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, which was created in 2013. This department was given responsibility for the City's provision and management of open spaces, including cemeteries. However, this institutional consolidation resulted in budget constraints for the development and maintenance of new cemeteries. This led to the neglect and decline of historical cemeteries such as Brixton Cemetery and the nearby Enoch Sontonga Memorial Park and Braamfontein Cemetery (see Figure 6.1) (Buff, 2018). The neglect enabled residence by the homeless, with these cemeteries becoming home to street children (Buff, 2018). Brixton Cemetery, in particular, gradually fell into disrepair, and the subsequent and ongoing vandalism of buildings and amenities such as ablution facilities and gradual theft of fencing meant that the public no longer visited the space. However, despite the absence of functioning amenities, the participants explained they preferred to reside in Brixton Cemetery rather than other public open spaces such as parks because they deemed it to be safer.

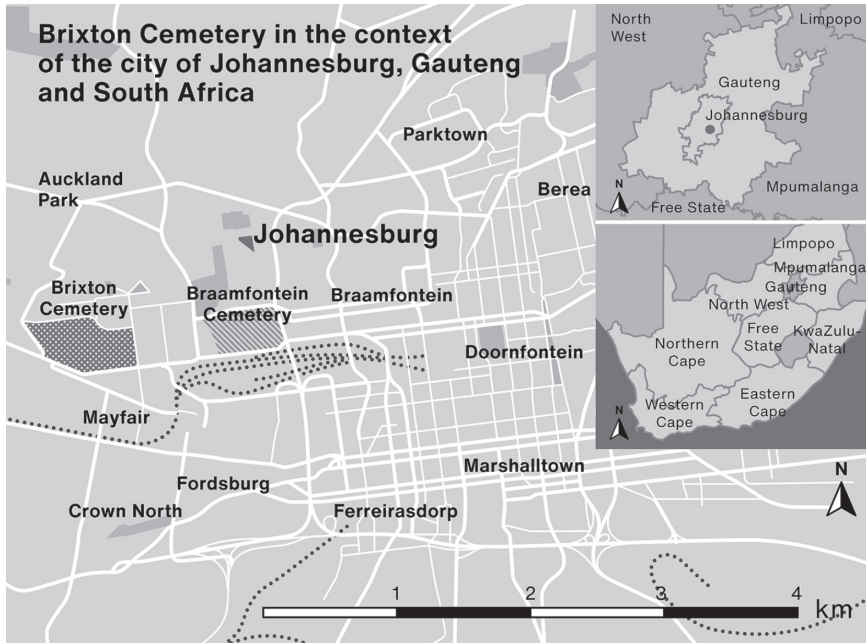


Figure 6.1 Map depicting the location of Brixton Cemetery in relation to the Braamfontein Cemetery.

Source: Image drafted by Till Sperrle from material provided by the authors

**Case study: Brixton Cemetery and its emerging use by a homeless community**

Brixton Cemetery, as shown in Figure 6.2, is one of the cemeteries extensively inhabited by homeless people in Johannesburg. It was the main Johannesburg cemetery until it reached capacity in 1942 (City Parks, 2008). Although it is no longer open for conventional burials, it allows for the interment of cremation remains in specific locations (Buff, 2018). The cemetery plays multifaceted roles—as a place of memorialising the dead, a heritage monument, a green lung in the city, and a “home” to the roofless. However, poor upkeep in some sections can be observed, especially in terms of overgrown vegetation and vandalised infrastructure. The overgrowth has created a buffer for the homeless, as they are invisible from a distance (Buff, 2018).

Graveyards are places associated with the dead and, often, desolation, and can therefore be considered “deathscapes,” a term used by Mbembe (2003). Although Mbembe (2003) views deathscapes within the confines of colonialism, these continue to exist in the postcolonial and apartheid era, and among the homeless are characterised by perpetual humiliation, subjugation, and torture. For the purposes of this chapter, the meaning of deathscapes is

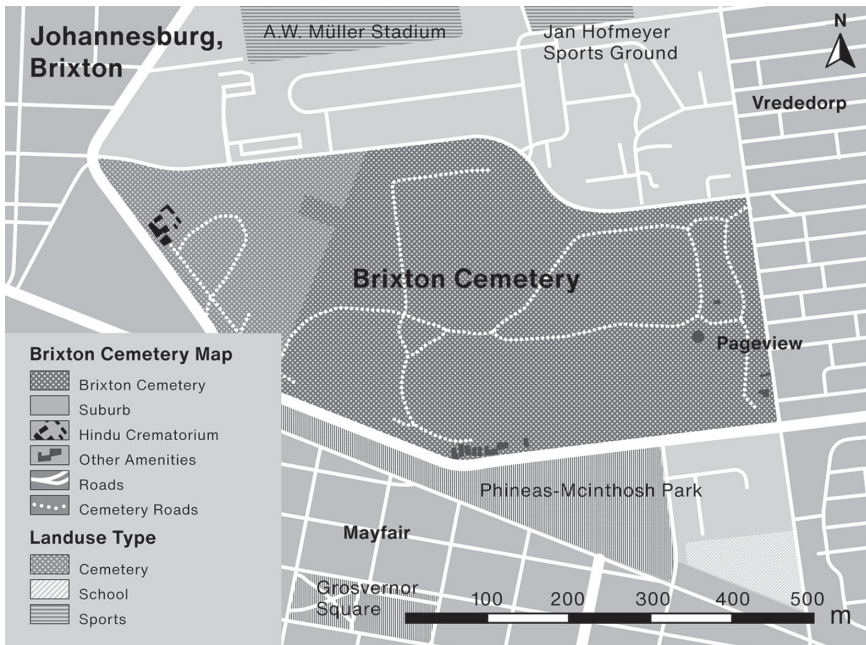


Figure 6.2 Map showing the location of Brixton Cemetery within the context of Johannesburg.

Source: Image drafted by Till Sperrle from material provided by the authors

understood beyond its association with spaces of death and the dead, as it also entails protracted suffering emanating from tyrannical and penal actions that leave the homeless more vulnerable to the “outside” world. In the case of Brixton Cemetery, the description of deathscape can be understood, firstly, in the sense that the homeless have chosen to live among the dead and, secondly, in the sense that their existence is negated. Thus, the cemetery constitutes a deathscape that is characterised by constant pain and alienation inflicted by the state through technologies of destruction. To the dwellers, however, the cemetery has become a refuge and the only place where they feel safe—and “accepted” by the dead. This dialectic is not easily reconciled with national and international discourses of inclusion, which inform the standpoints of more progressively oriented officials.

The practical realities of the homeless in Brixton Cemetery are poorly grasped by the official response to it. At the time of this study, the dwellers of Brixton Cemetery formed a close-knit community; some did odd jobs in surrounding neighbourhoods while others were waste reclaimers in affluent suburbs in the north of Johannesburg, making a living from informally trading recyclables. They had been collecting waste in these neighbourhoods over long periods of time and had built relationships with residents, who would put aside goods that were in good condition for the homeless individuals to collect and later sell closer to the city centre. Some of the reclaimed items were sold to buy-back centres and some to passers-by for additional income, as supported by findings in a study by Samson et al. (2022). According to dwellers at Brixton Cemetery, each of them was assigned a role to play in the upkeep of their “home.” For instance, while some left the cemetery to hustle, others stayed behind to watch over everyone’s belongings, clean, and prepare meals. At night, one would remain awake as a watchguard and alert all at any sign of danger. The sleeping places, living areas, and “kitchen” were clearly demarcated and kept neat through sweeping and clearing of trash.

The CoJ, taking guidance from national and international policies, manages homelessness through, among others, a Displaced Persons Unit, which has the mandate of gathering information; conducting research; collaborating with other departments and entities of the City, as well as with private and non-profit entities that run shelters; managing access to shelters; and liaising with the grant system (CoJ-DSD, 2022). The Johannesburg Metro Police Department (JMPD) ensures public safety broadly, as well as the safety of officials. It also enforces relevant by-laws and conducts “removal[s] of those willing, to be escorted to processing centres during enforcement activities” (CoJ-DSD, 2022, pp. 33–34). However, the local media reported on the police portraying the homeless people in Brixton Cemetery as “dangerous,” with evidence of weapons, drugs, and suspicious goods found, and therefore, there were plans for their removal (*Northcliff Melville Times*, 2020b). During the time of my research, criminalisation of homelessness and the homeless was evident through various types of actions by the JMPD, such as confinement to what the homeless deemed uninhabitable spaces, the imposition of

restrictions on sleeping and the conducting of natural bodily functions in the cemetery, and raids or so-called “sweeps” (*Northcliff Melville Times*, 2020a, 2021).

Criminalisation of the homeless is generally understood to take multiple forms. These comprise subjection to inhumane treatment by the public or government, including public and private security; detention or forced institutionalisation; deportation; and restriction of freedom of movement (Dholakia, 2022). The criminalisation of the homeless and homelessness can be observed through repression, punitive and banishment regulations, and measures imposed on the homeless and their use of space (Burns and Bowen, 2022). In the CoJ, this is enforced through, for instance, by-laws that restrict street begging and sleeping in public open spaces. One may interpret these measures as plans to eradicate the homeless from open spaces to ensure they are invisible to the public eye. By restricting the homeless from using public open spaces, they are automatically denied basic public services and benefits, such as access to safe drinking water and sanitation. This suggests that the homeless are denied their most basic needs and rights.

Measures of regulation and confinement, including unlawful raids, anti-panhandling, and anti-sleeping ordinances, became a norm in Brixton Cemetery. Three evictions took place during the research period, with severe impact on the lives of the affected dwellers, all of whom were men. In a police raid in 2019, the JMPD evicted a group of men at night during a rainstorm. During an interview with the individuals a day later, the evictees collected their possessions and sat outside along the cemetery boundary. Such evictions result in displacement, which forces the homeless to be constantly on the move; what Kawash (1998, p. 329) refers to as placelessness and the non-existence of the homeless body—“having no *place* to be and having no place to *be*” (emphasis in the original). When placeless, the homeless appear to be publicly non-existent. In this case, the homeless are placeless because they are wanted neither in spaces of the living nor in spaces of the dead, neither by the state nor by the general public, in whose interest the state assumes to act. Yet eliminating them from the public space in the name of securing public and spatial identity contradicts objectives of inclusion in national policy and international frameworks.

During another raid in December 2019, the group were ambushed while sleeping. However, one member of the community, Kat (not his real name), was on guard duty that night and blew a whistle to warn others. During a 2018 interview, Kat had explained this role and the constant anticipation of an eviction:

You see there? [Pointing at a nearby tree] That’s where I sleep. You don’t sleep waiting for them to come. When they come at night, I blow a whistle and my brothers wake up rushing, and run over in the cemetery. We leave our things here. We know we can’t get them again.

(Kat, interview, 2018)

During the December 2019 eviction, the cemetery dwellers were forced to move outside the cemetery. The next morning, Siphso and Vusi (not their real names) rented a friend's garage until they could find their feet. Within weeks, they returned to the cemetery, demonstrating the futility of these evictions—a clear sign of how the evictions address a symptom of the problem and not the problem itself. This recurrence highlights that technologies of destruction are employed that either eliminate them or reduce them to objects, to the extent that they are relegated to spaces of the dead where they consequently become invisible (Mbembe, 2003). Such force constitutes the expression of necropower, which refers to having the power to decide who lives and who dies, as coined by Mbembe (2003). The state finds itself exercising necropower and thus unleashes structural violence to chase the homeless out of the spaces they have attempted to secure for themselves. As Milaney et al. (2019, p. 555) explain, structural violence was originally described by Galtung in 1969 in his seminal article “Violence, peace and peace research” and refers to “violence occurring when social structures or institutions cause harm by preventing individuals from meeting their basic needs.” The institutionalised and intangible form of violence hidden in structures renders structural violence difficult to name, describe, and address (Sithole, 2014; Taylor, 2019). This type of violence has become so normalised that its illegality is accepted in daily living, yet it continues to exacerbate helplessness and the continual threat of further violence (Milaney et al., 2019). Under such conditions, homelessness shows a systemic and socio-economic collapse through which a variety of human rights are violated (UN General Assembly, 1948). It impinges on individuals' right to life, as it may cause premature and preventable death, and often unleashes aggressive policies that violate rather than safeguard the rights of the destitute (UN General Assembly, 1948).

A further eviction took place in Brixton Cemetery in December 2020 during a peak in the coronavirus pandemic. The men's belongings were confiscated, leaving them without clothes, food or reclaimed stock to resell. When asked to describe the impact of having their belongings confiscated and burnt, Siphso and Vusi (2020) responded, respectively:

You know what, we're used to them taking our clothes, our stock and IDs [identity documents]. Once the police took my ID and I've never got it back. Some of my brothers [implying peers in the group] have lost their IDs just like that [snapping his fingers]. When you go to the clinic, they want one. How, when police took it? That is why you must have somewhere safe to hide it [meaning a safe spot near where they sleep]. When they come, they only take your clothes and things you see here [pointing out visible property].

I was called for an interview as an Occupational Health and Safety Officer. But I didn't have my ID. I won't get that chance again.

From these responses, the seizing and burning of belongings leave the homeless worse off than when they first began inhabiting the cemetery, confirming other findings that repressive and punitive measures are wide-ranging, unseen, and difficult to address (Taylor, 2019). The eviction further marginalised the men, as impounding their identity documents deterred them from accessing public health services and seeking formal and informal employment. The confiscation and burning of the homeless' property expose the power relation within and traits of structural violence; the very thing that necessitates and extends the existence of hidden deathscapes. This expresses the conditions of bare life that the homeless experience. "Bare life" refers to a conception of life in which the sheer biological fact of life is given priority over the way a life is lived (Agamben, 2000). In other words, the state reduces the prospects of the life of particular homeless people to their biology (being just alive) and takes no interest in the actual circumstances of their lives. Because cemetery inhabitants are divested of economic status and reduced to bare life, the graveyard is, for Agamben (2000, p. 47), "the place in which the most absolute *conditio inhumana* consistently appear" in the city.

In addition, deathscapes normalise the coloniality of being, which is in itself informed and justified by violence that seeks to dehumanise and objectify the marginalised such that the wider society becomes desensitised to its consequences (Sithole, 2014). Sithole (2014) refers to the coloniality of being in terms of race, with the African subject being racialised. However, the application of this concept within Brixton Cemetery refers to the idea that colonial relations of power have left a profound mark not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge, and the economy but also on the general understanding of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Similarly, the influence of international and national policies with their embedded neoliberal governance on the city and on the homeless overwhelms the entire being of homelessness. The conception of policy reason can be critiqued as it creates subjection, specifically focusing on the coloniality/control of the homeless being where the humanity of the homeless subject is questioned, doubted, and deprived of any rights.

When asked to reflect on the eviction, Vusi shook his head and responded:

Eish, my sister, they kicked us out like dogs. Even a dog has a dog house outside to hide from rain. We sit outside by the wall. We're waiting for morning. Mind you, you can't sleep. You sleep, other homeless people come and take your things! You must be awake all night.

(Vusi, 2019)

The vicious night raids disoriented the cemetery residents. Once expelled from the cemetery, they experienced further discrimination by the public and their property became susceptible to theft by other homeless people, further confirming their state of "unwantedness" and instability. For instance, after



the 2019 eviction, Siphon (2019) moved to a nearby park where he was robbed of his trolleys, allegedly by other homeless people. He recalled, See, I'm wearing women's clothes? I don't have clothes. They stole everything. My clothes, my trolleys, my stock. How will I make money? I can't buy food. I can't help Mpho (Siphon, 2019). Mpho was one of the participants needing care from the group, as a taxi had run him and his trolley over. Siphon used a trolley to push Mpho to the hospital for his regular check-ups, and some of the money made from renting out the trolleys was used to buy him medication.

The 2019 eviction left these homeless men helpless and relegated them to a life without access to basic services. This helplessness presents the state of mutual "zombification" where, on the one hand, the state lacks the resources to address homelessness and, on the other, the homeless are robbed of their ability to fend and provide for themselves. Mutual "zombification" was coined by Mbembe (1992) and refers to a state of powerlessness in both the ruler and the ruled, each of them stripped of vitality, both of them left impotent.

Another raid occurred after my empirical research, in September 2021, and was reported in the media. It formed part of a broader initiative aimed at placing the homeless in shelters (*Northcliff Melville Times*, 2021); a futile effort. As Piet (not his real name), a 65-year-old respondent, had noted a year earlier, the cost of the shelter, although only R15.00 (\$0.79) per night, was significant, given the demands on homeless people's resources: It's better for me to save the money so that I can send it to my wife and kids *ka* [on the] weekend. It is too much and not worth it (Piet, 2020).

Piet's response signifies that homelessness, which involves cost-free living, is part of a strategy of providing support for his family. Shelter is secondary in his struggle for survival. Indeed, most of the respondents explained that they came from abusive homes. The solution to moving them to shelters was not only impractical but did little to reintegrate them into their families. They were homeless not because they had lost their physical homes but because of ruptured relations, which had deepened their poverty. Moving them to shelters does not address the root causes of their homelessness, nor do shelters provide tools to mend ruptures in familial and social relations (Makiwane et al., 2010). They render the concept of inclusion superficial, as they do not address the psychosocial causes of homelessness (Speak, 2019). Although shelters form systems of support, they also create structural barriers for the homeless men. Firstly, they restrict their movements during hours when they could productively be sorting out rubbish, a means to their survival; and secondly, they do not make provisions that lessen their suffering.

A 2022 CoJ Draft Policy on Street Adult Homelessness provides for psychological support for the homeless (CoJ-DSD, 2022). Whether this represents a shift in how the homeless are treated, and whether it can direct a more grounded response to dwelling in cemeteries, remain to be seen. As difficult as it appears to tailor homeless shelters to the real needs of those finding themselves in situations like those of the respondents, the rendering

of psychological support in a way that is accepted by the respondents and impacts their lives in positive ways is not an easy task. It is, nevertheless, important, if incremental steps are to be taken towards progressive inclusion of the diverse individuals and communities that are referred to as the homeless.

## **Conclusion**

Although aligned to international conventions and local legislation and policies, the immediate objective of CoJ regulations focuses on eliminating the homeless, rather than solving the problem of homelessness. The policies fail to recognise that they are constructed within a broader system of neoliberalism that is contradicted by the interests of the homeless in the city. Accordingly, the “city sweeps the poor away” (Watson, 2009, p. 172) and dehumanises and marginalises them by the use of structural violence and technologies of destruction. Blindly employing positive assertions such as “inclusion” without being cognisant of the homeless’ reality favours the needs of the desirable members of society at the expense of the homeless. Constantly evicting the homeless demonstrates a form of spatial cleansing that is an implementation of necropower and necropolitics. The opposed and unaccepted existence of the homeless in the cityscape equates to spatial cleansing, a symptom of criminalisation often met with blatant brutality. Overall, evictions result in the homeless being rendered homeless in homelessness and deeply vulnerable to violations of their other human rights. Ultimately, the evictions treat the homeless as intruders in the city, thereby negating the real meaning of inclusion.

The state employs necropower to criminalise the homeless and does so through unlawful evictions, in this case from Brixton Cemetery. By using structural violence, which prevents the homeless from reaching their potential, the state utilises the invisible social machinery of inequality that reproduces exclusion and marginalisation, and in turn naturalises poverty and the removal of homeless people without holding anyone accountable—except for the homeless themselves. When homelessness is disguised as an individual problem, its true nature and impact are masked and difficult to address. As long as such structures of violence against the homeless are invisible, permitted, and encouraged, technologies of destruction towards the marginalised will persist and give a misleading impression of an inclusive and cohesive society. It is for this reason that assertions such as inclusion in international and national policies remain at a high level and are rhetorical to the lived experience of the homeless, in that they do not have the instruments to engage with issues on the ground as they happen. The practice of national policies’ conforming to international conventions without questioning their formative character, applicability, and consideration of real experiences renders the integration of inclusion for the sake of inclusion useless, because it becomes a function of exclusion as far as homelessness is concerned.

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- \* Please note that pseudonyms were used for the homeless men interviewed
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# 7 Exploring the Potential of the Spatial Agency of Refugees and IDPs to Inform Alternative Approaches of “Protection”

## Case Studies from Lagos and Berlin

*Philipp Misselwitz and Rebecca Enobong Roberts*

### Introduction

Forced displacement is a global crisis that resulted in the displacement of 100 million people in 2022, with the primary causes being conflict and climate-related disasters (UNHCR, 2022). An overwhelmed, underfunded, and technocratic humanitarian sector tasked with the “protection” of vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) finds coping increasingly challenging, and scholars are increasingly engaged in discourses around effective alternatives to current approaches and reimagining effective protection (Ramadan, 2012).

This chapter explores two different groups of forced migrants—IDPs and refugees—and how they find and make homes. While these two categories share similarities, the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights’ (UNHCR’s Guiding Principles on Displacement, 1998) classify IDPs as displaced who remain within national borders, while refugees cross international borders.

Contextually, we explore the concept of agency among displaced migrants as an alternative to paternalistic humanitarian regimes of care and control, where “home-making” reflects on agency expressed in self-initiated spatial and material practices of shelter adaptation and construction. Further, we conceptualise “displaced refugees as urban actors” and acknowledge that integration into cities rather than confinement to camps is more empowering and ultimately integrative for this group.

This chapter draws on recent case studies from Lagos and Berlin, two cities that are distinct in significant ways but that have both recently experienced a large influx of forced migrants—refugees in Berlin and IDPs in Lagos. In their own ways, both are becoming laboratories for the re-imagining of humanitarian responses in an urban context. We focus on tracing the self-initiated socio-spatial and material practices of these groups in home-making. In Lagos, we explore the everyday spatial practices in self-provisioning of shelter by IDPs who migrate from north-east Nigeria, through various stages

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and processes, and ultimately to the inner-city neighbourhood of Lekki. The chapter uses mixed-method data collection carried out from February to October 2022 but is restricted to migrant demography between 2010 and 2020. Data extraction consists of household surveys and interviews with IDPs, the local community, and key government stakeholders. The Berlin case study uses spatial ethnography to look at Kurdish Syrian and Palestinian Syrian refugees who migrated through Turkey and Greece to Germany, specifically Berlin. It explores refugees' agency and the spatial knowledge mobilised in officially provided emergency accommodation in five refugee-housing settings in Berlin between 2018 and 2020.

Firstly, we problematise the current humanitarian framework and present forced migrants as core urban actors. We then introduce both case studies and their placemaking practices before concluding with recommendations. Throughout, we argue that close examination of emerging practices and outcomes can expose the limitations of current policies, such as restrictive encampments in Berlin and the difficulties of self-provision in Lagos. In so doing, we offer tools to rethink current policy and inform more collaborative approaches suited to rapid urbanisation shaped by conflicts around diversity, mobilities, and migration.

### **IDPs and refugee agencies, home-making, and urban actors**

Critical interrogation of the effects of techno-managerial approaches in forced migrant interventions is an increasingly prominent policy and research topic. Agamben (1998) first introduced the “camp” as “an impassable biopolitical space” systematically governing society and a “space of exception” revealing the brutal dynamics of control and dehumanisation of humanitarianist rhetoric. Here, we view biopolitical space as a conceptualisation developed by Sitze (2012), where biopolitical space is implied to mean the management of “life, species, and race” through the instrumentalisation of violence, restrictions, and hostility, weaponised through power for marginalisation.

Recently, Pasquetti (2015) developed this growing critique by referring to it as technocratic humanitarianism. Hoffmann (2015) describes the Janus-faced nature of humanitarian camps in that they simultaneously serve as instruments of assistance and of restriction, entailing both “care and control.” Other scholars argue that this primary focus on critiquing the humanitarian response framework may be limiting, proposing instead a focus on a complex reading of the emerging socio-spatial conditions of humanitarian response and the power of the displaced in shaping and changing their realities through active participation (Sanyal, 2010; Ramadan, 2012; Katz, 2017).

“Refugee agency” has become a central motif in works on “abject spaces” (Isin and Rygiel, 2007), so-called squatting practices and informality (Sanyal, 2010, 2012), or zones of indistinction (Oesch, 2017). “Refugee agency” as a concept also fuels work by urban scholars and architects focusing on material practices in emergency shelters and camps (Kennedy, 2005; Hlerz, 2007;

Misselwitz, 2009; Dalal, 2014; Oesch, 2014). Exposing the dynamics and impact of refugee-initiated socio-spatial practices has helped build a critique of technocratic planning. Hlerz (2007), for instance, suggested that naïve modernist principles were used in the planning of camps and that these failed to respond to the cultural specificities of displaced migrants, thus reinforcing colonialism. An in-depth analysis of the Syrian refugee camp of Za'atari in Jordan exposed the incremental transformation of the camp through refugee-initiated adaptation practices (Dalal and Misselwitz, 2018) making shelters into de-facto homes. Brun and Fábos (2015) described dwelling and home-making as emancipatory processes through which forced migrants sought to establish stability and self-control despite ongoing uncertainty.

While the concepts of dwelling and home-making are typically synonymously applied, Huchzermeyer (2022) differentiates between them by presenting dwelling as a physical concept and home-making as a collection of both tangible and intangible good processes.

Normalisation of everyday life is associated with home-making, but as Vigh (2008, p. 8) argues, it should not be confused with indifference to the ongoing precarities and vulnerabilities that forced migrants face; “normalisation” does not reflect “normal in the sense that this is how things should be.” Hence, we interpret normalisation as a re-subjectivisation phase after traumatic escape and apply “the displaced agency” as a lens through which we build a critique of current approaches applied in the two case studies (see Agier, 2010; Agier and Fernbach, 2011). Equally, “home-making” as a concept is used to analyse the socio-spatial and material practices of dwelling and home initiated in both cities. Although “home” starts with a space, it could apply as a localised idea; “home starts by bringing space under control” (Douglas, 1991, p. 289). For this reason, we neither predefine “home” as a place, space, feeling, and/or an active state of existence nor describe “home” as related to a house, family, gender, the self, or a journey, instead operationalising home as a set of concrete spatial practices (Mallet, 2004). By analysing the material constellations of “dwelling and home” in Berlin and Lagos, and how they structure daily routines, we set out to understand how this spatial knowledge changes and adapts at the place of asylum, forming a trans-local and multi-contextual repository of home-making routines.

### **Refugees and IDPs as “urban actors”**

The high prevalence of forced migration to cities in recent times draws a correlation between displacement, forced migration, and cities. The growing trend of displaced populations avoiding the infrastructure available in camps and migrating to urban areas instead gives rise to critical questions about the future of urban inclusivity.

Exploring the sustainability, dignity, and protection of displaced Syrian migrants in Jordan, Burne (2016) finds that, although basic services are more accessible in camps, protracted encampment and the inability of refugees to



pursue livelihood-building lead displaced persons to move to urban areas. Acknowledging this, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assigned the new terminology of “urban refugees” (UNHCR, 2009), a term used for traditional categorisations such as IDPs and refugees living as displaced migrants in cities, although the definition is increasingly blurry.

The UNHCR (2022) speculates that, by 2050, 143 million displaced migrants will live in cities. For the UNHCR, this is a dilemma. Although it has attempted to expand its mandate in recent years to, for instance, address the needs of Syrian refugees fleeing to Cairo in 2014, the agency is used to interacting with national governments and not cities and municipalities. It also lacks the concepts and tools to provide protection against displacement-based discriminatory practices and urban precarities. The result is a growing sense of neglect of and lack of intervention for displaced migrants in cities, particularly in Africa (Monteith and Lwasa, 2017).

Urban refugees are a comparatively new topic, and there are significant knowledge gaps. Various scholars note that these are the most vulnerable groups of city dwellers globally and that a lack of data makes their vulnerabilities difficult to frame. Case studies in Nigeria (Sambo, 2017), Colombia (Aysa-Lastra, 2011), and Hamburg (Sprandel, 2017) show displaced migrants’ agency with regard to self-organisation, adaptation, and provision in the core process of integration (Müller, 2019). Urban and architectural ethnographic research plays a growing role in investigating such material and spatial practices and shapes our own research on the topic. While displaced migrants living in cities shape urban spaces in ways that are not yet thoroughly understood, the absence of an institutional policy framework responding to this phenomenon leaves multifaceted vulnerabilities unattended.

### **Introducing Lagos and Berlin**

By bringing Lagos and Berlin into the conversation on questions of migration and humanitarian responses in cities, we align with multiple calls for a different kind of comparative urban research—one that involves the inclusion of forced migrants (Roberts, 2022). Despite both cities having a long history of showing considerable pull factors in terms of migration, there are vast differences between them in terms of size, existing policies, and challenges, as well as available data, access to research sites, and intrinsic risks in conducting fieldwork.

Research across these dynamics renders a rigid approach to comparative work impossible. However, when applying the sensitising concepts of “displaced agency,” “home-making,” and “displaced as urban actors,” our fieldwork and analysis generate insights for reimagining equitable urbanisation. Both cities illustrate the narrow but significant manoeuvring space in and through which refugees and IDPs, through their everyday practices, shape urbanisation in ways that might have significance for the reframing policy for the entirety of their human rights, as well as the planning and management of inclusive cities.

### **“Head in the sand” policy: Ignored and invisible IDPs in Lagos**

Lagos, the most populous city in Africa, houses approximately 21 million people (Wikipedia, 2023). Its robust economy is bigger than that of most African nations (Kazeem, 2016). Yet, in spite of its economic power, Lagos faces significant urban challenges, with access to basic services insufficient and unequally distributed (Olajide et al., 2018). The gap in basic service provision, including affordable housing, is a leading cause of poverty and the proliferation of slums (see Chapter 10 in this book). A 2015 Heinrich Böll Stiftung study classifies Lagos as 65% to 70% informal, indicating that a substantial proportion of the population caters for its own basic needs.

Reports by Human Rights Watch (2016) and the International Labour Organization (IOM) (2019) suggest cities in Nigeria are currently experiencing an increasing influx of IDPs. The majority are from violence-ridden north-eastern Nigerian states (IOM Nigeria, 2022). They choose cities for the multiple opportunities they offer over poorly managed camps and in the face of recent camp closures. Lagos has three official camps run primarily by the Lagos State Emergency Management (LASEMA). These camps are on the outskirts of the metropolitan area of Lagos and outside Agbowo, Igando, and Mushin, but they are not accessible to IDP migrants from the north. They only absorb victims of forced evictions in Lagos and international refugees from conflict-ridden African states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Cameroon, and Sudan (Roberts, 2025).

Reliable data on IDPs living in Nigerian cities are unavailable. However, within the geographical location of the Lagos Lekki district alone, an informal 2019 IDP register compiled by various IDP community leaders estimates the IDP population at over 100,000 households, which suggests that the total number in Lagos might amount to several million individuals.

As a result of inadequate structural support for IDPs, some migrants seek support primarily from religious organisations, which leaves them entirely reliant on pre-existing social capital and networks to access such assistance. In an interview, LASEMA and the Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency (LAS-URA) attributed this gap in the national and international humanitarian response framework to an almost exclusive focus on camps and resettlement programmes within the North East region, where the displacement is occurring. As Nigerian citizens, IDPs should enjoy constitutional rights to freedom of movement and protection, as accorded by the 1999 Nigerian Constitution and through the African Union (Kampala) 2012 Convention on IDPs to which Nigeria is a signatory. However, no legal or financial provisions have been put in place thus far to support the IDP movement within Nigeria (Olanrewaju et al., 2018).

Officially, and as confirmed in our interviews with government representatives, Lagos State denies any responsibility for these migrants, claiming that those forcefully displaced would lose their IDP status and protection rights in a national response framework as soon as they left designated camps in the

north. Instead of offering protection, the Lagos State Government response has been deliberately hostile so far, designed to discourage and reverse internal migration. This includes arrests and the habitual internal deportation of homeless groups, of which IDPs make up a large population (Polity, 2014), as well as the banning of commercial tricycles commonly known as *okada* and *keke* in 2020 (Lagos State Government, 2022), thereby closing vital income avenues for IDPs. Such practices illustrate a disregard for the basic rights of IDPs, such as the right to freedom of internal movement (Nigerian Constitution, s. 41 [1]).

### **Between care and control: Protection regimes for Syrian refugees in Berlin**

Berlin, with close to four million inhabitants, has a long history of absorbing forced migrants, in particular after the Second World War, with an estimated 30% of its population having a migratory background (Hübschmann, 2015). Lanz (2007) argues that Berlin is characterised by a complex dynamism of socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural segregation, often manifesting in structural inequalities in the housing market (Lanz, 2007). The influx of refugees into the city dramatically increased between 2014 and 2016, triggered by the Syrian war. In a complex refugee distribution system, the Federal Government of Germany allocates new arrivals across its 16 states. Berlin, as one of these states, is mandated with organising the city-wide registration and processing of its allocation of refugees. After registration at emergency arrival centres managed by the Berlin State Office for Refugee Issues, refugees are allocated different types of emergency accommodation across the city's districts (LAF, 2017). Since 2015, the policy on refugee housing in Berlin has evolved dramatically. After initially repurposing school gymnasias, vacant buildings, and hotels as temporary shelters, the Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten Berlin (LAF) eventually succeeded in “normalising” refugee shelters through temporary shipping container solutions following newly developed design standards. Containers were first used in 2016 in six so-called container villages housing 2,200 people. As this solution proved insufficient and costly, the LAF embarked on an improved container-based design solution for 18 additional sites. In contrast with the previous double-storey containers, the new so-called “Tempohomes” were single storey, with small apartment-like units consisting of three containers with cooking and bathroom facilities. Eventually, Tempohomes were retrofitted with porches and outdoor infrastructure and other communal facilities. All 24 sites are fenced; guarded by security, which controls access; and managed by various independent contractors on short-term contracts. Built according to temporary-use regulations, the sites were licensed and zoned for dismantling by the end of 2019. However, the construction of more durable housing solutions—modular accommodation for refugees (so-called MUFs)—remains significantly behind schedule. Most container-based solutions were still in use at the time of writing in 2022 and

remained fully occupied, increasingly also housing more recent refugees from Ukraine.

The strategy of housing refugees in closed-off container villages and Tempohomes, combined with the pragmatic choice of placement and set-up in often-peripheral, poorly serviced locations, was widely criticised by activists and planning professionals alike as “campisation” and as fuelling tension with surrounding neighbourhoods (Kreichauf, 2018). Indeed, hostilities have been most frequent in those locations where Tempohomes or container villages have been placed in neighbourhoods with predominantly low-income residents and infrastructural deficiencies.

### **Making homes in Lagos: From improvised shelters to de-facto permanent structures**

Despite the exclusionary factors outlined earlier, many IDPs still choose to live in Lagos. In the following section, we will summarise findings from micro-cases in the Lekki area, where we focus on a typical IDP group. When we began our fieldwork in 2022, members of this group had already undergone a nine-year process of transitioning through several sites in Lagos. Over time, the group grew in size and now comprises approximately 100 households (an estimated 500 people). Based on interviews, we reconstruct their journey through different sites. We will structure our narrative into the three settlement stages for IDPs described in the camp coordination and camp management disaster framework (IOM, 2015)—emergency, intermediate, and de facto permanent.

Upon arrival, finding basic shelter is the IDPs’ most pressing priority. All interviewees stated that existing slums and informal communities characterised by close-knit social structures were inaccessible owing to discrimination against IDPs. Most interviewees resorted to pre-existing kinship and solidarity networks born out of sharing similar displacement journeys or places of origin. Joining pre-existing informal IDP settlements is available to all new arrivals, as this is predicated on available resources to erect arrival shelters commonly set up at an underpass at a busy thoroughfare—a still-unclaimed, interstitial space with the additional advantage of close proximity to income-generating opportunities such as street begging and anonymity through concealment.

However, the group was soon confronted with threats from local gangs and police and had to negotiate “protection” through financial extortion to avoid violent attacks, theft or, worse, internal deportation justified by a vagrancy law for the offence of wandering without an evident means of livelihood. This law dates back to colonial times (Polity, 2014), based on the British colonial administration’s policing of public space to facilitate oppression and racial segregation (UN Secretary General’s Independent Expert, 2004). Lagos is still planned and managed by British colonial [principles] now manifested in segregation between the poor, middle class,

rich and now IDPs; Lagos state is still planned and managed in segregation (Yaha, 2022).

Although abolished in 1973 (UN Secretary General's Independent Expert, 2004), the law is still applied by both the police and court system to harass and oppress vulnerable populations such as the homeless, sex workers, and IDPs (Human Rights Council and Fahra, 2017). This occurred particularly frequently during the COVID-19 lockdowns and stay-at-home orders (Aborisade, 2021).

All interviewees described home-making as a difficult journey in which IDPs slowly transitioned through three distinct stages—from improvised shelter (stage 1) through often several intermediary stages (2) towards de-facto permanent, negotiated shelter arrangements (stage 3)—having to endure evictions and needing to relocate frequently along the way and, each time, rebuilding shelter while introducing more complex material practices. When the interviewed group settled at the underpasses in 2014 and had grown considerably, they attracted the attention of Lagos State's Task Force Unit,<sup>1</sup> which deals with environmental protection and special offences (Daniel and Showemimo, 2022). They were evicted in 2017 and resettled, as demonstrated in Figure 7.1.

After the original eviction, the group's elected head made a deal with a neighbouring slum community and received unofficial permission to relocate to the east of it. The "renter or host" community received IDP "rent" despite having no ownership rights. The group was also subject to regular financial extortion. In 2019, the authorities again forcibly expelled the IDPs as their numbers swelled. The group moved to southeast Lagos's Owode Mango IDP permanent camp, the city's largest IDP settlement (Figure 7.1). Seasonal migrants had arrived there in 2011 and became community leaders. The community was named "Owode Mango" after an ancient mango tree and the Yoruba word *owode*, which means "money has arrived." This was meant to symbolise that the settlement would be a permanent home for its inhabitants.

Two years after our fieldwork, the group had grown and become more solid, and thus we consider their settlement permanent. We examined locals' two "compounds" and one "individual" cluster to grasp the complicated socio-spatial and material homemaking practices. Religion, age, and inter-communal disputes determine geographical arrangement. The 2011 Christian IDPs live in Compound 1. Compound 2 houses Muslim groups, while the cluster houses youth groups, single homes, and newcomers.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the study group's stages of home-making in Lagos and Owode Mango, demonstrating the limitations and vulnerabilities of IDP access to housing and land in Lagos. Firstly, we find that while migrant workers nearby have access to formal rentals, these houses are not rented to IDPs and their rentals are explicitly restricted to temporary group land leasing. They are also forbidden from building permanent homes with materials such as concrete. As informal rental arrangements are not recognised by the

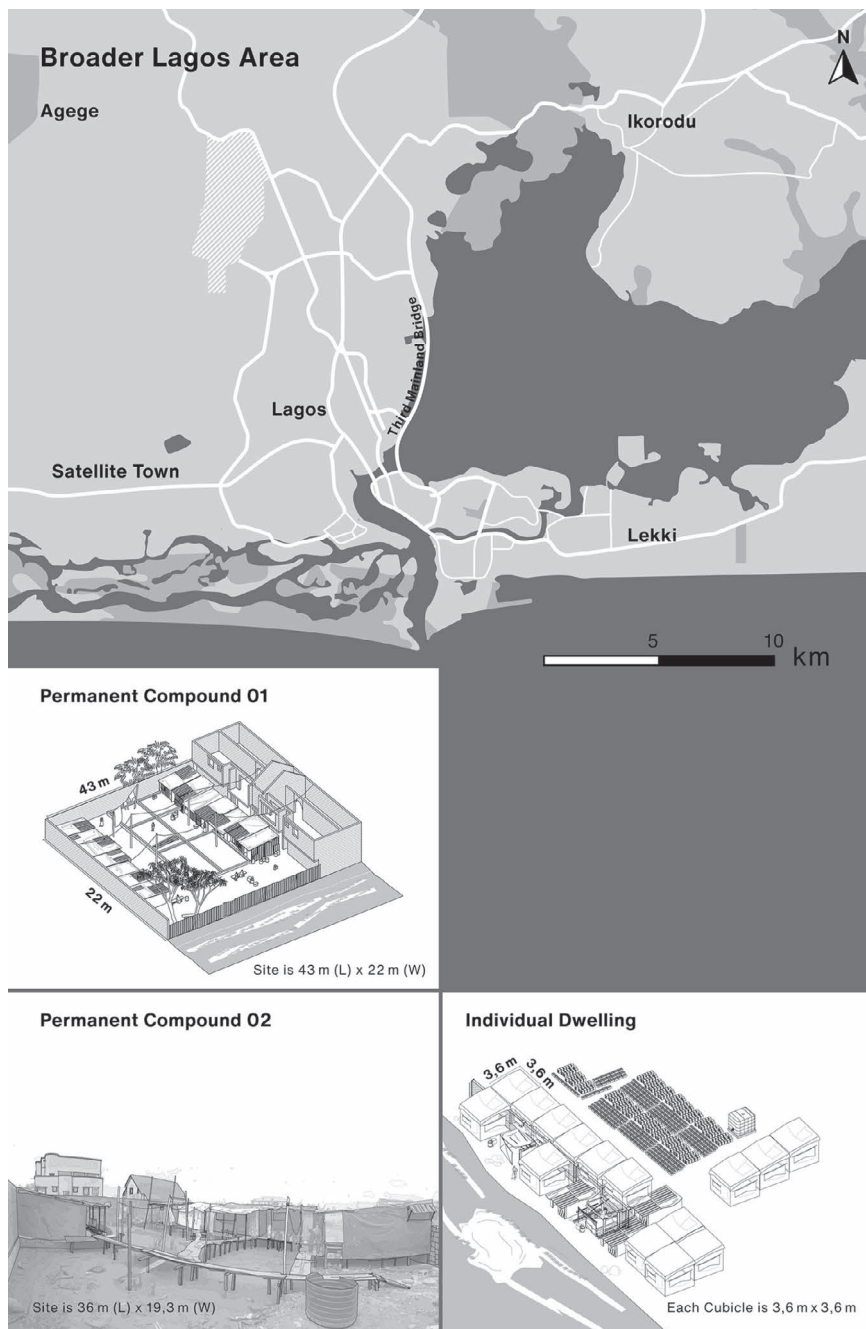


Figure 7.1 IDP settlement typology in Owode Mango.

Source: Image drafted by Till Sperrle with material provided by Bola Aguntade and the author

state, the IDP settlements remain unauthorised and susceptible to financial exploitation and forced eviction threats. For instance, during data collection in August 2022, we witnessed an outburst of violence and abuse resulting in the burning of IDP homes in the isolated shelter cluster.

Spatial ethnography and queries about earlier home-making construction show parallels and changes in socio-spatial and material home-making practices throughout these phases. The most significant changes in shelter evolution are from arrival to intermediate, with the final stage adapting the intermediate exterior and improving the interior.

Upon arrival, the main shelter consisted of plastic sheeting supported by lumber. Along the underpass wall, shelters shared wooden pillars. At the intermediate level, shelters were reorganised to create a compound around a common public space and improved with timber walls and fixed plastic roofs. At the final location, many families duplicated the previous phases using plastic, wood, raffia, and fibrous branches. As incomes improved, they rebuilt and updated their constructions. The landowner required temporary walls and ceilings, limiting upgrades. The IDPs wanted to improve their shelters, but their hosts and landlords only allowed temporary residency. In 2017, a landlord destroyed a concrete structure in Compound 1, based on the no-permanency regulation.



*Figure 7.2* Compound 1 (bottom), Compound 2 (top left), Individual cluster (top right).

IDP camps in Owode Mango lack state-recognised addresses and access to essential public amenities. Compound 1 provides all of these requirements, including public water, and shares them with other IDP compounds. Compound 1 has a kitchen, toilets, and washrooms, whereas the inhabitants of Compound 2 cook outdoors and share other facilities with Compound 1. The same applies to each cluster. We found unsafe wells with unclean water in the compound, which contributed to diarrhoea, cholera outbreaks, and infant mortality during the COVID-19 lockdown, when street vendors (usually IDPs) could not sell safe drinking water. None of the compounds is recognised by the state, and thus, most of the houses lack electricity. Only the wealthy have household generators and will charge other IDPs' cell phones for a fee.

We saw a steady upgrade to a respectable, well-maintained suburb under obvious limitations. This has had unanticipated consequences. Renters and landowners want to monetise land value gains, as residents make the settlement more appealing. This leads to rent hikes and spurs development ambitions to replace temporary IDP shelters with profitable formal investments. IDP renters are vulnerable without rights or a system protecting them.

### **Adapting Berlin's Tempohomes: From containers to homes**

In Lagos, IDPs build modest, impromptu homes that grew over time. In Berlin's regulated refugee housing system, spatial agency encounters distinct restrictions. We provide three ethnographic micro-studies on refugee-initiated spatial adaptation methods inside and against the state-provisioned plan. Despite institutional limits, residents have adapted the strictly controlled surroundings to their requirements.

#### *From containers to homes*

Berlin's LAF modified Tempohome design criteria over the years, regulating the layout of containers and entry porches, doors, windows, and other exterior aspects. The formal regulations also affect the interior of the unit, with additional furniture and decoration discouraged. Yet fieldwork showed how conventional containers had become "their" dwellings, fitting migrants' home-making ideals. Some people moved the beds into one container, creating a shared bedroom, and used the other container as a living room. Floor activities were common. Beds were used for schoolwork, dining, conversing, ironing, folding, and playing. Camp administration inspections, penalties, furniture dismantling, fire security threats, and other design code breaches disturbed this minimal self-determination and autonomy. Collective dinners demonstrated the agency's strengths and weaknesses. LAF tables are for meant two people, not a group or family. Residents moved the furniture and put down a carpet for bigger dinners. "Where else can we eat?" they asked (Fatima, 2018). "We

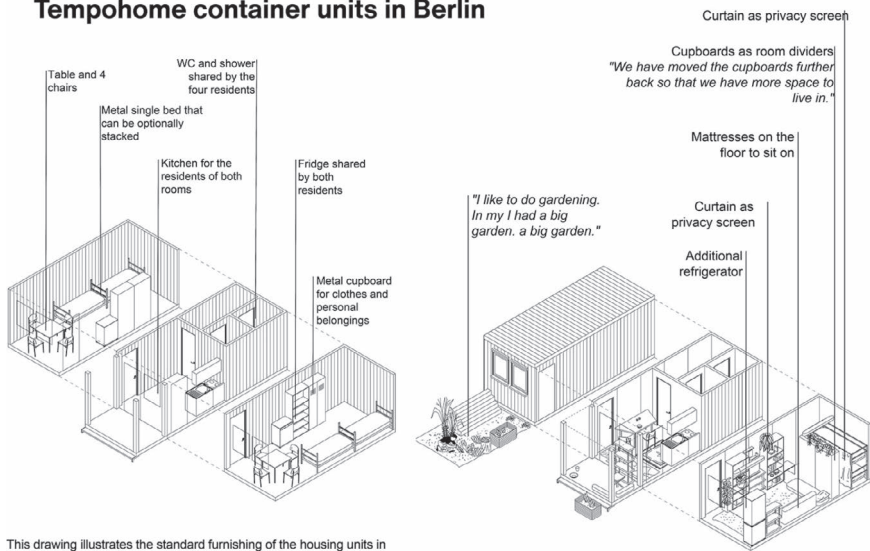


used to eat on the floor and do this here also to make us feel at home.” Fatima (2018) evoked the remembrance of a vanished residence.

### *Renegotiating privacy*

The lack of privacy, especially for devout Muslim women who prefer to take off their headscarves in their “home,” was a major issue in our interviews. Residents draped windows and doors. Tempohome porches allow for additional space adjustments. Many neighbours covered their porches with blankets or plastic sheets to add privacy between the “public” access roadway and their homes. One Wollenberger Strasse Tempohome resident renovated the porch and surrounding green areas into a tiny but exquisite enclosed garden, reminding him of his Syrian home. After he erected it, security and management ordered the garden removed, owing to fire dangers from the entrance blockage and the combustible wooden fence and pergola. When the resident objected, a compromise included moving the garden a few metres. After the tenant moved to a new container, the garden was moved to a third place and given new features using extra materials. The garden was no longer questioned by the camp administration. The resident’s 2.5m × 2.5m garden was a tangible daily spatial practice of liberation and rights testing.

### Spatial appropriations of Tempohome container units in Berlin



This drawing illustrates the standard furnishing of the housing units in the Tempohomes.

Figure 7.3 Spatial appropriations in front of a Tempohome, 2019.



*Figure 7.4* Preparing a family meal, Tempohome Wollenberger Strasse.



*Figure 7.5* Spatial appropriations around the container porches and the garden, 2019.



*Figure 7.6* A covered entrance porch at Columbiadamm, Tempohome, 2019.



*Figure 7.7* Spatial appropriation through washing lines at Columbiadamm, Tempohome, 2019.

### *Reclaiming public spaces*

LAF's Tempohomes retrofitting schemes involved significant public space renovation. The Tempohome Columbiadamm built enormous elevated wooden decking to hide cables, water, and heating lines between containers, with pergolas, chairs, and benches. In 2019, these interventions were neglected or used for mundane tasks such as clothes drying. A social worker explained this "rejection" as the actions of dependent and "shy" persons who had spent years in emergency housing. The goal was to "change the residents back into independent, autonomous, and responsible citizens" by providing appealing public areas (Social worker, 2019). Residents preferred to gather and socialise on less exposed porches or in alleys closer to their homes and neighbours, leaving the clean, artistically constructed interventions mainly unoccupied. The frequent presence of security staff seems to have turned well-intentioned interventions into disciplining tools, delaying autonomy, emancipation, and refugee home-making.

### **Conclusion and potential learnings**

Both case studies show statelessness in different contexts: abandonment in Lagos and humanitarian governance in Berlin. Despite the obvious differences between these two, socio-spatial and material practices of home-making reveal the resilience and resourcefulness of the groups. They negotiate and assert presence and participation in space-making, challenging, and transforming, albeit to a limited degree, the spatial order of refugees or a seemingly hostile and unsupportive urban landscape of IDPs. We call these practices the materialisations of spatial agency.

Can forced migrants' daily coping tactics undermine humanitarian regimes' punishing and limiting norms, as in Berlin, or overcome a policy of general neglect, as in Lagos? We saw the first encouraging signals of participation in our fieldwork results. In Berlin, the LAF joined in our research and co-published our findings. Our research contributed to a series of legislative changes that improved emergency accommodation design, as stated earlier. As observed at Tempohome Columbiadamm, well-intended "innovations" may have ambiguous outcomes, promoting paternalistic care and control rather than self-determination (see Chapter 8 in this book). There has also been some success in integrating refugees rather than isolating and controlling them as in other European countries.

Thanks to critical research and activism by the University of Lagos, which collaborated on our fieldwork and analysis, IDPs in Lagos have garnered cautious political attention. For the first time, a citywide profile operation may result in reliable statistics and a solid knowledge of IDPs and their local host communities. Most Global South cities lack humanitarian protection regulations, including Lagos. These Lagos micro-cases demonstrate how governmental inactivity can lead to self-help "humanitarian planning." Our case studies show that IDPs and refugees, like the underprivileged, use their

own resources to meet their fundamental requirements (Huq and Harwood, 2019). Forced migrants show agency, but without solid tenure and official assistance, their actions can only result in temporary stability without a clear integration route.

How can our case studies fuel conversations about IDP and refugee protection beyond Lagos and Berlin? Can self-assertions and changes in spatial-material results at the size of households, public spaces, or neighbourhoods in both cities guide new humanitarian protection tactics that build on and improve their agency? Our study suggests that three elements are essential to a new paradigm.

Firstly, policy reform must recognise that humanitarian protection—the guarantee that displaced migrants’ fundamental human rights will be “protected” and that they will receive humanitarian aid—should embrace rather than constrain self-determination. Protection must incorporate homemaking practices as welcome steps towards re-emancipation and self-determination. Learning from present practices and the obstacles encountered by both groups may reveal how policy and humanitarian initiatives can improve each other. Instead of top-down paternalism in Berlin or the complete absence of the state in Lagos, what is needed is protection based on a calculated distance from the state, with both groups as key drivers in (re)building dignified lives in cities through interstitial and invented spaces of power, life, and home-making. States and humanitarian organisations can provide financial assistance, services, and legal frameworks, while agencies can maximise their potential without compromising individuals or groups.

Secondly, urban contexts require carefully designed, context-specific approaches that recognise that forcibly displaced groups and their neighbours are interdependent, needing to share resources such as land, water, and energy, and thus benefit from social and economic ties. Isolating migrants and IDPs in Berlin-style emergency housing or other isolated assistance measures can cause jealousy and conflict. In this context, “area-based solutions” (Urban Settlements Working Group, 2019) can support forcibly displaced communities more discreetly.

This method uses an area, rather than a sector or target group, as a primary entry point to preserve complex, interdependent, and multisectoral urban environments. Humanitarian organisations should distribute aid via municipal and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Local support systems such as schools, technological infrastructure for basic services, and markets benefit everyone when they get greater funding and enhancements. Refugees and IDPs may provide fresh development chances for everybody. Berlin shows how the previous decade taught and refined policy. Many European communities now see forced migration as a central issue in urban planning and development. For instance, sheltering refugees must be part of cheap and suitable housing for everybody.

Thirdly, policies and initiatives should be co-designed using an extended, displaced agency-centred approach and area-based methods. While shelter

standards and norms are important, refugees, IDPs, and their neighbours should co-design dignified, locally appropriate, and integrated dwellings. Strategic assistance for self-provisioning could enable refugees to co-produce protection. Self-resettlement and spatial appropriations may be transgressive and emancipatory means of challenging the status quo, claiming rights, and renegotiating city status. These need urban planners, geographers, and development organisations to consider how both groups change the city. An urban and spatial lens highlights the city as a vital aspect in a lasting humanitarian refocusing, shifting from the temporary to the long term.

Greater study of the geographical and material features of both groups in cities can increase the scientific base but cannot close the policy–practice gap. However, policy ideas are mostly based on refugee migration research and consulting in European cities. Southern scholarship requires exposure and training. We try to organise research discourses beyond North–South binaries, since the Lagos and Berlin viewpoints are mutually beneficial. This re-conceptualisation must happen now, as the ongoing global crisis will result in much more forced migration.

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### **Note**

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## Part III

# Persistence

*Marie Huchzermeyer*

Urban policy norms, when adopted into global agendas, are intended to inspire change and effect transformation in the practices of governments and other stakeholders towards solving long-seated problems. This includes managing various dimensions of urbanisation, such as ensuring land is held under appropriate tenure, absorbing city-ward migrants, and achieving improved living conditions for impoverished households—challenges to which this part of the book speaks. The broad norms that the three chapters in this section engage are the formal–informal binary and, with it, the terms “informal” and “informality”; the notion of tenure security and the normative assumptions on how this can be measured; and the policy approach of enablement.

The terms “informal” and “informality” draw attention to an overlooked reality that is understood to exist beyond the reach of formal mechanisms of urban governance, management, and city-making. Their use has been in critiquing entrenched ways of planning and the construction infrastructure and housing that fail to engage with existing and often bottom-up alternatives. At the same time, as argued in Chapter 8 (Huchzermeyer and Kornienko), these terms have been used to make blunt, hierarchical distinctions, formal versus informal, and as a label that denotes inferiority. Tenure security is a norm that can be used to break down this hierarchical binary when tenure forms that may be framed as “informal” are recognised as secure. However, as argued in Chapter 10 (Sithagu), mechanisms for measuring and reporting on progress towards the norm of tenure security are limited in the extent to which they engage less recognised forms of tenure. Enablement is also a norm that can bridge the formal–informal binary when it is applied to improve the ability of a plurality of stakeholders or actors to make contributions towards resolving long-seated challenges. Yet, as Chapter 9 (Oyalowo) acknowledges, the dominant way enablement is understood in housing policy is to mean optimising the role of the private sector. This is with the intention to effect a shift away from state-centric models of housing delivery, which are associated with inefficiencies and poor targeting. Private sector housing, even when “enabled” through policy, has also failed to reach low-income groups. Thus, the promotion of enablement in housing policy has not only ignored existing housing processes but also required these processes, unaided by state or policy, to meet the gap.

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We bring Chapters 8–10 together under the theme “persistence” to capture converging angles. Firstly, persistence denotes the longevity or durability of these once-novel norms in the dominant policy discourse with the necessary review and refinement over time. There is a shared concern across the chapters over the persistence of approaches that sit at odds with African everyday realities. Secondly, there is the persistence of this reality itself. A backdrop to these three chapters is the rapid pace of urbanisation on the African continent and the extension of urbanisation beyond what one may term peri-urban or the urban periphery in a spatial sense. The everyday realities that these chapters speak to are shaped by urbanisation in the absence of industrialisation or the absorption of new households into a labour market. A multitude of self-sustaining though marginal and unsecured livelihoods link into systems and flows involving production, movement, and trade. Large swathes of the built environment are created from below, to varying extents adapting traditional or customary approaches, in an uneasy tension with state ambitions for infrastructure.

Thirdly, and more importantly, persistence underscores the endurance of unrecognised realities, institutions, and practices that contradict the dominant policy norms. Well-articulated leadership, though not a given in all underserved, low-income communities, may challenge and engage imposed housing development. The collective quest to self-determine improvement or the development trajectory, as shown in Chapter 8, may endure for decades, unsettling the formal–informal framing through which the state, consciously or unconsciously, stamps out collective initiative and tenacious everyday practice that contradicts hierarchical normative framings. In Chapter 9, the poor targeting of housing produced through policy framed around enablement (itself poorly implemented) creates conditions in which the everyday life of the majority of urban residents depends on the persistence of a multitude of institutions and infrastructures for financing and securing land, housing, and livelihoods in the city. In Chapter 10, persistence captures the endurance of traditional authority in some areas and the rise of new and, in some cases, less benign land institutions, nevertheless securing tenure, that suggest they are “here to stay.” This unsettles assumptions around the mechanisms through which tenure is secured. Chapter 10 also speaks to the persistence of the spatial imprint of colonial practices (in this case those of the apartheid state) and their implications for households seeking to secure a place to build a home.

The chapters in this section span South Africa and Nigeria. Chapter 8 is based on the experience of an officially unplanned, though ambiguously endorsed, community located in the fragmented urban fabric of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality. This borders the eastern edge of the City of Johannesburg and therefore forms part of South Africa’s largest urban agglomeration. Chapter 9 is located in Africa’s most populous city, Lagos, and while not incorporating an empirical case of everyday practices, explains

the policy disjuncture that necessitates a variety of low-cost practices in order for the city to function for its population that is estimated to extend beyond 22 million. Chapter 10, in contrast, is based on the tenure practices in two communities in KwaMhlanga in South Africa. This urbanised customary area, with its commuter relationship with the capital city Pretoria, formed out of the homeland system with displaced urbanisation that was triggered by both the apartheid state's racialised exclusion from Pretoria and that city's dependence on cheap labour. While not representative of the diversity of residential realities and practices across the African continent, these three chapters, read together, provide a window onto the disjuncture between globalised norms in land and housing policy and persistent everyday practices through which African cities are shaped.



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## 8 Unsettling the Formal–Informal Binary

### The Right to Development and Self-Determination in the Harry Gwala Settlement Trajectory in Ekurhuleni, South Africa

*Marie Huchzermeyer and Kristen Kornienko*

#### Introduction

The dominant understanding of development is deeply rooted in Global North supremacy and a process of “improvement” following predetermined, Western norms. These norms, entrenched in mechanisms of economic control by the Global North (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009; Keita, 2011), articulate economic growth, “civilization superiority” (Ziai, 2017, p. 2551), and maintenance of global power structures. Whether imposed or voluntarily embraced by governments on the African continent, Western norms, when applied to communities whose occupation of land is not officially sanctioned or to, in today’s policy language, “informal settlements,” displace self-determined local norms. This erasure, which we argue in this chapter is facilitated by the label “informal,” brings into question whose values underpin dominant development practices (Gyekye, 1997; Ziai, 2017) and neglects the pluralist realities of “diverse forms of life and, often, contrasting notions of sociability and the world” (Escobar, 2018, p. 3). In this chapter, we challenge the formal–informal binary by invoking the right to development, which has roots in the pan-African struggle against colonialism and for self-determination (Cheru, 2016). We will argue its local postcolonial resonance to historical truths that, in turn, as Markus (2014) argues, confronts ongoing development strategies characterised by undue control and colonial-like urban assimilation.

Self-determination in development was articulated in the 1986 United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Right to Development (DRD) as an individual and collective human right. It shifts responsibilities for development through this “radical human rights framing” (Vandenhoele, 2020, p. 224) and assigns a responsive and supportive role to the state, particularly in removing obstacles to development, not only within national borders but also internationally (UN, 1986). Since the turn of the millennium, notions of social and spatial justice and the right to the city have featured prominently in global urban development and post-development discourses (Adegeye and Coetzee, 2019), yet seldom engaged with the right to development. The DRD is still

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mostly discussed in relation to international law and national constitutions rather than in social, economic, and policy terms (Sengupta, 2004).

In this chapter, we apply core principles of the right to development to the complex account of the Harry Gwala community in Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality in Greater Johannesburg, South Africa. As researchers and as “resource persons” to the representative civic committee, our approach incorporates elements of action research (Stringer, 2007, p. 24) reflecting our collaborative engagement with Harry Gwala since 2004. The longitudinal analysis for this chapter is qualitative, using transcripts of consent-based interviews, meeting recordings, and field notes, as well as official records issued by the municipality. Collectively, these sources implicate the formal–informal binary, prominent in urban policy and official development practices, in the state’s imposition of a development model that does not support the needs of the Harry Gwala community. We use the lens of the right to development, in which self-determination plays a key role, to expose this binary and its ambiguities in this local development process.

The chapter first discusses the right to development and its core principle of self-determination, explaining their embeddedness in the African continent. It shows how self-determination, captured in the concept of “social production of habitat,” bridges and undermines the formal–informal binary prominent in official urban development processes. A brief discussion of applicable South African policy—the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP)—aligns principles of this with the right to development and, from that perspective, its potential to disrupt the formal–informal divide. The chapter then turns to the history of the Harry Gwala community in three phases, with the representative civic committee’s sense of duty towards development as a common thread. It first chronicles the history of the Harry Gwala occupation and resistance to what the state offers as “formal” development. It then discusses the community’s effort at self-determined development with their own layout plan countering the state’s imposed “formal” plan. The next section covers the more recent phase, after the leadership surrenders to and then eventually rejects the state’s housing plan. The chapter concludes with a discussion that shows how the account of the Harry Gwala civic committee’s efforts to realise their right to development implicitly confronts and destabilises the formal–informal binary thinking on the part of the state, which in turn is implicated in the drawn-out development impasse.

### **Disrupting binary thinking through the right to development and self-determination**

In housing and wider human environments, self-determination has long been recognised in the term “social production of habitat” (Romero, 2003; Schütz, 2003). While coined in Latin America in the 1970s, this term reflects experiences across the globe, contrasting habitats resulting from imposed modes of production (Lehner and Gerscovich, 2021). Given the persistence of imposed

development, this concept remains relevant (Lehner and Gerscovich, 2021). Socially produced habitat as a term reflects greater pluralism in its span from shack communities to state-sanctioned collective and participatory development projects. It also erodes the conventional divide between “formal” (state-sanctioned) and “informal” (unsanctioned) development, a dynamic conceptualised in the turbulence of the global restructuring of the mid-1970s. Hart (1973, p. 61) documented the “informality” of economic practices by northern Ghanaian Frafra migrants in response to conditions in Accra that fell outside of the “formal” or “modern sector.” Bromley (1978) suggested that the International Labour Organization picked up this self-determining economic dynamic, coined the term “informal sector,” and then used the formal/informal sector duality as a global platform to promote and distribute its policy recommendations. Moser (1978, p. 1041) critiqued the resultant informality and dualism in urban development at the time as “involutionary,” highlighting its “subordinate relationship to capitalism.”

By the 1990s, the word “informal” had become entrenched in urban development practices, with the term “informal settlement” identifying and othering both living environments that do not comply with official norms of urban development (Dovey and King, 2011) and those housed “informally” who often also work in the informal sector (Obeng-Odoom, 2011) and thus are deemed outside of the *Western* values of urban modernisation. From 2000, the policy discourse led by the UN and its agencies supplanted the term “informal settlement” with “slum,” attracting widespread criticism for further distancing the “other” and normalising eradication drives (Huchzermeyer, 2011; Beier, 2023). In 2016, the New Urban Agenda (NUA) distanced itself from this negative framing by referring consistently to “slums and informal settlements” (Habitat III, 2016) and engaging flexible and incremental planning, thus reflecting “a major shift towards engaging informality” (Habitat III, 2016, s. 12; Mehaffy and Haas, 2021, p. 18). Moser’s (1978) critique of informality as subordinate to capitalism becomes critical when read in parallel with the 1986 DRD, which was conceptualised in the 1970s. It represented a radical reframing of development that “sought to challenge prevailing international economic relations” and responsibilities (Vandenhole, 2020, p. 224). The UN’s contested endorsement of the right to development in 1986, including collective self-determination of development as a human right, could have furthered that challenge but, instead, this lost ground, and not only to growing neoliberal hegemony. In Cheru’s (2016, p. 1269) words,

[I]n the eyes of dominant European powers . . . the right to development and self-determination were viewed as existential threats to white privilege and therefore had to be thwarted at any cost.

Cheru (2016) nevertheless highlights the ongoing relevance of the UN’s commitments towards the DRD, citing the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015. However, the DRD’s critical elements

of international cooperation and extraterritorial obligation remain contested (Vandenhole, 2020). This is an issue of growing importance in the context of climate change and its borderless impacts, particularly on precariously located neighbourhoods. In reality, although the DRD collectively places critical responsibility on the international community to eradicate inequality and enforce social and economic (intra- and extra-border) justice through the necessary reforms (UN, 1986, art. 8; Subedi, 2021), to date, the right to development has had little impact on policies directed at neighbourhood-level development.

The African (Banjul) Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights adopted in 1981, "inspired by an African legal philosophy and responsive to African needs" (Gittleman, 1982, p. 674), is a regional forerunner of the DRD. Sen Gupta (2004, p. 181), also aligning with rights-based development, points to an aspect of Amartya Sen's (1989) capability approach, namely how it links the generally accepted purpose of development—human wellbeing—to the "freedom to choose between different ways of living." This shifted reading of development raises a critical question: Can the DRD's element of self-determination open the door to different worldviews and in turn to societal transformation that decolonises entrenched and often imposed development norms? Locally, self-determined "development" resonates with extensive discourses by African scholars around communitarian or communal (Ntloedibe, 1995, referring to Sobukwe; Gyekye, 1997), multidimensional interdependence common to African social structures (see Kamwangamalu, 1999; Magoro, 2020), and the defining of Africanness (Dickson, 1977). This communal character, if chosen by or present in developing communities, often clashes with Western individualisation at the root of many dominant development norms. Post-development theorists such as Escobar (2018, p. 2) challenge Western notions of development, including individualisation, and seek alternatives, in particular through relationality and pluralism.

Writing on the South African context, Malaza (2014) argues that re-defining development would need to be accompanied by an expanded interpretation of space and identity, a notion with broad postcolonial resonance. She defines "Black urban" as an "understanding of how identity is translated, negotiated and reflected in the urban morphology" at the neighbourhood level (Malaza, 2014, p. 557). This understanding is deeply rooted in Black consciousness and manifestations of history and geopolitics in the built environment (Malaza, 2014), connecting it to the DRD's lineage on this continent. Such an embrace of true histories by contemporary development actors could begin to redress lived spatial and structural injustices. This means that communities' ability to drive their own development, in which identities and aspirations are translated and negotiated at the neighbourhood level, cannot become a means for the state to evade its responsibility.

The urban studies discourse has raised unease with the conceptual division between "formal" and "informal." Commenting on various contributions in this discourse, McFarlane (2019, p. 622) argues that although "blurred in practice," this division has promoted "a particular structure of thought," difficult

to transcend and thus operating as “a kind of intellectual governmentality, stubbornly reiterating the same ways of seeing, carving up, and analysing the city, getting in the way of our ability to name, imagine and research urbanism differently.”

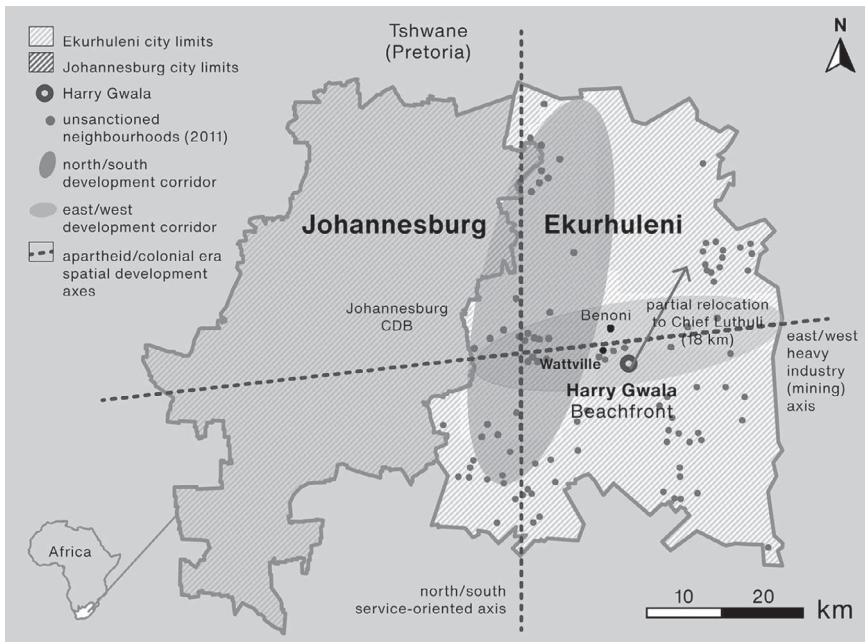
This approach to “seeing” underpins unyielding attempts to “formalise” or intervene in the “informal” to make it appear “formal.” However, when “formal” infrastructure is provided for impoverished households, it often remains a “precarious achievement” with no guarantee of continuous functioning (Baptista, 2019, p. 515). This adds to insecurity and aligns with the contention that a failure to reorient colonial urban logics with their divisions and binaries leaves hierarchical power and spatial structures in place (Hilal and Petti, 2019, p. 147). Simone and Pieterse (2017) echo this by reimagining a different urbanism through a broadly active and experimental urban insurgency in the context of African and Asian cities. Such calls, coupled with growing awareness of a long history of deepening inequalities, intensified and brought to light by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, have begun to refine the global advocacy agenda (Cities Alliance, 2021).

Our review of the Anglo-American debate on informality notes the sparse attention given to self-determination. When self-determination is foregrounded in the analysis, whether through the term “social production of habitat” or by invoking the right to development, the distinction between what is framed as “formal” as opposed to “informal” recedes. In our account of Harry Gwala, everyday practices to determine improved living conditions reveal the fraught nature of what is officially termed “formal.” “Formality” is seemingly unattainable and at times itself irregular. Likewise, what is conventionally termed “informal” may have an undeniable consistency.

In South Africa, the UISP, adopted in 2004 but largely unrealised (Huchzermeyer, 2011, 2021), embraces development that is self-determined by impoverished households outside of statutory processes (Department of Housing (DoH), 2004; Department of Human Settlements (DHS), 2009). It requires that communities be improved in a manner that minimises disruption to the lives of residents and builds on what they have already created individually and collectively, while addressing deficiencies in infrastructure and in tenure security and empowering them through direct participation (Huchzermeyer, 2006, 2011). Protracted post-apartheid reform of planning legislation culminated in 2013 in the requirement that municipal planning and land use management incorporate unsanctioned or “informal” settlements into the urban fabric over time, incrementally securing their permanence and adequacy (Huchzermeyer, 2021). This and the UISP are at odds with the “formal” planning and development strategies that persist in South Africa. The limited UISP implementation that has occurred since 2004 largely diverges from its core principles (Huchzermeyer, 2011, 2021). The Harry Gwala trajectory, to which the chapter turns next, is but one example of the seeming inability of the state to embrace self-determination by communities whose land occupation it has not sanctioned. The formal–informal binary is implicated in the state’s approach but countered from below and thus shrewdly disrupted.

### Occupying and holding on to land: The Harry Gwala community implicitly insisting on the right to development

Harry Gwala is located on the eastern edge of what today is the large township of Wattville (Figure 8.1). Early in the 20th century, following the discovery of substantial deposits on the eastern Gold Reef, the white town of Benoni emerged and rapidly grew into the present-day Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM), 2011). The adjacent Black township of Twatwa housed the mine workers until “overcrowding and a lack of basic amenities . . . led to the creation of a tent shanty town in [what became] Wattville” (EMM, 2011, p. 10). Despite “formalisation” in 1941, Wattville’s population grew. In the absence of a state commitment to its expansion, patterns of “overflow” repeated themselves on adjacent unused land, as did the repression of attempts to occupy, re-occupy, and develop this land (Bonner et al., 2012; Masoeru, 2018b). In the early 1990s, when state ambiguity towards land occupations marked the gradual transition towards a democratic dispensation, the land of present-day Harry Gwala was successfully occupied. Mr Lihlabi (2014), a long-serving community representative on the current



*Figure 8.1* Ekurhuleni within greater Johannesburg, showing the spatial context of Harry Gwala.

*Source:* Image drafted by Till Sperrle from material provided by the author, based on the map by Kristen Kornienko

Harry Gwala Civic Committee and third-generation resident of Wattville, was among the initial occupiers. Like many others, he had no alternative home site for his young family (Lihlabi, 2014) and resisted seeking a home elsewhere owing to economic, social, and cultural connections to Wattville (Lihlabi, 2014). Defended by the community over three decades, Harry Gwala's urban identity has been shaped by such residents. For Lihlabi, unlike some of the others in the leadership of the civic committee, there is no rural "home" to which to return (Lihlabi, 2014). Socio-cultural connections to place resulting from generations of their own iteration of social production of habitat express individual and collective aspirations of self-determined development; the debilitating social consequences when such expressions are forcibly disrupted are known to be present within many South African communities (Magoro, 2020) and, more broadly, African societies (Gyekye, 1997).

In the run-up to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, Wattville Town Council understood the unsanctioned extensions, including Harry Gwala, as legitimate parts of the town (Masoeu, 2018a). The then "Tent-town Residents Committee" of Harry Gwala received a letter permitting it "to develop portions 29 and 68 for residents' purposes" (Wattville Town Council, 1993). In the Wattville area, rezoning and state-sanctioned housing construction proceeded, initially through a self-help scheme and later through state-subsidised housing (Masoeu, 2018a). However, despite repeated requests for rezoning, the post-apartheid state revealed its intention to relocate Harry Gwala. In 2004, many households resisted relocation (Kornienko, 2013). The publicised eviction threat instigated a relationship between Harry Gwala's civic committee and the Landless Peoples Movement, and in turn their pro bono lawyer Moray Hathorn. In 2005, following a conference at the University of the Witwatersrand on the newly introduced UISP, Hathorn asked Marie to explain this policy to the civic committee and assist in engaging the municipality (Huchzermeyer, 2011). This was the start of the community's drawn-out endeavour for the implementation of a programme affording them self-determination and active participation in the development processes.

In 2006, following lengthy negotiations in which "the municipality was in no hurry to resolve the situation at Harry Gwala," it conceded to owning much of the occupied land and that most of it could be developed (Huchzermeyer, 2011, p. 229). However, despite its own feasibility report estimating 2 000 households living in Harry Gwala, the municipality's consultants produced a standardised plan for only 389 plots, a "formal" solution to which they argued there was no development alternative (Huchzermeyer, 2011) (see Figure 8.2). According to the City's figures, this "development" rendered 1 611 households in need of relocation. In the first of many acts of solidarity and self-determination, the Harry Gwala community mandated its civic committee to reject the plan.

This experience bolstered the community's collective, albeit at times contested, alignment with the UISP, which allows relocation only "as a last resort" (DoH, 2004; DHS, 2009). For many, this meant letting go of the

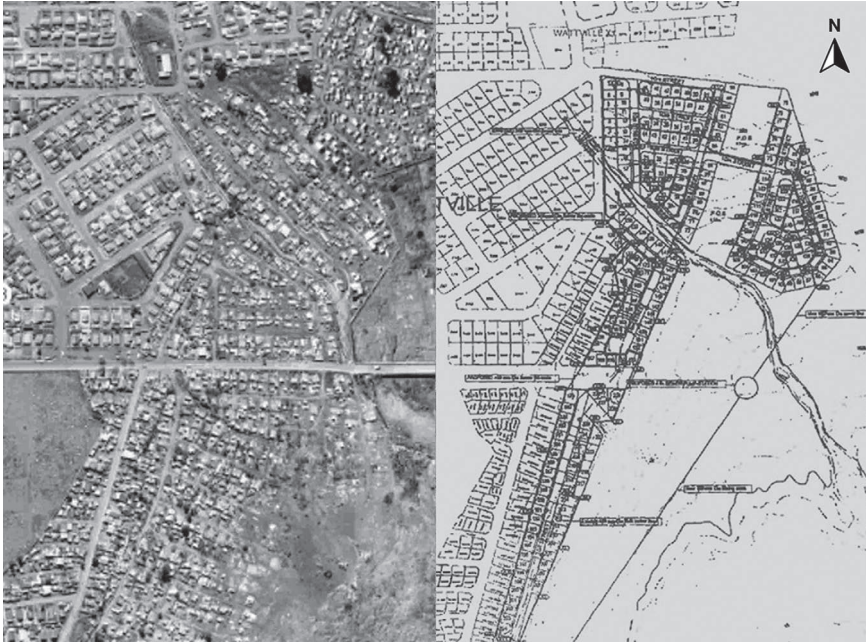


Figure 8.2 Harry Gwala (left) and the 2006 plan to replace it (right) (Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM), 2010; *Envirolution*, 2010, p. 98).

state’s promise of a house, and with it the dream of owning a solid dwelling on a straight street (Kornienko, 2017), which for many represents recognition by the post-apartheid state and entry into the “new” (post-1994) South Africa (Pithouse, 2012). Despite a further decade of efforts by the civic committee, the municipality remained inflexible about its 2006 plan, only replacing individual stands with modernist apartment buildings for higher yield. The municipality also did not commit to allocating these to residents of Harry Gwala, thus showing a disregard not only for self-determined development but also for the right to location, a component of spatial justice.

Various factors contributed to the City’s inflexible stance, including the provincial development agenda to construct a memorial complex for former ANC president Oliver Tambo on an adjacent site. However, this inflexibility also reflected the state’s “informal settlements” eradication drive. Citing the wording “cities without slums” in the UN’s Millennium Development Goal 7 Target 11 (which itself was modestly framed to improve only 10% of the existing “slum” population globally), South Africa had adopted its own target to eradicate all “informal settlements” by 2014 (Huchzermeyer, 2011, p. 1). This represented the height of the post-apartheid government’s enactment of the formal–informal binary as a “structure of thought.” In practice, it sought to gain control over all development that emerged outside of the

state-determined and Western-rooted norms and processes, manifesting in hostility to self-determined development.

In 2008, the Harry Gwala community responded with “formal” action, initiating the “Nokotyana versus EMM” case in the High Court. It requested interim services while awaiting the outcome of the state’s investigation into the feasibility of “upgrading” under the UISP. The state, misleading the court, misrepresented this term, implying with it the implementation of the plan for 389 plots (Huchzermeyer, 2011). The High Court ordered the immediate resumption of refuse collection and the installation of additional water taps but, seeing no emergency, did not find the request for shared pit latrines and high-mast lighting justified (Kapindu, 2011). In the community’s appeal, the Constitutional Court dismissed the request for temporary sanitation and high-mast lighting. In Kapindu’s (2011, p. 210) assessment, the Court paid “undue regard to technicalities at the expense of substantial justice.” Kapindu (2011) goes as far as to recommend a case at the African regional level, to establish the Constitutional Court’s compliance with the Banjul Charter. Although Kapindu (2011) does not make this explicit, one can imply an understanding that socio-economic rights must be read in conjunction with the right to development and self-determination, as presented in the Banjul Charter (AU, 1986).

Vindicating the Harry Gwala community, the Constitutional Court condemned the state’s delays and ordered the completion of a feasibility study for *in situ* upgrading within 14 months (Huchzermeyer, 2011). The resultant study was an impact assessment under the National Environmental Management Act. As Hathorn commented in the consultations of the impact assessment, according to this act, “people and their needs” must be placed “at the forefront of its concern and serve their physical, psychological, development, cultural and social interests equitably” (Envirolution Consulting, 2010, p. 35). The Act, like the UISP, shows alignment with the right to development, requiring meaningful engagement with affected communities’ aspirations and lived reality, which the state labels “informal.” Dismissing not only the lived reality at Harry Gwala but also the community in its entirety, the impact assessment refers to the future occupants of the new units as “prospective buyers” from “middle income sectors in nearby townships” and qualifying housing beneficiaries from “unemployed communities surrounding the site” (Envirolution Consulting, 2010, p. 65). Kapindu’s (2011, p. 212) insistence that “the Court should have issued a structural interdict in order to ensure that the [provincial minister] remained accountable to the Court throughout the process” gained increasing relevance.

### **Attempts to demonstrate the feasibility of self-determined development at Harry Gwala**

The Harry Gwala community rejected the proposed plan, expressing this in the statutory consultation process for the impact assessment and subsequent meetings with the municipality. In 2012, the Harry Gwala Civic Committee, through its legal representative, requested our assistance with preparing



an *in situ* upgrading plan as a counter-proposal, to prove the feasibility of self-determined development based on the existing layout. The community at large had endorsed the idea of a community-based participatory planning process by vote. Kristen's understanding of the existing conditions and the community through her PhD research (Kornienko, 2013) formed a collaborative basis for participatory analysis, layout planning, and engineering design, which she and former civic committee member Thobile Sipethu coordinated (see Figure 8.3).

Aligning with the UISP and the residents' wishes, the plan was as undistruptive to existing lives as possible. Necessary relocations would be within Harry Gwala or on adjacent land. To enable this, residents agreed to varied stand sizes, a non-standardised layout, leasehold rather than freehold tenure, and that plots could include at most two existing tenant households (Kornienko, 2012 (engagement notes)). Participating community members prioritised safe circulation, emergency vehicle access, solid waste removal, improved social amenities, a satellite police station and electricity, waterborne sewerage, and taps to every plot. Through several mass meetings, residents contested, rethought, and reimagined the layout plans that Kristen and Thobile prepared and revised (Figure 8.3), ultimately reaching a consensus (Kornienko, 2017).

In mid-January 2013, the civic committee requested meetings with the municipality to table its self-determined layout plan. In June, Hathorn wrote



Figure 8.3 Community-based *in situ* layout planning in Harry Gwala.

Source: Photos by Marie Huchzermeyer (2012, 2013)

to the municipality, drawing attention to the plan, its features, the participatory process, community endorsement, and its compliance with the UISP and 2009 court order; his letter also placed on record the municipality's unwillingness to meet and discuss the plan (Hathorn, 2013). A meeting was finally granted in August 2013, but the Head of Department (Housing) and Member of the Mayoral Committee (MMC) for Housing refused to discuss the plan, accusing the team of having flouted the hierarchical planning procedures. The MMC reproached the community leadership for allegedly creating distrust and undermining her authority. While the officials undertook to submit the plan to various departments for comment, this achieved no change in the municipality's stance towards Harry Gwala.

Two years later, the municipality tabled a progress report on Harry Gwala's development, noting that rezoning of the municipal-owned land portion had "been approved for High Density (Res4) stands." It acknowledged that "[t]he community is not in support of the development and as such has rejected the high-density proposal. Numerous attempts to convince the community that 3–4 story walk-up units are *the only viable option* has [sic] not yielded results" (EMM, 2015, unpaginated, our emphasis).

The progress report further stated that considering "any other model" would "entail a minimum delay of five years which may be delayed further should there be issues" (EMM, 2015, unpaginated).

### **Surrendering to formalisation and subsequent attempts to rein in the flaws of the so-called "formal"**

Confronted with unyielding resistance from the municipality to the collective self-determination of their development, and threatened with further delays, in 2015 the Harry Gwala community weighed their prospects of achieving any improvement to their living conditions in their lifetime. Hathorn advised, based on the UISP's principles, that in accepting the municipality's plan, the community would lose the grounds for his legal representation. However, after more than a decade of resistance to the housing plan, the committee felt it had no choice but to surrender. From that point on, it maintained its "duties to the community" (UN, 1986, art. 2.2), keeping residents informed and involved, and as far as possible holding the municipality to account by shadowing the project management. However, despite visits to the Ward Councillor, there was no progress. In 2017 all communities in Wattville and adjacent Actonville embarked on a peaceful protest march to demand improvements across Wattville. Despite the leadership's best efforts, there was an uncontrolled element of civic damage, resulting in arrests. Nevertheless, the Ward Councillor acknowledged that the march had achieved movement within the municipality, and Harry Gwala's leadership insisted that it unlocked the project (HG Civic Committee, 2018).

At a public meeting in November 2017, the MMC for Housing announced the imminent start of construction for 1,000 units, 264 of these in Phase 1 (EMM, 2017b, p. 2). An audit had identified "about 1 000 beneficiaries" qualifying

for fully state-subsidised housing from a community of over 1 500 households (EMM, 2016, p. 2). The roughly 500 non-qualifying households, provided they were documented, would eventually be housed as tenants on alternative land, for which feasibility studies were underway (EMM, 2017b). Phase 1 of the project was to replace the southern portion of Harry Gwala, known as “Beachfront.” Some older tenants at this point agreed to be relocated to other housing projects (HG Civic Committee, 2018). For the remaining Beachfront residents, the municipality had secured a three-year leasehold for a temporary relocation area (TRA) on disused railway land bordering Harry Gwala to the north. Close to 400 Beachfront residents signed consent to reside there for 18 months (EMM, 2017a, 2017b). Others objected, either because of misgivings over the sincerity of the project (EMM, 2017b) or because their incomes depended on multiple tenants. The process was plagued by internal tensions and political manipulation by external actors (HG Civil Committee, 2018).

A month before the municipality’s announcement and with the knowledge that relocation was imminent, the civic committee reclaimed a certain level of self-determination by pre-empting the municipality. The committee organised households’ move to the designated but unprepared TRA site (HG Civil Committee, 2018). Taking on considerable uncompensated work as a duty to the community, the committee managed site allocation and numbering in the TRA. These actions accommodated individual needs and preferences: livestock, on-site sanitation for an aged resident, and fencing, owing to animosity from the neighbouring community. The committee lobbied the municipality for the construction of a drainage system and sought a solution for those resisting relocation (Huchzermeyer and Kornienko (notes from transect walk), 18 July 2018). It also found space for 30 households from Lakeview, one of Wattville’s rezoned and upgraded “overspill” settlements, bordering onto Beachfront. Their backyard rental dwellings had encroached onto what was to become Phase 1 of the housing development and therefore were subject to demolition.

The municipality’s contractors began the cut-and-fill required on the sloped beachfront site, including a 5-m-high retaining wall along the border with Lakeview. The project timeline set aside two months for its construction, 16 months for the housing construction, and one month (July 2018) for beneficiary allocation from those in the TRA (EMM, 2017b). Phase 1 completion and allocation of units in December 2020 would then pave the way for the TRA’s occupation by households for Phase 2 (EMM, 2017b). The civic committee undertook to work closely with the Ward Councillor and relevant officials to see the project through on this basis.

However, several factors caused significant delays in the implementation of Phase 1. Firstly, a few plot owners in Lakeview whose primary residences encroached beyond their plot boundaries took legal action to resist the demolition of their houses, holding up the completion of the retaining wall. Secondly, there had been no planning or budgeting for a costly bulk infrastructure intervention. Thirdly, the municipality had omitted to register the housing project in advance with the National Home Builders Registration Council. Finally, from March 2020 the COVID-19 lockdown caused a municipal standstill

lasting several months. Each holdup affected budget allocations, causing further delays. Against the agreement, in January 2019 the municipality requested households in the remaining Harry Gwala neighbourhood to move to a TRA on the far side of Wattville. This would allow Phase 2 of the housing project to proceed while Phase 1 was awaiting resumption (Huchzermeyer (notes from site meeting), 2019). However, the community rejected the request for relocation, as it contradicted the earlier agreement that these households would move into the vacated TRA, which in turn required the first phase of the apartment buildings to be completed, allocated, and occupied.

At this point, the civic committee and the community's faith in the project were waning. They were aware that the National Prosecuting Authority had approached the municipality with allegations of corruption (Huchzermeyer (notes from site meeting), 2019). Soon after this, the municipality suspended and reshuffled key officials, causing gaps in institutional memory and continuity. The civic committee had to use its own records to explain the project agreements to a new team in which it had little trust. By late 2021, only the retaining wall, partial foundations, and floor slabs had been completed. At the time of writing in 2022, the ground-floor walls were finally underway (Figure 8.4).

The civic committee's first-hand experience of irregularities, inconsistencies, and poor accountability in the supposedly "formal" housing development process coincided with mounting questions from affected residents. Late



*Figure 8.4* Apartment block construction as of early 2022.

*Source:* Photo by Marie Huchzermeyer (2022)

in 2019, a committee member reported that the municipality was extending electricity into neighbouring unsanctioned communities. One of Harry Gwala’s leaders captured the general sentiment: “Actually, I’m tired now; we are tired; everybody here is tired” (Lihlabi, 2019). In February 2022, while providing community oversight over the apartment construction in erstwhile Beachfront, the civic leadership, with the support of the community, resolved not to let the second phase of the project go ahead:

We will fight with the Municipality. To be honest, we will resist. We’ve agreed about that. The community has discussed. Our intention now is to get electricity and take it from there. I know the *in situ* plan very well. (Lihlabi, 2022)

In February 2023, shortly before going to press, we were invited to a meeting with Hathorn initiated by the civic leadership to discuss legal options to prevent Phase 2 of the formalisation project from going ahead and return to the self-determined development plan of 2013.

Thus, as summarised in Table 8.1, our chronicle of Harry Gwala comes full circle. A community labelled “informal” resists the imposed “formal”;

Table 8.1 The Harry Gwala Civic Committee’s practices through the conceptual lens of this chapter (Constructed by the authors).

	<i>Disrupting the formal–informal binary</i>	<i>Committee approaches to self-determination</i>
1990–2004	Land occupation, layout planning, expectation of permanent servicing and tenure.	Self-determined development at the neighbourhood level.
2004–2006	Resisting relocation to “formal” housing, convincing the municipality of the applicability of the UISP.	Expecting state support through interim servicing under the UISP.
2006–2009	Awaiting the outcome of the government’s study into the feasibility of upgrading under the UISP.	
2008–2009	Litigating for interim services, securing an order against further state delays.	Insisting on improved living conditions and state support.
2009–2015	Contesting the state’s plan for housing; self-determining an <i>in situ</i> layout plan and submitting this to the municipality.	Defending and proposing a layout based on the existing neighbourhood.
2015–2022	Although surrendering to the state’s housing plan, assisting the state in implementing Phase 1 and ensuring immediate community needs are met in the TRA.	Taking responsibility for development, continued duties to the community.
2022–2023	Resisting Phase 2 of the housing plan; resuming demands for <i>in situ</i> upgrading.	Renewed self-determination of development.

then, left with no option, tests this and resolves to return to self-determined development. The civic committee's practices and actions over 30 years have aligned with key elements of the right to development and have persisted in pursuing self-determination against many odds.

## Conclusion

The Harry Gwala story begins to demonstrate that, while impoverished communities can determine and are determining their own development across what has come to be seen as the formal–informal divide, that divide undermines their efforts and contributes to inhumane timelines for actual change to take place. In language, policy, and practice, this binary misconstrues the community's adeptness to resist, confront, engage, and even become "formal." While the norms defining "formal" development processes in turn underestimate the possibility of community solidarity and erase residents' social, economic, and cultural attachments to place, critically, these imposed norms perpetuate colonial logics of power while eradicating local identities and aspirations. In contrast are the committee's own development approaches as elements of the right to development and self-determination. Taken together, it becomes evident that the deliberate application of the DRD by local development actors at key moments would have changed the trajectory of development.

A complex question that needs further enquiry is whether culturally unique and more just lived realities can be achieved through a radical reframing of the norms that inform development. Here we refer to a reframing in line with the right to development's normative demands on state and inter-state relations, including a fair position for countries of the Global South in the world economy, and self-determination at all levels. These demands pose a challenge to the foundations of Western-driven paradigms that have shaped the notions of developed versus undeveloped and formal versus informal. In such a re-imagining of development, it would be critical to understand whether a pluralistic approach could enable land and social justice (Markus, 2014) and push back current, ongoing colonisation through assimilation into irreverent "modernising" norms. But, as Malaza (2014) and Simone and Pieterse (2017) have pointed out, such a reframing demands that those in (visible and invisible) positions of power make different "development" decisions.

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# 9 Policy Transfer and the Misplaced Enabling Role of Government in Nigeria's Housing Policy

*Basirat Oyalowo*

## Introduction

A turning point in economic policies for African countries came in the early 1980s, when they adopted neoliberal reforms under structural adjustment programmes involving privatisation, liberalisation, and deregulation, with the purpose of reducing public expenditure and introducing an enabling role for the state (Carmody and Owusu, 2016). These economic policies were promoted and enforced by global governance entities and multinational agencies influenced by the United States (US) (Peck et al., 2009; Parnell and Robinson, 2012). They had far-reaching social consequences, since they largely discounted citizens' realities (Peck et al., 2009; Horn, 2018). This chapter questions the assumptions underpinning the international transfer of neoliberal policy in the housing sector. It does so by examining "enabling policies" as expressions of the ubiquitous neoliberal slant that has dominated housing policies in the Global South since the early 1980s (Yap, 2015; Carmody and Owusu, 2016; Horn, 2018; Arku, 2020). Using Nigeria housing policy as an example, the chapter tackles a central assumption associated with enabling policies, namely that governments' enabling role will facilitate the construction of housing that is affordable for various income classes (Arku, 2020). It explores how the Nigerian government adopted market-driven housing policies in the early 1990s as a mechanism for housing provision for all income classes but failed to realise the expected outcomes. The chapter subjects Nigerian housing policy to scrutiny to establish the workability of market-based housing finance and housing supply policies in the context of a predominantly informal and low-income demand base.

The chapter adds to the literature on international policy transfer following the work of Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), Rose (2004) and Renaud (2010), all of whom caution against overlooking macro-economic and local conditions in policy transfer. It aligns with propositions by Renaud (2010), Murphy (2014) and Soaita et al. (2021) that the workability of policy transfer depends on the ability of each country to replicate the macroeconomic, political, and social conditions that made the transferred policies work in their country of origin. As Murphy (2014, p. 894) notes, successful policy transfer involves both the deterritorialisation of nationally constituted and

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temporally specific sets of practices and, simultaneously, the reterritorialisation of these practices in new national or local market and regulatory contexts. The precarity of the assumptions that underlie the successful deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of such policies for Africa has also been explored by Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyane (see Chapter 2 in this book).

Given its focus on housing policy transfer, this chapter identifies neoliberal housing policies in the Global South as “what is being transferred.” It also agrees with Sam et al. (2017) that this movement is generally motivated by factors such as the absence of policy, the desire to improve policy, and, in some cases, political considerations.

The chapter interrogates the implication of neoliberal housing policy using internal conditions in Nigeria to assess the enabling role of the federal government in its implementation. As Nigeria is made up of 36 states with differing urbanisation, housing, and demographic characteristics, this chapter uses Lagos—the country’s most urbanised state—to show how residents have responded to governmental failure in acting as such an enabler. This chapter has three main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to establish the routes through which the Nigerian government has sought to implement its enabling role in housing provision. Secondly, it aims to disrupt the assumption that the government’s enabling role has facilitated low-income housing accessibility on a large scale. Thirdly, it briefly describes residents’ responses to the failure of this enablement role. While discussing the case of Nigeria, the chapter offers insights that may illuminate housing policy challenges confronting other countries with similar policy transfer trajectories.

Complementing a broad review of housing policy literature in policy enablement, transfer, and analysis, the narrative of this chapter draws on two forms of secondary data. One is macroeconomic indicators as collected by the World Bank, the 2021 *Housing Finance Yearbook* of the Centre for Affordable Housing Finance (CAHF) in Africa, and the Central Bank of Nigeria. The other is statements made by housing developers in *The Guardian*, a prominent newspaper in Nigeria, noting that stakeholders voice their views through the media owing to its capacity to influence the direction of public policy and to shape the public’s understanding and perceptions of this (Walsh-Childers, 1994; Chang and Lee, 2019). With the help of keywords, I extracted excerpts from news items and interviews in the “Homes and Property” segment of *The Guardian* for the period January–May 2022. Through an interpretative content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2004), I reviewed 250 extracted articles, narrowing this to 18 relevant articles, which I analysed in detail.

In the next section, the chapter explores the nuances of enabling strategies as expressions of neoliberalism. This is followed by an overview of the Nigerian housing policy environment within the framework of enabling policies promoted by global norms. It then discusses the assumptions underpinning Nigeria’s enabling housing policy. The discussion progresses with specific examples of counteractions to these policies from Lagos, which disrupt

these assumptions. The chapter closes by drawing together suggestions for a reappraisal of assumptions underpinning globally promoted housing policy norms and their transfer. These may inform the search for more nuanced norms as the decade of action of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) draws to a close.

### **Neoliberalism and enabling housing strategies**

The neoliberal turn in policy that first gained prominence in industrialised countries in the late 1970s (Peck et al., 2009) required the withdrawal of direct government expenditure on public services in favour of market-driven reforms. Several reform policies, such as privatising government institutions and liberalising economies, were subsequently transferred from countries such as the US and the United Kingdom (UK) to what was then termed “developing countries” through the efforts of multilateral agencies and global governance institutions (Peck et al., 2009; Parnell and Robinson, 2012). Governments were enjoined to take on an enabling role to facilitate market-driven economies.

The enabling policy approach was widely promoted in UN conferences and strategies of the 1980s and 1990s (UN, 1996), with policy transfer also being spearheaded by the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (Arku, 2020). In the late 1980s, the 1988 Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 recommended the revision of national housing policies and the adoption of an enabling strategy (UN, 1988, cited in UN, 1996, p. 3). Subsequently, the UN Conference on Environment and Development of 1992 (the Earth Summit) expanded the approach through its Agenda 21. Chapter 7 of Agenda 21 describes an enabling approach as a partnership between the public, private individuals, and the community (UN, 1992). In 1993, the World Bank (1993) published an influential housing policy document titled “Making Housing Markets Work.” The Habitat Agenda, adopted at the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) three years later, built on this, while also reinforcing the aspiration of adequate shelter for all expressed in 1988 in the Global Strategy for Shelter for All by the Year 2000 (UN, 1988). The Habitat Agenda committed states to a strategy of “enabling all key actors in the public, private and community sectors to play an effective role—at the national, state/provincial, metropolitan and local levels—in human settlements and shelter development” (UN, 1996, p. 27). It also committed states to establishing favourable conditions for the organisation and development of the private sector, defining and enhancing its role in housing provision. Paragraph 48 of the Habitat Agenda restated a commitment to strengthening regulatory and legal frameworks to help markets flourish and overcome market failure (UN, 1996, p. 29). Twenty years later, the New Urban Agenda (NUA) continues to support this approach, its implementation in particular relying on “an enabling environment at all levels” (Habitat III, 2016, s. 130).

In the housing sector, and mirroring the Habitat Agenda, neoliberal policies are founded on the notion that markets should be allowed to thrive and governments should divest from direct housing provision. Instead, governments should focus on facilitating an operational environment conducive to private sector investment, in which market bottlenecks are removed (Arku, 2020; Obeng-Odoom, 2022). Throughout this chapter, I refer to this as “the enabling policy.” Private sector investment refers to the activities of corporate real estate development organisations rather than individual housing developers. In successfully implemented enabling approaches, households satisfy their housing needs from the outputs of private developers, whose capacity to produce affordable housing has been subsidised or incentivised to provide housing below market rates (Van Bortel and Gruis, 2019). Without this, private sector producers would be limited to producing housing for those who are able to afford market-priced housing. Thus, in the absence of supportive financing mechanisms, lower-income households would have to find other means of satisfying their housing needs (Enisan and Ogundiran, 2013).

Countries have adopted several strategies to aid the functionality of housing markets. Planning and regulatory frameworks have been the main focus of action, with interest in the capacity of the planning system to constrain or ease the processes of formal construction (Arku, 2020; Leon-Moreta and Totaro, 2022). Other strategies include reducing planning restrictions and the transaction costs associated with new housing construction, introducing flexible planning approvals to reflect changing conditions of urban areas, and adopting incentives to foster residential housing provision (see Hassan, 2011; Van Bortel and Gruis, 2019; Arku, 2020; Leon-Moreta and Totaro, 2022). Ndubueze (2010) identifies other strategies, including the development of a property rights system, market-rate mortgage finance systems, and the rationalisation of housing subsidies to stimulate private-sector housing provision on a cost-recovery basis. The cases of Morocco and Kurdistan demonstrate the successful application of enabling strategies in terms of incentivising private sector redevelopment for lower-income households and improving housing stock by incentivising new private investment, respectively (Hassan, 2011). Arku (2020) also notes the increase in housing stock in major urban centres in Ghana, Brazil, and Chile under the enabling approach. By virtue of the capital intensive nature of housing, it is understood that there are opportunities to enable markets throughout the housing development value chain. Nevertheless, various nuances undermine an overall picture of success.

Enabling housing policies are motivated by various concerns across different city contexts (Leon-Moreta and Totaro, 2022). Thus, even within one country, the implementation of an enabling policy could differ from city to city. In addition, such policies operate within the confines of the overarching agenda of each implementing government, possibly becoming a socio-political tool for pursuing a specific governance agenda. As such, if the implementing government chooses to strengthen the provision of low-income housing, it will have to adopt strategies such as production subsidies and mortgage

guarantees to support construction and, eventually, allocation to low-income beneficiaries based on needs rather than political patronage. However, if public–private partnerships for market-priced housing are priorities, governments will promote measures that enable markets to determine prices, ease planning processes for partner developers, and leave the production to the private sector, which is motivated mainly by profit. Peck et al., (2009, p. 49) thus point to “actually existing neoliberalism,” which takes a variety of forms, including situations in which governments, rather than stepping back from the public service provision as neoliberal ideology requires, continue to be active interventionists in the economy in order to impose market rules that suit the political agenda. Therefore, adopting an enabling approach to housing policy may serve different priorities and does not necessarily lead to a more conducive environment for low-income housing.

### **Neoliberal policy transfer and subsequent shifts in Nigeria’s housing policy**

At the federal level, the Nigerian government translated its enabling role into the National Housing Policy in 1991 via two main entry points, namely private sector-led housing development and access to mortgage finance. Together, these and other aspects of the enabling policy were expected to provide housing for all income classes across all states in the country. However, over 30 years later, it is evident that the enabling approach has not been successful.

Prior to 1991, Nigeria’s housing interventions were based on a direct construction approach, where designated government agencies constructed houses and allocated these to qualifying households. The first National Housing Programme in 1972 aimed to construct and allocate 59,000 housing units, with 15,000 in Lagos and 4,000 in each of the other 11 state capitals, but this target was not met (Ajayi, 2019). In the 1975–1980 period, a new target of constructing 202,000 units was set for direct provision, but a success rate of less than 15% was achieved (see National Housing Policy of, 2012, s. 2.3.4), as released by the Federal Ministry of Land, Housing, and Urban Development (FMLHUD, 2012). In the 1980–1985 period, the country embarked on the direct construction of 40,000 housing units annually nationwide, based on the concept of “affordability and citizen participation” and targeted at low- and middle-income earners (FMLHUD, 2012; see section 2.4.1 of the National Housing Policy, 2012). By 1983, only 20% of this target had been achieved. At the end of the period, the government still had not met its targets (Ajayi, 2019), although several institutions, including the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria, and laws such as the Land Use Act of 1978 had been enacted to facilitate housing provision during the period (Ocholi et al., 2015).

It was not until 1991 that Nigeria launched its first National Housing Policy (National Housing Policy, 2012, s. 2.5.6). Reflecting the Global Shelter Strategy for All by the Year 2000, the main goal of the policy was to ensure

that, by the turn of the millennium, all Nigerians owned or had access to decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing (Ocholi et al., 2015). Given the persistent failure of the direct construction approach in previous years, the National Housing Policy of 1991 provided a clear mandate for the government to step into the role of enabler, leaving construction to the private sector (Nubi and Ajoku, 2011; Agunbiade et al., 2013). In addition, the rationale given for the corporate private sector's entry into housing provision was that it would increase competition and efficiency in the sector (National Housing Policy, 2012, s. 2.5.4). The policy also allowed the federal government to devolve responsibility for direct housing provision to the regional state, a process which Jessop (2002, p. 454) describes as the "selective transfer of state capacities upwards, downwards, and sideways . . . to promote supply-side competitiveness on various scales above and below the national level." However, federal government agencies such as the Federal Housing Authority continued to direct housing construction, but with a limited and contradictory yield. Firstly, while the Federal Housing Authority had access to factors of production such as land, its housing delivery met only an estimated 4.2% of the country's annual requirement (Enisan and Ogundiran, 2013). Secondly, its housing projects were riddled with the awarding of politicised contracts and allocation of completed units to people who were not in need and at prices that low-income households could not afford (Adenuga, 2013; Ocholi et al., 2015). Thus, while Nigeria joined other countries in the Global South in adopting market-led processes in line with World Bank and UN guidelines (Nubi and Ajoku, 2011; Arku, 2020), in practice, it exemplified Peck et al. (2009, p. 49) proposition of "actually existing neoliberalism," as the government did not step back fully from housing production but continued to use this for its elitist agendas.

The National Housing Policy of 1991 was reviewed in 2006 and later again reviewed to the 2012 National Housing Policy (Ajayi, 2019). In 2012, a report of a presidential committee on urban development and housing was published as a white paper, referred to as the 2012 National Urban Development Policy. In section 3.1.2, the document stated that:

the increasing commitment to a free market economy as well as the growing awareness of communities compel that greater attention be given to partnership building with the private sector and the communities themselves, in the delivery of services in urban centres.

In the 2012 National Housing Policy, the government again committed to the enabling approach as a strategy for reaching its objective. This was to be achieved through the creation of an enabling environment for private sector investment and the injection of offshore funds into housing development (National Housing Policy, 2012, s. 3.2). The policy's financing thrust hinged on strengthening the country's mortgage system (National Housing Policy, 2012, s. 3.2). Two interrelated elements of the 1991, 2002, and 2012 policies

can be identified as being core to the government's goal of market-led housing provision and typical of policies adopted as a result of the international transfer of neoliberal policies to developing countries in the early 1990s (Carmody and Owusu, 2016; Arku, 2020). These are strengthening the mortgage sector as the basis for housing finance and promoting the private sector as a housing supplier. I briefly expand on each of these.

Mortgage financing in Nigeria has been in operation since 1977 through the Federal Mortgage Bank. The 1991 National Housing Policy entrenched mortgage finance in Nigeria's housing finance system, creating primary mortgage institutions (PMIs) as private-sector mortgage banks to mobilise loanable funds from workers towards a contributory scheme called the National Housing Fund. The introduction of PMIs was a step towards removing primary mortgage financing from the federal government's responsibilities and passing this role to the private sector, while the Federal Mortgage Bank would coordinate the management of the National Housing Fund.

This dependence on the private sector as a housing supplier is underlined in the 2012 National Housing Policy, which states that “[t]he physical construction and provision of houses and the disposal shall be private sector-driven with Government creating and sustaining the enabling environment” (National Housing Policy, 2012, s. 2.5.2.4). The Real Estate Developers Association of Nigeria (REDAN) was launched in 2002 to fulfil this purpose. The National Housing Policy of 2012 defines a developer as “an entrepreneur and a risk bearer engaged in the business of efficiently investing his resources in the development and provision of housing, for expected profitable returns on his investments” (National Housing Policy, 2012, s. 2.6.2.6). Developers were to operate under the REDAN and were mandated to “meet the critical needs of members of the various segments of our society” (National Housing Policy, 2012, s. 2.6.2.6(c)). This framework cemented the new direction of housing provision in Nigeria as being an entrepreneurial, market-driven process.

### **Incongruent policy assumptions and resulting expectations from housing developers**

The secondary data collected for this study dismantle assumptions that the adoption of enabling policies produces favourable outcomes for market-driven processes and, in the case of Nigeria, for mortgage sector development and private sector housing provision. Poverty, informal employment, rising inflation, and high interest rates combine to limit market-based housing production and financing. By 2020, 47.6% of Nigeria's population (an increase of 8.5% from 2018) lived on US\$1.90 per day (World Bank, 2022). In 2017, only 39% of Nigerian adults had a bank account or savings with financial institutions (Centre for Affordable Housing Finance (CAHF, 2021). CAHF (2021) estimated that, at that time, only 4% of Nigeria's adult population had borrowed from formal financial institutions.



Mortgage loans are provided on the basis of traceable deposits in commercial or mortgage banks and require stable, fixed incomes. However, the proportion of Nigerians in informal employment and therefore disqualified from mortgage loans is high, standing at 53% (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2020, p. xviii). As of 2017, the ratio of mortgages to Nigeria's gross domestic product, a key indicator of the contribution of mortgage transactions to the national economy, stood at 0.5% (Ogundimu, 2019; CAHF, 2021). This low ratio reflects the poor performance and low impact of the nation's mortgage sector. An immediate implication is that, unless there are interventions to ease access, at least 53% of the general population, namely those in informal employment, will not qualify for mortgage loans and have to find alternative housing finance. The same goes for those who earn too little to afford a down payment. CAHF (2021) posits that 63% of Nigerians are able to afford local mortgage rates for the cheapest new-built housing produced by private sector developers. However, too few such houses are being built. High inflation rates are contributory factors to low housing production. For example, inflation rates stood at 11.40% in 2020 and almost doubled to 19.61% by July 2022 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Rising inflation rates increase the costs of housing production, a situation that is compounded by the country's high reliance on imported construction inputs, estimated at between 50% and 55% (CAHF, 2021). Scarcity in an environment of high demand, especially in a city such as Lagos, pushes up house prices and prevents most people from buying or renting decent homes (Patunola-Ajayi, 2020).

Similarly, high interest rates constrain housing supply by the private sector. Nigeria's interest rates determine the costs of borrowing for housing suppliers and impact mortgage rates. In 2020, interest rates for lending averaged at 15.38%, and between 2018 and 2021, mortgage interest rates were offered at rates between 12% and 25% on short tenures of 8–10 years (CAHF, 2021). These terms are not favourable to households in the low-income bracket, thus limiting the uptake of mortgage loans. They are also not attractive to housing developers, who require long-term, low-interest loans to finance their housing developments (Ogundimu, 2019).

Another fundamental assumption in Nigeria's enabling policy is that private sector developers are ready and willing to provide housing for all income categories and that the government will be in a position to create a functional enabling environment, including the macro-economic conditions required to achieve this. The media analysis conducted for this study provides insight into developers' perspectives on low-income housing supply constraints. A prominent position voiced by developers is that

[m]ore needs to be done particularly in the areas of mortgages, making it affordable and commensurate to the minimum wage. The present interest rate does not allow an average Nigerian access to loans, mortgages and other facilities

*(The Guardian, 2022b)*

*The Guardian* newspaper published stakeholders' persistent calls for the government to actualise its enabling role—for example, achieving a long-term, single-digit mortgage interest rate as opposed to the current situation, in which one respondent suggested “mortgage loans seem to be [for 10 years] if you are lucky” (*The Guardian*, 2022d). The reports extracted from *The Guardian* also show how private sector developers are exploring the market for profitable housing development opportunities in response to a constraining macroeconomic environment. Real estate developers reported that they were rapidly shifting from supplying larger, high-end housing developments to smaller, high-end apartments because “many developers were finding it increasingly difficult to even offload [larger] units built for high end markets” (*The Guardian*, 2022e). This is caused by the “harsh economic realities due to inflation that rose above 15% in March 2022, so that spacious and high-end apartments have gone beyond the budgetary limits of the salaried class and upcoming adults in major cities” (*The Guardian*, 2022e) (see Figure 9.1). However, as the same developer argued, “the trending design [i.e., smaller units] does not mean that the units are cheap, especially those located in high-income areas like Lekki, Victoria Island, Ikoyi, and other similar areas in Lagos mainland” (*The Guardian*, 2022e).



*Figure 9.1* Luxury apartments under construction in Lekki, Lagos.

*Source:* Photo by Basirat Oyalowo (2022)

Intertwined with macroeconomic concerns are questions relating to land market regulations: “Prices of the products in the market space have continued to rise due to the escalating cost of building materials, epileptic performance of the naira [Nigeria’s currency] against the dollar, high interest rate [and] unexplainable increase in land value” (*The Guardian*, 2022e).

Developers were requesting better enabling land regulation: “[I]nvestors want advocacy that will make the industry attractive for property investors, such as improvement on the review of the land tenure system, Land Use Act [LUA]” (*The Guardian*, 2022c); “[r]ight now, the LUA is a dampener to real investment” (*The Guardian*, 2022a). Another noted that “resources are better utilized in the hands of [the] private sector but you also need the public sector to give you access, regulations, approvals and permit” (*The Guardian*, 2022b).

These developer concerns voiced through *The Guardian* confirm the limitations of an entrepreneurial direction for affordable housing providers, as set out in the National Housing Policy of 2012. Developers grapple with the severity of market conditions that constrain private-sector housing production and the mortgage market. As a result, they call on the government to actualise the enabling environment its policy promises. This underscores the absence of a conducive environment for market-led, low-income housing provision in Nigeria. The implications of this for the housing situation in Lagos, Nigeria’s most urbanised city, reflect similar issues in other African cities. The next section shows that, in Lagos, most households resort to alternative means of housing themselves, unsupported by housing policy.

### **Housing conditions in Lagos: A disjuncture with enabling policy**

Lagos, Nigeria’s commercial capital, has a population density of approximately 8 000 people/km<sup>2</sup>, compared to Nigeria’s average of 200 people/km<sup>2</sup> (Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, 2022). Its population is expected to surpass 32 million by 2052 (Lagos State Government Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, 2022). According to the Lagos Resilience Office (2020), over 3,000 people enter the city daily, searching for livelihood opportunities. It estimates that over 60% of Nigeria’s industrial investments are made in Lagos and that close to 90% of corporate businesses in the country are headquartered there (Lagos Resilience Office, 2020). The city is also the hub of over 3.2 million micro- and small-scale, mainly informal enterprises employing at least 67% of working adults (Lagos Resilience Office, 2020). Current estimates from the Lagos State Government (2022) indicate this has increased to 77%. The city’s housing stock does not meet the needs of its diverse residents, with inner-city areas characterised by as many as 2–3 million sub-standard housing units, and unmet housing needs in excess of two million units (Lagos State Government, 2013, p. 49). Importantly, the Lagos State Government acknowledges the shortage of formal housing and notes that over 75% of its population live in informal or slum

communities (Lagos State Government Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, 2022, p. 20). The informal sector therefore plays a significant role in housing residents, in the face of a macro-economic environment that limits formal housing supply for low-income categories. Everyday practices to mitigate housing finance and accessibility constraints are visible in low- and medium-income developments in the city's interior and expansion corridors, where household construction dominates and occurs continuously.

Various housing finance sources underpin everyday housing construction. Households rely on community affiliations as well as social organisations such as cooperatives, associations, and work, trade, and religious societies for loans to buy land, build houses, and improve homes. The role of cooperative societies in housing finance in Nigeria is particularly well recognised (Oyewole, 2010; Odum and Ibem, 2011; Adeboyejo and Oderinde, 2013; Lawanson and Oyalowo, 2016). In 2015, 2,516 cooperative societies were registered in Lagos, each with at least 20 members (Oyalowo, 2018), but thousands more operate without registration. Respondents in Oyalowo's (2018) study depended on cooperatives for housing-related loans, with 34% of 283 members having taken a loan from their cooperative either to pay rent or to fund home construction.

According to planning regulations, housing construction should follow formal processes of land parcelling, subdivision, purchase, and titling, as well as the acquisition of building permits. Alabi and Bako (2018) note the slow and bureaucratic processes involved in issuing planning permits, which delay construction and escalate construction costs. To meet their own housing needs, households bypass the stepwise regulatory and legal process, saving both time and money. Alabi and Bako (2018) observe that this pathway inevitably leads to an increase in "informal settlements." Incremental construction over the period of time that financing can accommodate, the use of rudimentary materials and unskilled labour, and the clustering of half-completed but already lived-in buildings add to the outlook of "informal" or so-called "slum" conditions in large parts of the city. Mabogunje (1968) listed evidence of such practices in various neighbourhoods in Lagos in the 1960s and, five decades later, Oyalowo et al. (2021) show that this situation has merely expanded. Officially, unplanned self-construction occupies interstitial spaces (see Figure 9.2), with the Lagos State Government (2022) estimating that there are over 100 such communities within the city, although the actual number is likely to be higher.

A bird eye view of Ebute-Metta, Lagos, with Makoko. It shows mixed-use buildings and roofs of the settlements, the water body, boats on the river to transport goods and people, electricity lines, the highway and an open market place. The lack of formal government recognition within housing and planning policies of what are termed "informal" communities limits the provision of sanitation, water supply, healthcare, and other amenities, exacerbating the situation. To some extent, a consistent actualisation of the state's enabling policy would mitigate this situation by increasing the affordable



*Figure 9.2* An aerial view of Ebute-Metta, Lagos with Makoko, an informal settlement on reclaimed land, in the foreground; LSDPC public housing on the far left; Grace Court, a privately developed estate, in the centre; and, on the far right, individually built houses in the Adekunle area of Ebute-Metta.

*Source:* Photo by Posedion Images/Bola Oguntade (2020)

housing supply. However, the prevalence of informal employment would still place mortgage funding outside the reach of most households. The market supply of housing would also remove the close spatial association or interdependence between informal livelihood and household-based incremental construction. It is evident that a lack of consideration for local realities has limited the effectiveness of the transfer of enablement policy in Nigeria.

The persistence of these informal settlements is an indication that local factors tend to limit the effectiveness of policy transfer, especially in the Global South (Arku, 2020). Inevitably, the incomplete de-territorialisation of the enabling policy and limited penetration of market-led processes became apparent not only as market failures but also as government failures to actualise the enabling objectives (Carmody and Owusu, 2016; Arku, 2020). These limitations have created counteractions in the everyday practices of ordinary people that are expressed in actions that resist, subvert, or attempt to mitigate the failure of the so-called enabling environment in fostering market-led housing interventions.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The Habitat Agenda urged governments to ensure that the enabling approach takes account of economic, social, and environmental diversity in each country (UN, 1996, p. 21). Despite this nuance, the underlying assumption was that the enabling approach could produce housing for all income groups, including the urban poor and low-wage earners, and that governments would carry out the necessary financial, environmental, social, and governance reforms that would allow enabling housing policies to succeed. In attempts to comply, national governments have carried out extensive reforms of policies, institutions, and regulations to enable housing markets to work more efficiently (Arku, 2020). However, the outcomes have not always been as anticipated.

This chapter has made obvious the disjuncture between the national vision of setting up an enabling environment in Nigeria and the reality in the case of Lagos. It has shown that the Nigerian government has not been able to actualise its enabling role in a way that facilitates market-led housing for all income groups. Neither have the macro-economic conditions required to facilitate housing finance through mortgages materialised. The notion that market-oriented reforms will work for all income classes must therefore be dismantled in Nigeria's housing policy reforms, as long established in scholarly work. The reality is that market forces are themselves shaped by the institutional, economic, political, and even social contexts in which they are located. In the same vein, enabling housing policies are also motivated by various concerns across different city contexts, so that even within one country, the re-territorialisation and implementation of an enabling policy could differ from city to city (Leon-Moreta and Totaro, 2022). In addition, such policies would operate within the confines of the overarching agenda of each implementing government, possibly becoming a socio-political tool for pursuing a specific governance agenda. This is a risk that needs to be accounted for as international policies are transferred, especially through global agencies and agreements.

In the case of Nigeria, the shift towards neoliberalism can be argued to be incomplete, given the continued participation of the government in housing provision even as the state took on an enabling role. The “actually existing neoliberalism,” which Peck et al. (2009, p. 49) posit as an outcome of incomplete territorialisation common in countries of the Global South, is therefore evident in Nigeria. Being unable to achieve its enabling role of private sector-driven provision, mortgage financing, and direct construction, the state inevitably passes the role of housing provision back to households themselves. In reaction, households have catered to their own housing needs within the confines of their resources—for example, in seeking alternative sources of funding, constructing incremental housing in unrecognised or “informal” settlements, and bypassing government regulations by building without permits in order to cut construction costs and delays. By virtue of

their “informal status,” these settlements are typically underserved in urban service provision.

This chapter demonstrates that countries such as Nigeria have adopted policies informed by global norms—enablement, in this case—without the macroeconomic conditions necessary to ensure that such policies address the economic realities of their people. It is quite possible to envision similar disjunctions across African cities, producing, in part, acts of self-determination by people, as explored in Chapter 8 of this book. As the UN’s decade of action draws to a close, it should be recognised that the specificity of local conditions in a rapidly changing world needs to be at the forefront of future policies for change.

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# 10 The SDG Monitoring Framework Turns a Blind Eye to the Daily Realities of Lived Tenure Security in African Hybrid Land Transaction Systems

A South African Case

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## Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by heads of state at the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. They are a set of global goals to end poverty, increase prosperity, and protect the planet by 2030 (UN, 2015). To oversee the implementation of the SDGs, the UN also published an SDG monitoring framework in 2015. Through a comprehensive list of indicators, accompanied by manuals and guidelines, its purpose is to enable country-level monitoring of progress towards the achievement of the SDGs (Saner et al., 2019).

This chapter offers a critical reading of the SDG monitoring framework, focusing in particular on Target 1.4, which relates broadly to access and control over land and resources, and Indicator 1.4.2, which measures the proportion of households with tenure security (UNSTATS, 2021).

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2002), tenure security is the certainty of one's right to land that is recognised by others and protected in the case of a threat, claim, loss, or eviction. This is referred to as passive tenure. Active tenure is the ability to transact on land through buying, selling, and leasing (Housing Development Agency, 2015). Tenure security is critical to sustaining livelihoods, stimulating economic activities, and generating wealth, as well as accessing services and infrastructure, and stimulating settlement improvement (Van Gelder, 2010).

Van Gelder (2010) defines three forms of tenure security. Legal tenure security is based on private ownership by either an individual or a group with well-defined land rights. Perceived tenure security is based on the occupant's perception of their likelihood or probability of being evicted. *De facto* tenure security depends on the situation of the settlement despite the legal context or lack thereof.

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The SDG indicator metadata template, used to guide how to measure and monitor tenure security, embraces all types of land tenure, including customary systems. It measures both legally recognised documentation and perception of tenure security to attain what it refers to as a “full measurement of tenure security” (UNSTATS, 2021, s. 2a).

The template acknowledges the limitations that countries may have in reporting on tenure security, particularly developing countries (UNSTATS, 2021). For instance, there may be gaps in the data, varied reporting systems, or a deficient capacity to conduct surveys, among many other challenges. At the same time, it acknowledges the complexities surrounding legally recognised documents and the perception of tenure security. It states that, in some cases, formal documentation of land rights may not be enough to guarantee tenure security, while in other cases individuals may feel that their land rights are secure even without legal documentation (UNSTATS, 2021). Even though the template has made an effort to address the many complexities relating to reporting on the perception of tenure security, the overall principles of the SDG indicator framework are based on a standardised and quantifiable process (UN, 2015a). The SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound) principle indicates a rigorous universal scientific monitoring process (Saner et al., 2019). In this chapter, I argue that, by using the SMART principle to measure the targets, the SDG monitoring framework incorporates a blindness towards both perceived and *de facto* tenure security, which are prevalent in situations where tenure security is deemed to be low, particularly in hybrid-land systems. In so doing, it is likely to introduce inaccuracies or under-reporting. Consequentially, large populations whose tenure security is outside of the criteria of the SMART principle would not be counted in the monitoring of the SDGs, thus creating data imbalances.

I use Van Gelder’s (2010) framework to analyse the tenure security of residents of Thembisile Hani Local Municipality in what was formerly the KwaNdebele homeland and is now in the Mpumalanga province in South Africa. Even though much of the land in Thembisile Hani is legally owned by the state, perceived and *de facto* tenure security are the most prevalent forms of secure tenure. I show that Thembisile Hani, which has a population of over 300,000, would most likely not be part of the SDG monitoring framework because of the prevalence of perceived and *de facto* tenure security (Thembisile Hani Local Municipality, 2022). In addition, the case study reveals that these forms of secure tenure can be fragile and the building blocks can collapse when there are no checks and balances, and no state support.

The chapter assesses the experience of two villages, Magodongo and Buhlebesizwe, through three lenses. The first examines the existing and ever-changing norms applied in land transactions in the context of hybrid land tenure systems. Interviews in the two villages revealed that community members distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate headmen.

Headmen appointed by the tribal authority council (TAC) were considered legitimate, while those not appointed by the TAC were considered illegitimate. Respondents believed that self-appointed headmen were extortionists, exploiting weaknesses in the customary land allocation process. I find that this type of land agent is seldom dealt with in mainstream literature, although their practices are increasingly entrenched and normalised in day-to-day hybrid land administration, as in the case of Thembisile Hani. The SDG monitoring framework does not capture actors within customary land practices such as those of traditional authorities and those imitating them, although these practices shape tenure security. The second lens examines the role of the local municipality and finds a proliferation of hybrid land systems linked to the lack of administrative and institutional support on the part of the municipality in providing legal documentation for existing land tenure systems. Even though the South African Constitution recognises customary law, there is a general lack of institutional and administrative support for customary land systems from the state and state institutions. This is also the case in Thembisile Hani. The third lens examines tenure security perceptions among the community in order to outline the irrelevance of legal tenure documentation and the prevalence of perceived and *de facto* tenure security.

This chapter draws on a larger study for which I conducted 42 interviews. Of these, 35 were households in Magodongo and Buhlebesizwe identified through purposeful sampling. I also interviewed two municipal officials, two ward councillors (officially elected, state-remunerated community-level representatives, and usually party-affiliated) and functionaries of the Ndzundza-Fene Tribal Council, which governs the Moloto area within Thembisile Hani. In addition, I conducted a focus group with eight local headmen and the *Nkosana*, or senior traditional leader, in this Council. For this chapter, I analysed interview responses that related to customary land allocations.

In summary, this chapter disrupts the SDGs' standardised notion of tenure security. The aim is not to romanticise perceived and *de facto* tenure security but to highlight their dynamics in the context of hybrid land tenure and, in so doing, to illuminate the complexities and shortcomings of perceived and *de facto* tenure security. The argument is that the SDG monitoring framework is insufficiently attuned to the nuances of what is lived tenure security and what is experienced as insecure tenure. The chapter draws out the mismatch between the conceptualisation of the SMART monitoring system and the real-life pluralism of tenure systems. It demonstrates how the communities of Thembisile Hani, as in most former homelands with tenure hybridity, exist in uneven forms, revealing the inadequacy of the SDG monitoring framework in areas where such forms of tenure exist. With such disparities between the SDG monitoring framework and the realities on the ground, the call is for a more adaptable and flexible monitoring framework that will take variations and context into account.

### **Challenges in adapting the monitoring framework (SDG target 1.4) to the African context**

The UN's SDGs consist of 17 goals and 169 targets and are supported by an elaborate indicator and monitoring system that assists UN member states to regularly review and report on progress towards implementation. According to the UN (2015a), the monitoring system drew lessons from the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 and whose indicators and monitoring systems were only finalised several years later, thus creating a monitoring lag. In response to the urgency of developing a monitoring framework, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Indicators started the technical work of defining the SDG indicator framework in as early as 2015 (UN, 2015a). A total of 232 indicators were developed under the SMART principle described earlier (Saner et al., 2019).

Tenure security falls under Goal 1 of the SDGs. This goal is to end poverty in all its forms globally by 2030; under this, Target 1.4 is dedicated to questions of land (UNSTATS, 2021). It aims to ensure vulnerable men and women have equal rights to “economic resources, as well as basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property inheritance” (UNSTATS, 2021, p. 15). The global monitoring framework contains several indicators related to land, also connecting across different SDGs. Progress in relation to land access and control is assessed by Indicator 1.4.2, which measures the “proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognised documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure” (UNSTATS, 2021, s. 0c). The legally recognised tenure documentation must be formal and recognised by the respective government, but the indicator system does not prescribe “what documentation on land rights will be counted as legally recognized,” leaving this for countries to specify (UNSTATS, 2021, s. 2a).

The SDG metadata template recognises the complexity of measuring perceptions of tenure security. It tackles the challenge of creating a universal and comparable system by acknowledging that, even without legally recognised documentation, individuals and communities may perceive their tenure rights as secure (UNSTATS, 2021). Similarly, having legally recognised documentation may be “insufficient to guarantee tenure security” (UNSTATS, 2021, s. 2a). The framework measures the perception of tenure security through two criteria:

- (i) The landholder does not report a fear of involuntary loss of the land within the next five years due to, for example, intra-family, community or external threats and
- (ii) The landholder reports having the right to bequeath the land.

(UNSTATS, 2021, s. 2a)

Emphasising the importance of gender, it relates the latter in particular to women's concerns over “intergenerational land transfer” (UNSTATS, 2021, s. 4a).

The framework acknowledges customary tenure systems as undocumented; security of tenure therefore is determined by surveys capturing household perception. As some governments, South Africa included, recognise customary systems, the framework requires adaptation of the measuring framework at the country level. As multiple and diverse tenure arrangements exist in dynamic rather than separate tenure systems (Cousins and Hornby, 2006), country-level adaptation of the monitoring framework to ensure accurate land data is critical to the monitoring of the implementation of SDG Target 1.4 on this continent.

The SDG monitoring framework, in my view, has several limitations. Firstly, it is evident that the framework is based on a scientific approach that emphasises quantifiable outcomes. The SMART principle is one example of the obsession with quantifying and documenting in order to validate the monitoring framework. When the SMART principle is related to land tenure, it resembles the principle of common law that is underpinned by accuracy and precision, translated through surveyed land that can easily be quantified and measured.

Secondly, the SDG monitoring framework assumes that the state is a willing collaborator in the recognition of customary rights and will provide the administrative and institutional support to provide legal documentation. In the case of the South African tenure system and as my case study will show, there is no political will to support the customary system administratively and legally. Although traditional boundaries are recognised by the state, residents receive no official documentation. Without the administrative support of the state, customary land practices, like other land tenure systems outside of the common law system, operate without legal principles, thus making legal documentation of such practices unattainable.

Thirdly, even though residential customary land may belong to a household head, some portions of the land may be shared among the community—for instance, grazing land—and therefore, this land is held through communal group rights. In the context of these overlapping land rights, the perception of security of tenure may differ among members of the same household and community owing to conflicts, the death of the household head, or other societal changes. The UN's definition of "perception of tenure security" assumes that there is only one landholder, as in the common law system, while there may be multiple landholders with multiple land rights.

Lastly, the definition is also not clear as to whom the landholder must report to should they experience involuntary loss of land. Who is the legitimate authority to report to when there is a threat of loss of land: Is it the state or traditional authority? Here, it must be considered that while the SDG monitoring framework does not mention traditional authorities, in most cases they are custodians of customary land. By making no mention of such authorities, is the monitoring framework avoiding traditional authority institutions?

In later sections, I also highlight that the monitoring framework ignores other agents: in this case, alleged self-appointed headmen, who are claiming their stake in traditional institutional frameworks, thus adding a layer of fragility and complexity to the hybrid land tenure system. In the next section, I discuss the theoretical concepts I use to analyse the shortcomings of the monitoring framework.

### **Another way to view tenure security**

Van Gelder (2010) defines legal, perceived, and *de facto* tenure security in the following ways:

1. Legal tenure security is based on individual or group private ownership obtained through title and well-defined property rights. This view stipulates that well-defined property rights equate to tenure security, and the lack of well-defined property rights equates to tenure insecurity. In other words, it establishes a clear dichotomy between formal and informal, legal, and illegal tenure security.
2. Perceived tenure security is based on an occupant's perception— that is, the occupant or household's perception of the probability of being evicted. This perception is influenced by the dweller's experience of feeling secure, because there has been no threat of eviction or insecurity. This form of tenure security is subjective and reliant on an individual's experience of tenure security.
3. *De facto* tenure is based on the “[f]actual situation on the ground” despite the legal status of the property (Van Gelder, 2010, p. 451). It is determined by factors

such as the length of time of occupation (the older the settlement, the higher the level of legitimacy and protection); the size of the settlement (the larger, the more critical mass); and the level and cohesion of community organization (the better the organization, the higher the probability of a successful strategy of non-compliance).

(Van Gelder, 2010, p. 451)

While these characteristics may come from within a settlement, there may also be external factors that influence *de facto* tenure security, such as external support from organisations, media mobilisation, politics, and administrative practices that legitimise tenure security.

Ideally, all three forms of tenure are needed for full tenure security (Van Gelder, 2010). However, this is possible only in developed countries where legal, perceived, and *de facto* tenure security are all attainable (Van Gelder, 2010). But Van Gelder (2010, p. 452) reminds us that “there is no necessary connection between them.” In fact, in developing countries, the absence of a linear relationship between the three forms of tenure security is what makes informality. Perceived tenure security does not have to co-exist with legal



tenure security, nor *de facto* tenure security with legal tenure security. The relations between the three forms of tenure security are dependent on context (Van Gelder, 2010).

The shortcoming of the SDG monitoring framework is that it does not recognise all three forms of tenure security as equally valid. Instead, it recognises legal tenure security and perceived tenure security. The monitoring framework only recognises tenure security if it can be measured and accompanied by legal documentation. However, perception cannot be measured nor are we able to define what it entails (Van Gelder, 2010). Therefore, reducing it to something measurable is the same as framing it within the legal and illegal dichotomy. Instead, we should be asking to what degree the perception of tenure is secure or insecure (Van Gelder, 2010). In addition, the monitoring framework does not consider *de facto* tenure security because it is context-specific, which means there are variations and, with this, difficulty in measuring. Consequentially, the fact that the monitoring framework does not treat all three forms of tenure security as equal in their own right puts developing countries at a disadvantage and ultimately excludes them from the global monitoring framework.

### **Hybridity as a metaphor and a literal space of negotiation within customary land tenure systems**

Hybridity is a term that has its origins in biology and botany and refers to the cross-pollination of species (Guignery, 2011). According to Guignery (2011), hybridity is often associated with creativity and the creation of a new thing. In the 20th century, the term came to be used in linguistics and the cultural domain. It was then adopted by postcolonial theorists to challenge perceived boundaries in language, politics, and ethnicity, that is, the hierarchies, polarities, binaries, and symmetries that were assumed to exist. In this sense, the notion of hybridity stands in opposition to an assumed purity in race and culture and “embraces a blending, combining and syncretism” and the impure (Guignery, 2011, p. 3). For Bhabha (1994), the use of “hybridity” in this way is disruptive in that it undermines binaries and boundaries that the dominant culture (that of colonisers) assumes exist and that serve the dominance of that culture (Bhabha, 1994). It therefore opens an alternative discourse that questions authority.

While arguing that hybridity is ubiquitous (and purity non-existent), Bhabha also refers to a “[t]hird space of enunciation” (Guignery, 2011, p. 5, quoting Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). This is an “in-between space” along borderlines and crossings in which identities, “multi-cultural individuals, migrants and diasporic communities . . . experience their hybridity” (Guignery, 2011, p. 5). Thus, Bhabha refers to these “in-between” people as displaced or as having “no secure roots . . . instead, they travel along contingent cultural routes . . . in a zone of exchange and negotiation” (Guignery, 2011, p. 5).

To borrow Bhabha's metaphor of "in-between people," there is a continuous struggle by those who do not belong within the domain of legal tenure security of gaining legitimacy in these spaces of hybridity or impurity. In the domain of customary tenure, these "in-between people" vary in status, as my case study shows—they may be ordinary citizens, officially recognised traditional leaders, unofficial land agents alleged to be self-appointed headmen, state and municipal officials, and political figures. They all work within the space of hybridity with the continuous aim to gain legitimacy.

I argue that public officials who are within the customary land setting form part of the "in-between people." They also are in a constant struggle to gain legitimacy as they deviate from prescribed bureaucracies and perform less prescribed behaviour in the implementation of public policy (Bierschenk and de Sardan, 2014). They operate in a real world that is different from the official norm because "informality does not [only] exist outside of the state, it is also firmly entrenched in state mechanisms themselves" (Bierschenk and de Sardan, 2014, p. 19). Even with their technical knowledge, their professional norms, and practical training, they adopt numerous habits, rituals, and tricks of the trade that correspond to both the job and the location and specific context in which they find themselves. In whichever way the state deals with customary law, "officials have often bent (some) rules of the state in order to acquire a (basic) legitimacy on the ground through which they are able to implement (other) state rules" (Zenker and Hoehne, 2018, p. 32).

Where state officials find themselves in a customary setting, it is impossible to "evade the realm or rule of the 'customary'" (Zenker and Hoehne, 2018, p. 4). To cope with the contradictions of legal pluralism, state officials use their own perspectives to do the work of the state.

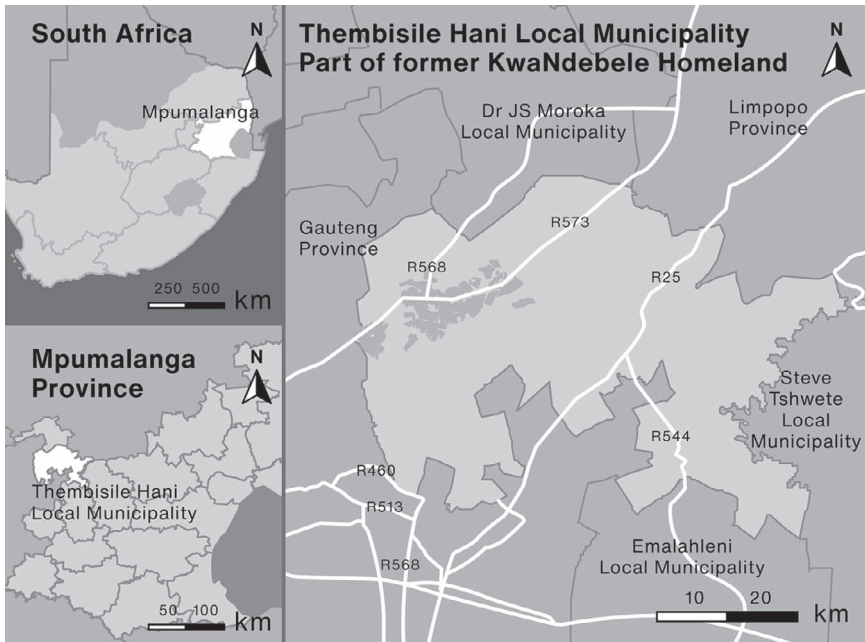
The rural poor also form part of the "in-between people." They must claim the benefits of government programmes by applying the "right pressure at the right places in the governmental machinery" (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 66). They frequently bend and stretch the rules "because existing procedures have historically worked to exclude or marginalise them" (Zenker and Hoehne, 2018, p. 66).

In essence, the state and those who live outside the legal system are in constant friction and negotiation. There is relentless pushing and shoving, as each entity "performs" to display its power. At times, this takes on violent forms, as is popularly seen in so-called "service delivery protests" in South Africa. Other times, negotiations are subtle or behind closed doors. What is clear is that there are "contradictions between rigid legal planning" and informal practices (Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011, p. 447). In reality, things are dealt with through "porous bureaucracy" (Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011, p. 447), meaning that both the state and the rural poor work with the cracks and gaps within legality in order to provide and access basic services (Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011). This is particularly evident in the case of Thembisile Hani, to which the chapter turns next.

### Case study locations

Through the wall-to-wall system of municipalities in South Africa, the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality came into being in the early post-apartheid years as one of six municipalities in the Nkangala District (see Figure 10.1). Thembisile Hani stretches over more than 30km and is predominantly rural but urbanised around the R573 regional route, which connects Pretoria with the interior of the Limpopo province. The urbanised portion of Thembisile Hani, which is where Magodongo and Buhlebesizwe are located (see Figure 10.2), corresponds with the apartheid-era non-independent homeland KwaNdebele, one of 10 such areas in South Africa that remain governed under customary tenure. It shares provincial borders with the Gauteng province to the south-west. This is also the border of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, the administrative entity for the country's capital city, Pretoria.

Magodongo emerged in 2016 on the edge of Moloto, which is one of the first villages one encounters when travelling (36km) from Pretoria. Owing to the death of the headman in Magodongo in 2017, the village has no legitimate or state-recognised headman (later, I discuss the difference between a legitimate, state-recognised headman and an illegitimate headman). Instead, interviews with community members reveal that various self-appointed



*Figure 10.1* Context map of the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality.

*Source:* Image drafted by Till Sperrle from material provided by the author, based on the map by Michelle Chikowero

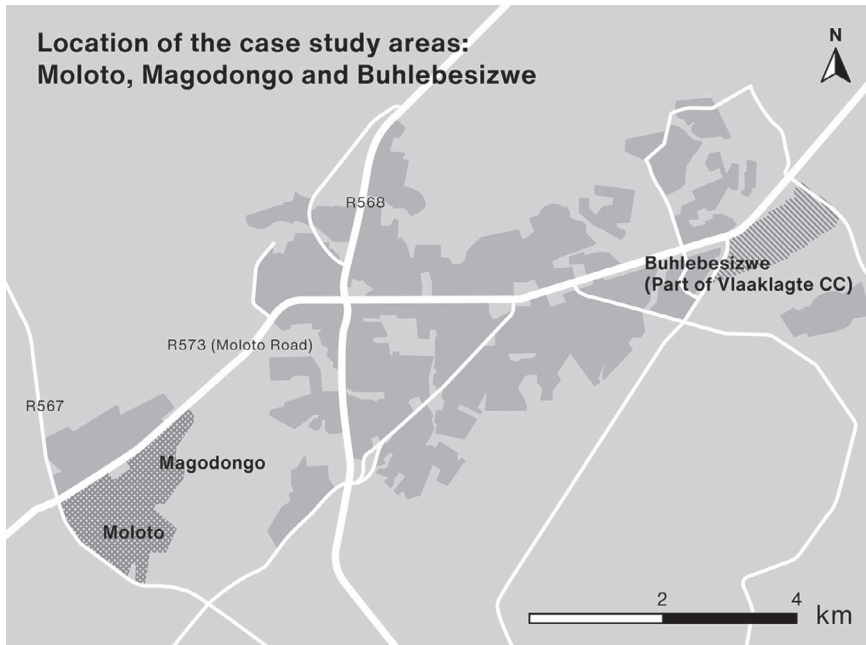


Figure 10.2 The urbanised portion of Thembisile Hani Local Municipality with Magodongo to the far south-west and Buhlebesizwe to the north-east.

Source: Image drafted by Till Sperrle from material provided by the author, based on the map by Michelle Chikowero

headmen are filling the leadership gap, some from the Ndzundza-Fene royal family and others from opportunistic individuals from the community and surroundings. One participant expressed his confusion over the rightful headman in Magodongo:

Eei . . . heyi heyi . . . [he holds his head with both hands and shakes his head while looking down] Hey . . . this place, when you turn here there is *Ndabezitha* [a praise name given to those of royal descent or a chief], when you turn there is *Ndabezitha*. They just say he is *Ndabezitha*, but he . . . [pause] . . . even the ward councillor. They are also *Ndabezithas* as well.

(Interview 23, 2022)

Most people who fell for the deception were from other areas, including Pretoria. It was evident that newcomers continued to access land without verifying the legitimacy of the land allocator. As a young woman in Magodongo said: “Yooo! You just trust. You come here when you are desperate for a place” (Interview 35, 2022). It was also clear that the headmen, whether

legitimate or not, were the first point of call and the only allocators of land in the area. Land seekers had no alternative way of acquiring land. This meant that the land seekers were “under the heel” of the headmen.

Buhlebesizwe is a village within the “functional area” of Vlaaklagte (Them-bisile Hani Local Municipality, 2022) and is 26km north-east of Magodongo and over 80km north of Pretoria. It was established in the 1980s. Unlike Magodongo, Buhlebesizwe has a legitimate or a state-recognised headman. Due to the stable traditional leadership in Buhlebesizwe, interviews revealed that there was an overall sense of cooperation between the ward councillors, the headman, and the community.

In the next sections, which are based on the interviews I conducted, I discuss the role of ward councillors in the land allocation process and how the municipality’s lack of enforcement of its own policy prescripts legitimises the customary land allocation process, including processes involving alleged self-appointed headmen.

### **Ward councillors entangled in customary land allocation processes**

Magodongo covers two municipal wards and Buhlebesizwe covers one. Each village is presented politically by a single ward councillor. At the time of my interviews in January 2022, they were in the first year of their five-year term in office. Some ward councillors, as in the case of Buhlebesizwe, play a key role as witnesses in the land allocation process on customary land. A land seeker’s first point of contact in the land allocation process is the local headman, who has absolute control over land allocation. Without the headman’s participation, the allocation process is deemed socially illegitimate. Ward councillors have no stake in the allocation process. They protect the interest of the municipality (this is usually the role of municipal officials) by making sure that land is allocated in the right place for municipal service provision. However, the land allocation process may happen without them. Their inclusion in the process is dependent on their good relations with the headman. When they take on the role of witnessing the land allocation process, they also “rubber-stamp” the process and strengthen its legitimacy, which is of benefit to the new landholder.

Upon the allocation of land, the new landholder receives *i’Rasit* (a receipt). This is an A5-sized document from the headman with the traditional authority tribal council stamp, the details of the new landholder, the area of occupation, and the cost of the land transaction. It validates occupation rights and mitigates land disputes by serving as proof of land allocation. It is also used to access municipal services. For example, on presenting the *Rasit* and a ward councillor’s letter to Eskom (the national electricity supplier), a landholder can apply to have prepaid electricity installed in their home.

Interviews with municipal officials and ward councillors revealed that the municipality has a formal process of incorporating customary tenure into the

municipal administrative system. One municipal official explained that when land was allocated by a local headman, the new landholder could choose to have their customary land rights absorbed into the municipal administrative system. In other words, the municipality does not convert customary land rights to legal land rights; it only formally recognises the customary land rights. In interviews with officials from the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality, they explained that this process is too expensive to undertake for a landholder, as most households are indigent.

For formal recognition, the new landholder submits their *Rasit* to the municipality. However, the municipality only recognises a *Rasit* from a legitimate headman: one who is state-recognised and registered at the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. Once this is validated, the municipality releases forms for the new landholder to complete; these must also be signed by the ward councillor. An “allocation letter” that confirms the plot or stand number is then handed over to the new landholder after the payment of an administration fee of R65 (US\$4) per square metre. The allocation letter serves as municipal recognition. Although this process exists, municipal officials and ward councillors acknowledge that most people do not follow it, since the *Rasit* is sufficient for them to feel secure. In other words, community members feel they do not need official documentation from the municipality, because they perceive the *Rasit* as socially legitimate, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

### **Unshakable trust in the chieftaincy and the *Rasit***

Most elderly people and those who had occupied the land for five to ten years or longer felt more secure in their land, thus entrenching their trust in the chieftaincy. They referred to themselves as “children” of *iKosi* (King) and expressed submission to the king. They believed that the land belonged to the *iKosi* when, in reality, it was state-owned.

Young settlers and newcomers, although they trusted the chieftaincy, depended more on their neighbours and the broader community should they be confronted with a land dispute. They believed in the power of numbers. One young man from Magodongo expressed this as follows:

I sleep peacefully at night. I am satisfied because I am not the only one that knows the information about this place. If something wrong happens here at the new stands, we can get together and talk about it as a community, you understand? Yes.

(Interview 24, 2022)

Instead of depending on social capital, a couple who had relocated in 2019 from Tembisa (a township in Gauteng) to Magodongo were willing to fight for their land, and even go to the courts or the police should there be a threat of eviction. They believed that formal institutions such as

the courts and the police would defend them because they had followed the “right” customary processes of land occupation through the headmen. When I asked the couple what made them feel certain that they would not be evicted, the wife said:

That R1 800 and that paper, *Rasit*. I will take them to the lawyers . . . I will fight because these bricks we had to make them, we bought cement . . . no . . . he [headman] will give me all the money I spent on this place. They [chieftaincy] will give me everything [she laughed]. We will fight.  
(Interview 9, 2022)

Again, this demonstrates the trust in the chieftaincy and the *Rasit*, even among newcomers. Others were the first occupiers of the land, so they felt no one could contest their right to it. Yet others invested in the upkeep of the land and building, thus showing a sense of permanency and possibly evading the threat of eviction. Although all the above accounts demonstrate different expressions of ownership, I argue that trust in the institution of traditional leadership and the land processes is the foundation of this sense of ownership and, therefore, tenure security. In the next section, I show how municipal officials bargain their role in the customary land process and also strengthen socially legitimate tenure.

### **The municipality’s bargaining power over customary land processes**

Since the municipality does not have control over customary land administration, it has incorporated some legal processes into the land allocation process, ultimately strengthening socially legitimate tenure security. Since the traditional authorities rely on the municipality for service provision, they also incorporate certain legal elements into their land allocation process. They do this by requesting permission to allocate land in a new settlement via a letter to the municipality. In essence, there are elements of bargaining and negotiation between the municipality and the traditional authorities.

Upon receipt of the letter from the tribal council, the municipality deliberates on the request to establish a new settlement and, with political support, the request is approved. Both parties then agree on the location of the site and the size of the new settlement. The municipality drafts a layout plan, which has town planning prescripts to guide land allocation. Ideally, the headmen should use the layout plan to allocate land; however, one of the municipal town planners indicated that they often do not follow its prescripts. Yet there are cases where the headmen are cognisant of the layout plan and adhere to some of its prescripts; for instance, they may reserve a portion of land for a future school or playground. For this to happen, the headman, municipal official, and ward councillors need to have good relations in order to collaboratively adhere to the layout plan. This is also where the ward councillor has

a key role in protecting the interest of the municipality by guiding the land allocation process, as discussed earlier.

While there may be some elements of collaboration between headmen, ward councillors, and municipal officials, the ultimate responsibility for land allocation lies with the headman. One community member of Buhlebesizwe village indicated that they were on good terms with the headman—to such an extent that they helped demarcate stands and streets and allocated street names and numbers. All this was done through a community committee in collaboration with the headman, who had received approval to allocate land from the municipality. The municipality had no role to play except for demarcating new areas and providing the layout plan. An interview with the Ndzundza-Fene Tribal Council confirmed this and stated that all land in Thembisile Hani was allocated by headmen.

The above case in Buhlebesizwe is one of the few instances where the community worked hand in hand with the headman to allocate land. In contrast to Buhlebesizwe, the passing of the legitimate headman in Magodongo opened up opportunities for financial exploitation by individuals who saw a gap in authority. The deceased headman was not replaced because his adult son refused to take over the headmanship, claiming that he was too young to be a leader. In the case of Buhlebesizwe, there were no contestations of traditional authorities and no informal agents. Land was allocated by a legitimate headman and prices ranged from R300 to R600 (US\$18–US\$37). Earlier occupants paid less than the most recent ones. The case was different in Magodongo. Those who knew the deceased headman were allocated their land for free, since they were the initial occupiers. Those who arrived after the death of the headman paid a variety of prices, ranging from R300 (US\$18) to R900 (US\$56), depending on when they were allocated land and who the land allocator was. The absence of a legitimate headman meant that prices varied. Informal agents charged between R1,200 and R5,000 (US\$75–US\$311). Again, the earlier occupiers paid less, while recent occupiers paid up to R5 000 (US\$311), suggesting an escalation in fraudulent land allocation prices into the future. One elderly man from Magodongo indicated that some informal agents colluded with corrupt local headmen from nearby villages, who supplied the alleged self-appointed headmen with original receipt books to issue the *Rasits*. This suggests a systematic form of corruption that has infiltrated the traditional leadership, which seems to be influenced by private interests. These alleged self-appointed headmen were extortionist and opportunistic and exploited people's desperation for land.

In Magodongo, communities are excluded from municipal service provision for several reasons: There is no state-recognised headman (instead, there are alleged self-appointed headmen); the alleged self-appointed headmen cannot request permission to allocate land because of their illegitimacy; and, because of this, the settlement (unlike Buhlebesizwe) is not formally recognised by the municipality.



In the eyes of the municipality, landholders in Magodongo are “invaders,” since they are “illegally” occupying land without municipal permission. A settlement that is not formally recognised will not receive municipal administrative support and municipal services (or, if it does, the services are rudimentary), since it is not reflected in the planning and budgetary processes of the municipality.

In summary, even though the municipality does not have control over customary land administration, it intentionally incorporates some of its formal processes into the customary land administration system in order to legitimise it. It is also clear that the traditional leadership recognises the significance of the municipality and thus incorporates some municipal processes into its customary land systems. There is, therefore, a give-and-take relationship between the municipality and traditional leaders. Those headmen who do not seek municipal permission to allocate land are at risk of having their settlement excluded from municipal service provision, even though the community has a high level of perceived and *de facto* tenure security. Here, we see the state showcasing its power by excluding those who are not willing to recognise it and its processes. In essence, the municipality lays bare its bargaining power in a system over which it has no control and asserts this power through inclusion and exclusion.

### Discussion and concluding remarks

The above discussions confirm that context is important in understanding tenure security, and that context can be complex. Within the same area, two villages just 36km apart have different forms of tenure security. The perception of tenure security is also dependent on who is being asked. The host municipality is an institution that is based on legal tenure. Anything outside of the legal framework is considered illegal. Therefore, in the eyes of the municipality, Buhlebesizwe and its inhabitants are legal, while Magodongo is deemed illegal. On the other hand, community members of both villages view themselves as tenure secure, regardless of whether the land was allocated by legitimate or illegitimate headmen. Their perception of tenure security is influenced by their trust in the traditional authority institution: They believe that the *Rasit* and the headmen will defend them in case of land disputes. Other elements of *de facto* tenure security also influence their perception—for example, their length of stay within a settlement: The older the settlement, the more services they receive. Lastly, the fact that they have never been evicted also strengthens their perception of tenure security.

In measuring tenure security, the SDG monitoring framework does not take complexities and nuances of context into account, even though it recognises that there may be different contexts. Instead, tenure security is measured through a standardised process.

The findings also revealed that, even though the municipality’s institutional framework is within the legal domain, it takes part in a “porous

bureaucracy.” In order to do the work of the state, the municipality incorporates some (not all) legal processes into the customary land allocation process. However, by doing so it breaks its own “rules.” This has three implications: The municipality contradicts its own policies; in so doing, it is unable to fully immerse the customary into the legal; and this means that legal support and documentation of customary tenure is not achieved. Without legal documentation, the perception of tenure security is regarded as invalid by the SDG monitoring framework.

In the case of traditional authorities, the findings reveal that a weak traditional authority institution becomes fragile as other agents contest power. The infiltration of alleged self-appointed headmen into the customary land allocation processes in Magodongo brings with it informal practices, thus making land tenure systems hybrid. Contrary to this, a functional traditional authority institution such as in Buhlebesizwe prevents power contests. However, the SDG monitoring framework ignores traditional authority institutions and other land actors. It also ignores the fact these land actors influence tenure security.

In summary, as long as the SDG monitoring framework is ignorant of the daily realities of land tenure systems, it excludes other forms of tenure security. By ignoring the “in-between spaces” and “in-between people,” the monitoring framework continues to suppress the significance of socially legitimate tenure security.

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## Part IV

# Interplay

*Elke Beyer*

Interplay focuses on mutual negotiation and dependence, asymmetrical relations of cooperation and competition, as well as of hierarchy in power structures and their impact on institutional and spatial arrangements. The section entails descriptions and critical analysis of interferences, linkages, connectivity, and boundaries, revolving around questions of alignment/misalignment, permeability/porosity, and dominance/subsidiarity. From different angles, the three chapters engage in essence with the interplay of various institutional levels of governance and its consequences in terms of sustainable and just urbanisation. They critically discuss how normative concepts of local government (Onifade, Agbalajobi, Lawanson, and Huchzermeyer, in Chapter 11), smart border management (Ojo, Faniran, and Huchzermeyer, in Chapter 12), and infrastructure-led development (Elsner, in Chapter 13) are framed in international development policy discourse and contextualise them by portraying ambiguous outcomes of actual policymaking and/or spatial interventions situated in diverse urban settings across sub-Saharan Africa, including municipalities in Nigeria, Benin, and Ethiopia. From these standpoints, the chapters' findings underscore the interrelatedness, translocality, and transcalarity of urbanisation processes and urban governance, which are still insufficiently taken into account in the formulation of global, national, and local (urban) development agendas. Thus, they substantiate the claim for a better understanding of the interplay of different sectors, actors, and territorial entities to build place-based and relational visions and strategies of sustainable urban development on the African continent, as well as elsewhere.

A key theme in all three chapters are conflicting political and economic rationalities of centralised structures of government at the state or national level (and of the stakeholders associated with them), on the one hand, and of local or community-based governance modalities and economic activities, on the other hand. In their delineation of fault lines or areas of interplay, the formal/informal binary and highly diverse actors' practices cutting across it—such as community-led basic infrastructure provisioning to remedy local governments' inability to meet their formal obligations (Chapter 11), undocumented cross-border trade and migration as a function of multi-sited livelihood strategies co-existing with systemic corruption (Chapter 12), and

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non-compliance with formal statutory rules (Chapter 11)—also come into play. Another cross-cutting theme is the spatial and political implementation of selective connectivity (and the question of who is entitled to control and monitor exchange movements) as a contested arena of interplay between diverse urban localities and actor groups. It is exemplified by large-scale transnational transport infrastructure and cross-border corridor projects, designed and executed with international support and expertise based on aspirations to create “smart borders” and zones of economic and industrial growth, but with dubitable development outcomes not only in terms of economic and ecological sustainability but also with regard to place- and community-based urban development (Chapters 12 and 13).

The chapters explore these contested forcefields in the context of urban realities: in Nigerian districts affected by inadequate and unenforced electoral processes for local government (Chapter 11); precarious trade economies of communities on the Benin–Nigeria border thriving through different modalities of permeability and fluidity, often in spite of restrictive policies and interventions (Chapter 12); or urban areas being transformed by government aspirations to create global commodity production hubs by providing transport and industry park infrastructure in Ethiopia and other African countries (Chapter 13). The discussions of these realities on the ground show a range of problematic gaps and silences, unfounded assumptions, discrepancies, and mismatches in the normative conceptual terminology related to local government, national borders, and infrastructure-led development as operationalised in current global policy discourse. Implicit, overly simplified assumptions about these normative concepts’ relation or contribution to sustainable development “by default” are thus disrupted, in favour of opening up productive questions how the social, economic, and political situatedness of local urbanisms can be taken into account. Moreover, the authors track some of the roots of the usage of normative concepts of local government, national borders, and infrastructure in colonial discourse, and their spatialisation in colonial administrative and economic practice, underscoring historical asymmetries of power knowledge to be reckoned with as a field of interplay and negotiation in a long-term perspective.

# 11 Local Government Autonomy, Electoral Systems, and Their Implications for Social Contracts in Nigeria

## An Overlooked Obstacle to SDG Implementation

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### Introduction

The relationship between local government and sustainable development has long been acknowledged. The Habitat Agenda of 1996 spells out the importance of effective decentralisation for the development of sustainable human settlements and UN-Habitat followed up with guidelines in 2007 (UN-Habitat, 2007). Taking stock the following year, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG, 2008, p. 26) noted tension within states in the African region between decentralisation as an “administrative technique” as opposed to having “political substance” and “democratic content.” The UCLG associated this with the “colonial legacy of an *ad hoc* and often contradictory combination of centralization and decentralization,” which “formed the foundation of post-colonial territorial administration” (UCLG, 2008).

The promotion of democratically elected local government has remained on the global agenda, if somewhat indirectly. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 do not mention local or municipal government. Goal 11, to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” promotes inclusive urbanisation and participatory planning and management (UN, 2015, p. 21). This is reinforced by Goal 16, to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (UN, 2015, p. 25). The New Urban Agenda (NUA) (Habitat III, 2016) supports earlier commitments towards decentralisation and subsidiarity. It mostly mentions local government together with national and sub-national governments, thereby elevating local government to the same level of attention. It also dedicates a section to “building the urban governance system” (Habitat III, 2016, s. 85–92). Here, it speaks optimistically to inadequacies in local government. It ascribes to

political, administrative, and fiscal decentralisation and subsidiarity, which would curtail central government interference in local government, and the empowerment, resourcing, and capacity building of local government. It further supports participatory policies, strategies and plans, intergovernmental cooperation and policy coordination, appropriate regulatory frameworks, relative autonomy, and mechanisms for consultation and partnership beyond government (Habitat III, 2016, s. 85–92).

The broad vision statement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda lists “democracy” as one of several prerequisites for sustainable development (UN, 2015, s. 9). The NUA, while supporting “inclusion” and “participation” throughout, refrains altogether from using the terms “democracy” or “democratic,” as well as from making any direct commitments to democracy, and therefore does not address itself to local government electoral processes (Habitat III, 2016). Instead, it commits to strengthening “urban governance, with sound institutions and mechanisms that empower and include urban stakeholders” and mentions the need for “appropriate checks and balances” (Habitat III, 2016, s. 15(c)ii). Governance is a “relational term” conceived as the various interactions within and beyond government and similarly within and beyond firms (Glückler et al., 2020). Therefore, governance is a broader term than government, with local government being one of the institutions involved in governance (Rhodes, 1996). Urban governance is understood as

the more or less institutionalized working arrangements that shape productive and corrective capacities in dealing with—urban—steering issues involving multiple governmental and nongovernmental actors.

(Hendricks, 2014, p. 555)

On the other hand, *good* governance refers to “doing things in a sound institutional setup, characterized by effective checks and balances and countervailing powers” (Hendricks, 2014, p. 555). This includes “free and open elections” (Wilson, 2000, p. 52). It is widely acknowledged that local government on the African continent is not able to perform according to global expectations. As Croese (2022, p. 3) notes,

in the African context . . . many local governments lack the political, administrative, and fiscal power, mandate, and resources to govern vast areas of settlement, with far-reaching implications for the prospects of effective SDG localization.

Through the case of Mozambique, Laíce and Croese (2022, p. 186) demonstrate the critical importance of subnational and local government leadership, decentralised cooperation, and partnerships, but note that local governments’ role in SDG implementation “requires greater recognition by national governments.” Cirolia et al. (2022) observe how hotly contested and, in some cases, resisted, decentralisation reforms in the political and fiscal realm on

the continent have been. They note in particular that decentralisation to capital cities has been met with resistance (Cirolia et al., 2022). In the case of Nigeria, Lawanson et al. (2021) go further in identifying limitations in the constitutional framework for local government, a situation that has negatively impacted access to services and good governance for many citizens.

This chapter shows through the sobering case of Nigeria that local government and, with it, local governance, is complex and often fraught. The local government system in Nigeria consists of over 700 local governments. Despite the inherent potential of these local governments to drive sustainable development by contributing to localised political, institutional, and structural change, they have not achieved positive transformation for local communities (Azu, 2018). Steering often occurs in the form of interference and the undermining of legitimate voices and powers from below, which is made possible through insufficient attention being paid to democratic processes—in essence, neglect of the social contract or compact. We use the term “social contract” in a pragmatic sense to mean “an agreement between societal groups and their government on their rights and obligations toward each other” (Loewe et al., 2021, p. 2). Social contracts may be formal or informal, implicit or explicit, defining relations between state and society as well as relations within society, and therefore both vertical and horizontal (Loewe et al., 2021). The term is used normatively and analytically (Loewe et al., 2021). In this chapter, our interest is in the vertical, explicit, and formal social contract between citizens and local government, as created by the electoral system.

The chapter examines how local governments are instituted and managed in Nigeria and how they interface with urban citizens. Through a desktop review, it unpacks how local government electoral processes, which create a form of social contract that makes accountability and claim-making imperative, are largely undermined in Nigeria owing to an inadequate and unenforced electoral system for local government, and how this has influenced local governance and the attainment of sustainable urban development in Nigeria. Through its findings, the chapter disrupts implicit assumptions in the SDGs and NUA that the SDGs can be implemented without a distinct commitment to democratic structures and processes at local government level that enable a robust social contract between citizens and the state. Whereas the NUA promotes local government as an opportunity to strengthen urban development, our argument is that how local governments are formed and administered or held to account can be counter-productive to the very aim of urban development.

The chapter begins by explaining the local government and electoral system in Nigeria, briefly setting out its history before turning to the local government system set out in the Constitution of 1999, which has been in force to date. The particular focus here is on the provisions around local government autonomy and elections and provisions that curtail or enable federal and state involvement in local government. The chapter contrasts the statutory



situation with the reality since 1999, when the operational federal system was adopted, and explores how the idea of social contract as an accountability structure applies to local democracy in Nigeria. It then identifies obstacles to local government performing an effective role in relation to sustainable development. The chapter concludes by emphasising the importance of local or grassroots democracy for the attainment of sustainable urban development and therefore for the global agenda going forward.

### **Local democracy and the electoral system in Nigeria**

The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 represents a turning point for democracy in the country. A difficult colonial and postcolonial history led up to this moment. However, the 1999 Constitution, including its amendments up to 2011, did not fully foresee the difficulty in guaranteeing local democracy. Despite some recent improvements, practices of state interference in local government affairs remain likely into the foreseeable future, pointing to the real challenges in overcoming the impasse in sustainable urban development.

#### *The evolution of local government in Nigeria*

Nigeria's local government system has been in existence since before it attained independence and has undergone various iterations and reforms over time. Colonial, postcolonial, civilian, and military regimes all made modifications and alterations to nomenclatures and administrative styles, each attempting to distinguish itself from the previous system, given the shifts in policy orientation and framework between these regimes (Okudolo and Mekoa, 2019). However, continuities are also evident.

Prior to British colonisation in the late 19th and early 20th century, present-day Nigeria consisted of "an amalgam of independent societies, each with its own system of government" and local administration (Okudolo and Mekoa, 2019, p. 60). Colonial rule restructured these traditional administrations in flawed ways, curtailing local autonomy through indirect rule (Okudolo and Mekoa, 2019). Nationalist struggles against this system led the colonial rulers to grant a "considerable measure of self-determination" to governments at the regional level with control over local governments shifting back to indigenes, but with class, ethnic, and factional alliances (Okudolo and Mekoa, 2019, p. 63). Reforms in the 1950s were carried out at varying pace across the different regions (Oladimeji et al., 2015). During the "First Republic," which lasted from independence in 1960 up to the military takeover in 1966, the Eastern and Western regions operated under the Local Government Law of 1960, whereas the Northern Region continued to function under the 1954 Native Authorities Law (Oladimeji et al., 2015). In this period, local governments fell prey to "internecine ambitions" and were thus deployed "to deepen anti-social, anti-economic and anti-political goals" (Okudolo and Mekoa, 2019, p. 64). The anti-democratic military

regime restructured Nigeria from four regions into 12 states and “dissolved all existing local government structures” (Oladimeji et al., 2015, p. 68). By edict, states took over the governing of the local administration. In 1976, under military rule, the local government was “accorded the third-tier status” (Oladimeji et al., 2015, p. 68). As Agboola (2016, p. 8) points out,

[T]he creation and spatial delineation of local government delineation just like state government territories, did not have [the] advantage of democratic processes.

After the creation of 301 local governments in 1976, their number progressively expanded under successive military regimes up to the current number of 774 in 1999 (Agboola, 2016).

In addition, local government administration passed through various reforms during democratic dispensations: from 1979 to 1983, ushered in by the 1979 Constitution; and from 1999 to date, under the so-called Fourth Republic replacing a military regime, ushered in by the current Constitution of 1999 with amendments up to 2011. Local government was re-invigorated as the third tier of government through the 1999 Constitution (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRoN), 1999), which remains in force.

Nigeria’s current political structure consists of the federal government, 36 states and 774 local governments, including six local council areas in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (FRoN, 1999; Page and Wando, 2022). A constitutional controversy or “crisis” created by the 1979 Constitution with regard to the federal government’s role in creating local government areas lingered on and was not resolved in the 1999 Constitution or its amendments (Okafor, 2012; Idoko and Obidimma, 2020). Whereas the 1999 Constitution sets out the process for the creation of new local government areas, whether this involves the federal government or only the relevant state government depends on interpretation (Okafor, 2012). Interestingly, several Nigerian states have created new local government areas without complying with the constitutional provisions by altering the nomenclature of “local government areas” to “local council development areas” (Oladele, 2020), also “known as local community development areas” (Page and Wando, 2022, p. 7). These states include Lagos (with 37 local government areas), Ebonyi State (with 64 local government areas), Nassarawa (with 16 local government areas), and Ekiti (with 19 local government areas) (Oladele, 2020, p. 47). Oladele (2020) argues that the unconstitutional creation of these areas has denied citizens their constitutional right to participate in local governance. However, Page and Wando (2022) point to the imbalance in which the impasse in creating constitutionally endorsed local government areas has resulted, with the populations of rapidly densifying local government areas exceeding that of some states.

Local government is intended to bring governance close to citizens, ensuring there are instruments of good governance or participatory democracy

that will engender economic progress (Page and Wando, 2022). Implied in this constitutional objective is the social contract between citizens and those who govern them. Local government is

closest to the people and by implication it is the most critical in engendering good democratic cultures and values, [and] effective participation in the process of development at the grassroots with the possibility of filtering up to the national level.

(Bashir and Mohammed, 2012, p. 98)

When this is fully functioning, a strong “sub-national social contract” becomes inevitable, as citizens are given the opportunity to elect their own leaders (see Loewe et al., 2021, p. 5). In return, they expect accountability from such leaders and can make claims to those basic goods or benefits that should come to them as a dividend of democracy (Loewe et al., 2021). While intended but not fully resolved in Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution, this is largely not the case in practice. Given how fraught the situation is, commentators are not in agreement on whether local government autonomy and democracy can be achieved in Nigeria. In their study carried out for the Carnegie Endowment Fund for International Peace, Page and Wando (2022) put forward the position that the only solution would be the “elimination” of local government, given the depth not only of undemocratic practice but also of corruption. Others such as Idoko and Obidimma (2020) are optimistic that a constitutional amendment could lead to greater local government autonomy. As we show in the next section, there are indeed limitations in Nigeria’s current Constitution with regard to its provisions for local government.

#### *Devolution and the extent of autonomy that the 1999 Constitution confers on local government*

The mechanisms of representative democracy for the local government system are spelt out in the 1999 Constitution. These include local government council elections ensured by the applicable state government (FRoN, 1999, s. 7(4)). Locally elected ward councillors should make up the “legislative arm” of local government, whereas the chairperson and vice chair, who make up the “executive arm,” should be elected by all eligible voters in the local government area (Page and Wando, 2022, p. 6). As pointed out by Saulawa et al. (2016), the National Assembly is empowered by the 1999 Constitution to enact legislation governing voter registration and local government elections. The State Assembly also has the role of allocating 10% of its revenue (derived from the national petroleum income) to local government (Page and Wando, 2022).

The Constitution stipulates a term of four years for elected state and federal government officials (Idoko and Obidimma, 2020). However, its silence on local government terms leaves it to state governments to decide on these,

and even to interfere with the terms of elected officials, reducing them before the agreed number of years has expired (Idoko and Obidimma, 2020).

The 1999 Constitution, which marked the transition from Nigeria's military regime to a democratic dispensation, also spells out the extent to which the federal government is involved in local government. It requires a state government to ensure the legal existence of "democratically elected local governments . . . under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils" (FRoN, 1999, s. 7(1)). It also requires the State Assembly to establish an Economic Planning Board and to ensure that local governments participate fully in its deliberations regarding a local area (FRoN, 1999, s. 7(3)). The Constitution contains an extensive list of exclusive local government functions, as well as the roles and duties that local governments carry out concurrently with their respective state governments. In addition to these, the State Assembly may confer further functions on a local government council.

The constitutional provisions pre-suppose that the state assemblies—also made up of duly elected representatives of constituencies—will act in alignment with the perceived social contract between citizens and their elected representatives. The local government's constitutional roles, ranging from registering births, deaths, and marriages to overseeing markets, waste disposal, and basic education, all have a direct bearing in the day-to-day lives of citizens; hence, the need to establish a strong and credible institution at this level if sustainable urban development is to be attained. However, as we show in the next section, this is seldom the case.

#### *Actual devolution: State government interference in local government in Nigeria*

Since 1999, local governments have not enjoyed the third-tier status that the Constitution affords them. Osaghae (2022, p. 142) points to "rivalries between central and state governments over control of local governments, and between states and local councils." He notes this is particularly the case in urban areas and large cities (Osaghae, 2022). The lack of respect for local government autonomy has rendered the aforementioned constitutional provisions toothless, especially in the area of local government elections, therefore undermining or preventing the social contract between citizens and the state, and in terms of federal and state government involvement in local government. This implies a level of neglect of the country's commitment to relevant SDGs and the NUA in particular. Elections in Nigeria for executive and legislative positions at the state and federal levels are handled by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), whereas periodic local government elections have been conducted by various state electoral commissions. Rather than abiding by the rules of electoral commissions, in many cases state governments determine the processes and dynamics of local elections by imposing their choices, making free and fair electoral processes impossible. This

was considered by Idoko and Obidimma (2020, p. 88), who emphasise that “conduct of local government election should be left to one level of government.” They question the wisdom in authorising the INEC at the federal level to develop and update the voters’ roll “and in empowering [the] SITC [State Independent Electoral Commissions] to conduct the election” (Idoko and Obidimma, 2020). As Idoko and Obidimma (2020, p. 88) argue,

[E]xperience shows that state governments over the years have simply hidden under their Constitutional powers to handpick their party supporters and loyalists and empower them as chairpersons of the councils.

According to Osaghae (2022), state electoral commissions are used to these ends. Given that there is no formal social contract that serves as a check on the excesses of irregularly appointed local government office-bearers or politicians, despite constitutional provisions, citizens are unable to hold local governments to account and demand crucial services. This is a major constraint to grassroots development.

The conduct of local government elections in Nigeria has been the constitutional preserve of states (FRoN, 1999, s. 7(1)). This means that the state has the prerogative to hold local government elections through the legislative power of state assemblies. Repealing the 2010 Electoral Act, the new Electoral Act of 2022 requires that the INEC has an office in each state and local government area. However, this Act applies to the FCT and not Nigeria at large (FRoN, 2022). The “considerable autonomy in many respects” that area councils in Abuja enjoy stands in contrast to that in the remainder of the country and has led to calls for reform (Idoko and Obidimma, 2020, p. 90).

As Idoko and Obidimma (2020) explain, the 1999 Constitution does not stipulate the tenure of elected local government office bearers. With a practice of state governors changing “the tenures of council chairpersons” and replacing “suspended elected local councils” with “caretaker committees with no fixed tenure” (Osaghae, 2022, p. 145), since 1999 local government elections across different states have been uneven. Abuja—the FCT—is a special case owing to its control by the National Assembly. Its local councils were elected every three years until the new Electoral Act of 2022 repealed the Electoral Act 6 of 2010 and extended local government tenure within the FCT to four years (FRoN, 2022). Beyond the FCT, some states have seen frequent elections, but there are notable exceptions, and several states have appointed caretaker committees to local governments within their jurisdiction. A decade ago, Okafor and Orjinta (2013, p. 112) wrote that “most local governments are run by non-elected officers appointed by state governors to serve in ‘transition’ or ‘caretaker’ committees.” However, the trend has gradually improved. In some states, local government elections are held every 3 years (e.g. Akwa Ibom, Benue, and Ekiti) or every four years (e.g. Oyo, Rivers, and Plateau). Of concern is that some states have not held elections for extended periods (Shine Your Eye, 2023). Examples include Adamawa, where no

elections were held between 2012 and 2021; Delta, with none between 2014 and 2021; and Katsina and Kogi, which have not held elections since 2014 and 2013 respectively (Shine Your Eye, 2023). In the latter case, local governments are in the hands of appointed caretaker committees rather than elected representatives (Shine Your Eye, 2023). As Idoko and Obidimma (2020) highlight, caretaker committees are not recognised by the Constitution. Used for the wrong purposes within party politics, including looting funds allocated to local governments, caretaker committees obstruct grassroots democracy and development (Okafor and Orjinta, 2013). Further,

[m]ost members of such committees owed their allegiance to the governors that appointed them rather than the local people they ought to represent, and they are at times not familiar with the terrain they presided over or even not from the vicinity or community. They got appointed as a reward for patronage to the political party.

(Tobi and Oikhala, 2021, p. 15)

In 2019, Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State dissolved 35 local council development areas and all 33 elected local government councils, which came into office during the tenure of his predecessor and belonged to the rival political party (Adebayo, 2019). He replaced them with caretaker committees made up of his party members (*Premium Times Nigeria*, 2019). In January 2023, caretaker committees existed in seven of Nigeria's 36 states (excluding the FCT) (Shine Your Eye, 2023). Page and Wando (2022) note that several court judgments have confirmed the unconstitutionality and illegality of caretaker arrangements. They add that, in general, formal objections from citizens, civil society, and opposition parties are frustrated by state governments using court processes to further delay local government elections (Page and Wando, 2022).

The complacency of the federal government about local government financial autonomy and the disruption of local government elections by state governments have further weakened local government (Page and Wando, 2022). In order to consolidate their hold on power, some state governments have reduced the tenure of local government chairpersons from three or four years to two years (*PM News*, 2016) so that they can appoint new (more loyal) people. Therefore, through a process of appointing political allies, whether in caretaker situations or in elected local governments, state governments have taken charge of activities at the local level to a point where local governments have become mere appendages.

The norm across Nigeria is that state governments stage-manage local council elections to ensure that their political party and chosen candidates win (Oladimeji et al., 2015). Added to electoral interference by the state government are expectations from local politicians and traditional authorities that council officials will see to their individual requirements (Tonwe and Osemwota, 2013; Oladimeji et al., 2015). While there have been minor

“positive steps” in some respects, including civil society giving greater attention to the governance and fiscal integrity of local governments, there is little evidence of tangible change (Page and Wando, 2022, pp. 27–28). From 2013 to 2017, protests by professional civil society and social movements on a range of issues, including the transparency and accountability of state institutions, picked up a momentum that had last been seen during the military dictatorship in the 1990s (Itodo and O’Regan, 2018). In 2022, labour unions, in particular the union representing local government employees, sought to pressure the federal state into local government reform (Aworinde, 2022; *Sahara Reporters*, 2022). Through Executive Order No. 10 of 2020, Nigeria’s president granted local governments full financial autonomy (Chioma, 2020), but 36 state governors challenged this in the Supreme Court, which overturned the Executive Order in 2022, thus maintaining the status quo (Adeniyi, 2022). States have similarly challenged attempts in 2019 to do away with the system that permitted them to make deductions from the state joint local government accounts, which receive national petroleum revenues to cover local government expenditures, and the open interference with funds officially intended for local government has continued (Page and Wando, 2022). Where local government funds are available and not syphoned off, they are often not adequate to execute projects and local governments lack the capacity to raise funds internally.

### **Implications of the limited local government–citizen social contract in Nigeria**

The integrity of the local government electoral system is a key component of local democracy in Nigeria. As Page and Wando (2022, p. 30) note, “short-circuiting of local democracy and the governance failures it causes . . . picks away at the already-frayed social contract between Nigerians and their leaders.” Social contracts are understood to be key in obliging governments to ensure individual, collective, and legal security and law enforcement; to ensure basic service provision, including economic opportunities; and to ensure public participation in decision-making (Loewe et al., 2021). Sustained undermining of the social contract therefore has far-reaching implications in the everyday lives of ordinary people across Nigeria, compounding the effects of poorly conceived and executed policies, for instance housing policy (see Chapter 9 in this book).

The ability of a state to develop responsive policies and to implement the resulting programmes, which a social contract between citizens and the state ought to secure, hinges on sound fiscal measures. When democratic checks and balances are not in place and local governments are a tool in the hands of a political elite interested in capturing resources, policy implementation remains a distant dream.

The statutory responsibilities of local government, in line with its constitutional roles, do not match the realities in Nigeria in terms of service delivery

and responsibility to communities, thus creating a significant governance gap (Shola and Jijoho, 2021). From basic education to waste management and even the management of cemeteries, local governments are unable to meet the basic needs of tax-paying citizens (Shola and Jijoho, 2021). Such basic functions align directly with the SDGs and highlight the tenuous pathway to achieving these targets. This conundrum, evidenced by the poor state of community access to physical and social infrastructure, as well as the inherent trust deficit, must be addressed urgently.

The inability of local government authorities in Nigeria to provide such basic services has resulted in micro-scale self-provisioning that is not necessarily sustainable and, in many instances, leads to other issues. For example, the failure of local governments to provide adequate water and sewerage services has led to the proliferation of household boreholes and *in situ* soak-away pits, which in turn result in increased groundwater pollution and the attendant public health challenges (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUAFR), 2017; *Blueprint Newspapers*, 2021). These precarious and un-resourced efforts cannot count as SDG implementation.

Citizens in many cases have also activated the self-help model by setting up community development associations (CDAs). In self-organising and mobilising community resources to address localised challenges, CDAs undertake activities and services that ought to be the responsibility of local government authorities. When necessary, some CDAs are able to tap into “services and materials from the government” (Akinsorotan and Olujide, 2006, p. 610). As Abimbola and Moses (2020, p. 162) observe, “CDAs are now regarded as the fourth tier of the government due to their proximity to the grassroots” and the extent to which local governments involve them in development projects and even policy formulation.

## **Conclusion**

A strong local government system is *sine qua non* for inclusive and sustainable development. The NUA, to which Nigeria is a signatory, prioritises “grassroot” development, citizen participation, and a functional local government system. However, it stops short of promoting strong and fully democratic electoral processes that would ensure the necessary social compact for citizens to hold local government to account, to direct development to where it is needed, and to determine what kind of development must be prioritised. An overview of the local government system in Nigeria clearly shows that there is no social contract between its citizens and their governments. Despite calls to institute such systems, entrenched interests are stacked against this, and constitutional gaps are consistently exploited to maintain the status quo. In addition, and partly as a result, there is a perennial lack of capacity in local government and a significant structural gap that limits its effective functioning.



The local government system in Nigeria is significantly constrained by the overriding powers of state and federal government in its structural formation and management. The lack of clarity in the Constitution on electoral processes and financial autonomy leaves local government vulnerable to interests that do not have transformative development or SDG implementation at heart and renders the institution of local government weak and incapacitated. The overbearing influence of state governments has the entire system subject to their dictates rather than the will of ordinary people. This has resulted in local governments becoming extensions of the state government system and tools for local political elites to access resources of the commons, thereby denying citizens the grassroots development to which they are entitled. The resultant centralised system and appropriation of local government functions and finances by state governments, coupled with fractious electoral processes that disenfranchise citizens, contributes to the challenges of basic service delivery and meaningful development and undermines the ability of citizens to demand good governance and/or participate in local governance—a bedrock of the social compact that must underpin sustainable development.

Sustainable development hinges on ensuring clarity in constitutional provisions, full financial autonomy, and truly participatory electoral processes; and empowering local capacity development and the ability of local government systems to deliver urban resources to ordinary people. Therefore, the global agendas that will follow current commitments such as the NUA must consider commitments beyond delivering urban resources to ensure that government systems are built on credible, democratic institutional structures. These include electoral processes that, where necessary, result in a paradigm shift from centralised power and financial resource control to a more nuanced bottom-up approach that empowers local governments and people to steer development to where it is needed most. What this means in Nigeria is that local government autonomy should be actively promoted. This will ensure that governments are answerable to their citizens and the social contract is implemented. In doing so, the country will be on the pathway to mainstreaming effective governance for localised SDG implementation.

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# 12 When Borders Do Not Matter

## Contextualising Socio- Developmental Challenges in Urbanised Nigeria–Benin Border Communities

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### Introduction

In the ongoing global discourse on human settlement, cross-border communities that either existed before or evolved around national border crossings receive little attention. National borders do not exist in isolation of distinct geographies; they form part of a blend of cities, towns, and rural areas, uniquely impacted by the way borders are governed (Dijkstra et al., 2020; Nnadi and Okoye, 2022). Understanding urban formations around borders, their urbanisation dynamics, and migrants' trajectories in order to articulate appropriate policy approaches, whether national, regional, or global, requires a grasp of broader trends in the politics and governance of borders.

Borders are recognised in the literature both as “bridges” connecting regions and as “barriers” separating people, dividing communities, and breaking up cultures (Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996; Weber, 2012; Boesen and Schnuer, 2016). Blum (2014, p. 3) captures another aspect of the dual nature of borders by referring to “borderlands” as “both melting pots and security hotspots.” At times, the barriers become “porous” or “permeable,” allowing socio-cultural reconnection but also permitting illicit activities that threaten economies and peace (Griffiths, 1996; Blum, 2014). Border region communities, which may take the form of twinned settlements—one on either side of the border—are often subject to poor management, neglect in terms of infrastructure provision, and vulnerability to health challenges (Weber, 2012; Otor, 2018).

With respect to the borders dividing the Horn of Africa, Weber (2012) notes that border regions are frequently disregarded, are afforded less development than the nation's metropolitan core, and receive minimal assistance in terms of programmes to promote human security and enhanced quality of life for their residents. Connecting this to the theme of porosity, in Weber's (2012, p. 4) words, this “absence of the state translates into freedom of movement.” This may translate into what Sennett (2006, 2017)

conceptualises as “openness”; benefitting ordinary people’s livelihoods and socio-cultural connections by enabling fluid lives that span artificial divisions. However, porosity, permeability, or openness also allows for a vicious circle where many “borderland communities” are subject to illicit activities such as trafficking, which in turn have implications for national and regional economies and ultimately affect people living in the so-called “borderlands” (Weber, 2012).

Owing to their unresolved nature, borders on the African continent overwhelmingly receive negative publicity and are largely considered vague, frail, compromised, and even unjustified (Foucher, 2019). Border settlements present challenges, including uncontrolled immigration, illegal import of goods, and trafficking of persons and terrorism or threats to security and sovereignty, but unevenly so (Boesen and Schnuer, 2016; Laine, 2021; Tim and Leuprecht, 2021; Hamidu, 2022). Some problems are specific to African border settlements, when compared to those in other parts of the world (Griffiths, 1996). Unique to Africa is how recently and rapidly the continent experienced colonial partitioning (Moya, 2020). This is a strong factor that has shaped the interplay of regional, national, and community governance of border settlements or communities and resulted in discordance between border policies and reality, with insufficient attention paid to the development of cross-border communities.

The United Nations’ (UN’s) long-standing concerns over borders include the trafficking of drugs and humans, threats to peace and security, and the optimisation of international trade, economic integration, border management, and human rights (see, e.g., UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNCTC), undated; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), undated). A further UN concern around international borders is migration, with the UN Network on Migration concerned with the appropriate management of borders (see UN, 2018). Of more direct relevance to the focus of this chapter, the UN Secretary General’s Peacebuilding Fund spearheads cross-border projects that seek to redress the neglect and abandonment of border communities and promote cooperation, inclusion, and participatory development approaches (UN Peacebuilding, 2020). Similarly, the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) pilots governance and financing mechanisms for cross-border infrastructure projects as a peace-building mechanism (UNCDF, undated). The UN’s New Urban Agenda (NUA) of 2016 can be read to implicitly acknowledge the peripheral treatment that governments afford urbanised areas in border regions and the need for redress (Habitat III, 2016). When committing to “encourage implementing sustainable urban and territorial planning . . . [and] to encourage synergies and interactions among urban areas of all sizes and their peri-urban and rural surroundings,” it specifically mentions urban and peri-urban areas “that are cross-border” (Habitat III, 2016, s. 96). However, this is a single and quite obscure acknowledgement. It forms part of the ambivalence in the urban discourse

and urban global agenda towards borderland urbanisation and complacency about the socio-developmental neglect of such regions, which the chapter seeks to disrupt.

Although not representative of all African border settlements, in this chapter the Nigeria–Benin border (see Figure 12.1) is discussed as an example of the reality of border settlements’ fluidity. It is one of West Africa’s most important border regions (Blum, 2014). The border posts, particularly seven Yoruba towns spanning both sides of the border along its southern one-fifth (Seme-Krake, Idi-Roko, Alari, Madogan, Ohumbe, Abule Idi and, at some distance, Ilara), have long been major centres of economic activity. Formal trading transactions alongside informal or unregulated and untaxed trade, comprising a combination of buying and selling of legal and illegal goods, are common in this region (Blum, 2014). Transnational organised crime and trafficking of persons also occur here (Blum, 2014). There is frequent mention in the literature of social and economic activities, politico-administrative structures, and cultural affinity across the Nigeria–Benin border (Blum, 2014; Adesina, 2019; Omeh et al., 2022). However, there remains a blind spot regarding how those whose lives and livelihoods are tied to border regions have learned to cope, and how various activities, affinities, and governance structures affect their well-being—a blindness also apparent in the global urban agendas mentioned earlier. This chapter is not able to address this gap fully. However, it places the economic, legal, and political reality of the Nigeria–Benin border in relation to the development needs of communities in order to draw attention to a largely overlooked reality, which it argues requires greater regional, national, and global attention.

The thematic analysis in this chapter is based on desktop research, with a particular focus on cross-border and urbanised border region governance, and the complexities that arise at various levels. The chapter is structured into five sections. Firstly, there is a brief review of the historical and regional context of African and West African borders, followed by an overview of the geographical and economic context of the Nigeria–Benin border, including its urbanised areas. The chapter then reviews dynamics around the movement of people and goods in that border region, the well-documented challenges of crime and insecurity, how these relate to governance, and how state neglect is often complicit in these processes. This is followed by a discussion of trends and activities underway to improve the developmental situation of the Nigeria–Benin border communities within the political context of these regions. In conclusion, we note that there is a need to devise interventions capable of contributing to the reconstruction, prosperity, and sustainability of border settlements. This is tied back to the global urban agenda, as direct, nuanced statements on cross-border communities at that level may contribute to more appropriate, coordinated, and resourced handling of this dynamic challenge at the regional, national, and local levels.

### **Historical and regional context of the West African borders**

Borders on the African continent and their contemporary reality need to be understood within their historical context and the emergence of transnational and regional governance mechanisms. Much of the current African border system has its origins in colonial conquest and the partitioning of the continent between competing European colonial powers (Davidson, 1991). Their “broad limits of expansion” were decided upon at the infamous Berlin Conference in 1884–1885 (Davidson, 1991, p. 284). In the partitioning that occurred in the following years until 1909, Europe established borders “on unrecognizable maps and, above all, without prior field surveys,” disregarding existing boundaries between ethnic groups and thus splitting them (Moya, 2020, unpaginated). Decades of colonial occupation and consolidation of the exploitative colonial system largely failed to take into account the cultural and economic coherence of the continent and existing conglomerates of people and languages (Weber, 2012; Gashaw, 2017; Moya, 2020). In combination with the colonial imposition of governance systems, this forced communities native to affected regions to live in ways different from their traditional way of life (see Chapter 13 in this book).

Independence struggles, spanning colonially defined countries, were focused on the emancipation of individual colonies with the prospect of turning them into new nations, while maintaining colonial borders (Davidson, 1991). They did not challenge the imposed borders as such. However, in the case of Nigeria in particular, the creation of a single post-independence nation-state at independence in 1960 was in conflict with the interests of long-existing regions aspiring for autonomy. The Nigerian post-independence state focused on building a national identity, but to uneven success; a civil war marked the late 1960s with the successionist eastern region of Biafra first declaring itself an independent state in 1967 and then being reincorporated into Nigeria in 1970 as a result of military defeat (Davidson, 1991; Meredith, 2006). At this point, and in aid of peace, Nigeria’s four regions were reconfigured into 12 states, easing the north–south tension (Davidson, 1991). These states were further subdivided into the current 36 states—in addition to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory—and are grouped into six geopolitical zones: South West, North Central, North West, North East, South East, and South-South (Bankole and Surajudeen, 2008). Nigeria is not the only African state that has not always been able to exert control over all of its territory (Blum, 2014), with countries in the Horn of Africa in particular also facing contests regarding their borders (Weber, 2012).

Urging for the opening of borders to ease trade and mobility, a UN Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) statement titled “Towards a border-smart, #integratedAfrica” draws attention to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This was agreed to by African Union (AU) member states in 2018 and forms a “flagship project” under Agenda 2063 (AfCFTA, undated), which itself aspires for Africa “to be a continent of seamless borders” (AU,



2015, s. 20). Nigeria is among the 44 nations to have ratified the AfCFTA, but only on the eve of ending a 2019–2021 border closure, which we discuss in the next section. By February 2023, Benin, Nigeria’s western neighbour, remained one of the few countries that had not ratified the AfCFTA (Iruoma, 2021; TRALAC, 2023). The AfCFTA builds on regional economic communities on the continent, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which was established in 1975 to promote economic integration across West Africa (ECOWAS, undated).

**The Nigeria–Benin border, so-called “twinning” cities and their economies**

The Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin share an international border that is approximately 780km long (Flynn, 1997). This border was determined by the respective colonialists, forming an inter-colonial border between British and French territories with legacies that extend beyond language (Blum, 2014). As shown in Figure 12.1, the sub-national “states” in Nigeria that share a border with Benin are Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Niger, and Kebbi. In Benin, the “departments” (the equivalent of states in Nigeria) sharing borders with Nigeria are Albori, Borgou, Collines, Plateau, and



*Figure 12.1* Map showing the border of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin.

*Source:* Image drafted by Till Sperrle from material provided by the authors

Queme. Along the Nigeria–Benin border, there are marshlands as well as vast expanses of agricultural land crossed by trade routes, border settlements, and several local markets (Blum, 2014). “[A] labyrinth of little creeks and streams” is unpoliced, while dugout boats transport goods across the lagoon between Lagos in Nigeria and Porto Novo in Benin (Blum, 2014, p. 3). The exact line of demarcation of the border is unclear in several places given the absence of a natural border such as a river, which in turn has implications for border settlement governance (Blum, 2014).

A particularly common result of porosity and fluidity on the southern part of the Nigeria–Benin border is spontaneous transboundary town-twinning. This occurs when two towns grow together over time despite being separated by a national border (Faleye, 2016). This is a global phenomenon and is common in towns with similar political, social, economic, and historical backgrounds (Ojo and Opoko, 2020). It reflects a level of commonality beyond national configurations. The most prominent example on the Nigeria–Benin border is the “twinning” of Idi-Iroko and Igolo. These towns are the largest of six twinned settlements on the border between Ogun State in Nigeria and Plateau Department in Benin, with the remainder of the Nigeria–Benin border to the north being largely unurbanised. Although different in size and socio-economic status, Idi-Iroko and Igolo share a common history and have twinned as a result (Blum, 2014). Common to this part of the Nigeria–Benin border are networks of solidarity and protection, embedded in cross-border Yoruba cultural associations (Blum, 2014). Thus, “[t]he ethnical and linguistic proximity together with the laid out forms of social organization favor a close web of trade relations” (Blum, 2014, p. 4). The Nigerian and Beninese governments’ neglect of twinned border communities is evident in the substandard living conditions, which translate into poor quality of life. Two quality-of-life studies of the settlements along the Nigeria–Benin border confirm that residents struggle with inadequate services and infrastructure, poor access to healthcare and educational institutions, and the absence of the state and development, in addition to economic, governance, and security challenges (Ojo, 2019; Okunade, 2022; see also Blum, 2014).

Benin and Nigeria are intricately connected through the most important West African regional economic axis, the Lagos–Abidjan Corridor, which crosses the Nigeria–Benin border. Owing to the size of its economy, Nigeria has a greater impact on Benin than vice versa. Nigeria’s population is nearly 20 times that of Benin, and its gross domestic product (GDP) is roughly 40 times larger. Therefore, economic ties between the two countries are essentially unequal and lopsided (Golub et al., 2019; Ugwa, 2019). Resource endowments of the two countries are also unequal. The implementation of poorly aligned policies on restricting imports and exports between Nigeria and Benin, among others, has resulted in the informal opening of the border. This has enabled continued transboundary trade. The Nigeria–Benin border has therefore been a zone of trade thriving through different modalities of permeability and fluidity, often in spite of restrictive policies.

The economic power and lifeblood of Nigerian–Beninese border communities are rooted in smuggling; trafficking of people, including children; and illegal commerce (Blum, 2014; Asiwaju, 2015, 2020; Jegede, 2015; Adebajo, 2019). Goods smuggled into Nigeria from across the border include “counterfeit, substandard or adulterated” software, drugs, fabrics, and foods, in particular rice (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020, p. 57). The primary (mostly illegal) export commodity from Nigeria to Benin is fuel (Blum, 2014). On both sides of the border, there is little evidence of business and informal trade operations other than those linked to smuggling (Golub et al., 2019; Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020). However, there is also a long-standing tradition of legal cross-border trade by peasants and herders in livestock and agricultural products (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020). Nevertheless, available statistics show that informal cross-border trade accounts for nearly 75% and 20%, respectively, of Benin and Nigeria’s GDP (Blum, 2014; IMF, 2022).

Significant economic activities and exchanges between Nigeria and Benin are, in general, loosely regulated, taxed, and recorded. This is owing to border porosity, which in turn has allowed the perpetration of nefarious activities and the involvement of customs and immigration officials in corrupt practices. It has also resulted in the AU’s (2018) Protocol on Free Movement (Opanike and Aduloju, 2015). As noted by Hoffman and Melly (2015, p. vii),

trucks line up at official border crossings and bump over muddy backroads, motorbikes stutter along laden with fuel tanks, barges slip through coastal creeks, and battered cars with raised axles weighed down by sacks of grain or cement trundle along border tracks.

This description illustrates the vibrancy of informal cross-border trade and the everyday reality of the border settlements. However, motivated by the need to curb smuggling, trafficking, and other illegal operations, the federal government of Nigeria implemented a “partial” closure of its entire border on 20 August 2019 (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020), which was fully reversed only in 2021 (Iruoma, 2021). As Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020) explain, the primary reason for this extreme measure “was the extraordinarily high role [or rate] of rice smuggling into Nigeria despite the ban placed on foreign rice by [the] Nigerian government” (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020, p. 60). As a result of the closure, import and export activities at the border were halted and the mobility of citizens in Nigerian border towns was limited, although crossing the border on foot was still permitted (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020).

While Benin’s economy appeared to be unaffected (Ugwa, 2019), the closure had an impact on local economies along the Nigeria–Benin border and beyond (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020). It also resulted in a rise in consumer-good prices across Nigeria and an increase in national inflation by 0.59% (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020). While there was a drop in transgressions or illegal activities and an increase in local rice farming and production in Nigeria, there were also reports of ordinary residents in border communities being

killed by armed forces mistaking them for smugglers (Abegunde and Fabiyi, 2020). The border closure was intensely debated. It was acknowledged that illicit border activity posed “grave threats to the peace, stability, and economies of [ECOWAS] member states”; however, it was argued that measures such as improved border management might be more effective (Rasheed, 2020, unpaginated). Other points of debate were that while illicit border activities violated ECOWAS standards, Nigeria’s 2019 land border closure also contradicted ECOWAS (Rasheed, 2020) and meant a step backwards in the implementation of the AfCFTA (NAN, 2020).

According to Adepegba (2019), before Nigeria’s land borders could be reopened to the flow of products from its neighbours, its federal government imposed a number of restrictions. In order for adjacent countries to export items to Nigeria, ECOWAS “rules of origin” had to be obeyed (Adepegba, 2019). Rice imports into any West African country were prohibited under a second agreement signed in 2021 by Nigeria and Benin. Representatives of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria met with the president’s chief of staff to pursue discussions about replicating the Nigerian border closure programme’s success there and halting rice imports into West Africa (*Economic Confidential*, 2022).

### **Migration across the Nigeria–Benin border**

Borders have an undeniable impact on migration, either facilitating or preventing movement. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) points out that millions of people cross Nigeria’s borders each year; Nigerians emigrate abroad and foreign citizens migrate to Nigeria for education, work, or family reunification (UNODC, 2022). By mid-2020, Nigeria was host to 377 169 migrants from Benin (Migration Data Portal, 2023). Because of their shared cultures, Nigerians also comfortably relocate to Benin; they may move in search of better living conditions and business opportunities (Tabi and Ndum, 2020; Lagos African Cluster Centre, 2022). Nigeria and the nations that surround it, with the exception of Cameroon, are entitled to freedom of movement for their inhabitants since they are members of ECOWAS (Okunade and Ogunnubi, 2019). The following principles serve as the cornerstones of Nigeria’s foreign policy, and by implication its relations with Benin: respect for each African state’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; avoidance of meddling in other African countries’ domestic affairs; and pledges of practical cooperation to advance African unification and economic growth (Adeola and Fayomi, 2012). However, the existence of these principles has not prevented the illicit activities that occasioned the 2019 border closure.

The Nigeria–Benin border frequently runs through dense forests and waterways, and during the border closure this provided what Vezzoli (2021, p. 21) refers to as “alternative migration channels.” Yet despite these channels, according to Ojo’s (2019) study, the border closure increased the cost of

crossing. Border towns such as Seme-Krake in Lagos State, Idiroko in Ogun State, Aiyegun in Oyo State, Chikanda in Kwara State, and Babanna in Niger State rely on cross-border trade and movement to thrive. Their residents typically work for low wages in the informal economy and, as a result, circumstances worsened for many of them (Ojo, 2019).

Plans to reopen the Nigeria land border in 2020 were postponed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown, which introduced a new rationale to restrict migration—to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The political border closure therefore overlapped with the COVID-19 lockdown with consequences for cross-border communities, such as those in “twinning cities.” Families were split up and people were separated from loved ones. Besides the implications for education, public services, and economic activities, the effect was also felt by cross-border workers reliant on migration (European Commission et al., 2021; Kwarkye and Matongbada, 2021).

### **Crime, security, and governance challenges on the Nigeria–Benin border**

In this chapter, we acknowledge complex realities in relation to the fluidity and permeability of borders (see Chapter 2 in this book). Border communities navigate the reality of fluid border environments on a daily basis, while also being confronted with marginalisation in terms of urban or social infrastructure. However, much focus is placed on the poor governance and porosity of the West African border that fuel crime and insecurity (Ejotubu and Jude, 2011; Idris and Tutumlu, 2021). Particular attention is paid to transnational crimes, which, according to Boister (2003), are acts that have the potential to cause harmful consequences beyond national borders while also contradicting the essential ideals of the international community. Frequently, transnational crime includes cross-border banditry, smuggling of commodities and products, trafficking in persons, and sex slavery (Okunade, 2022).

West Africa is vulnerable to transnational crime in part because, in addition to its borders being relatively porous, it also has insufficient infrastructure, particularly in the face of globalisation and technological innovation (Ojo, 2019). This is also a concern in terms of the rise in transnational organised crime (Blum, 2014; Osimen et al., 2017). Because of “weak governance on both sides” and compromised border management, border posts are typically manned by a small number of workers who lack the expertise, desire, and resources needed to discourage international crimes (Blum, 2014, p. 5). This is a concern to which the Nigerian media has attempted to draw attention by raising the alarm about border corruption. According to Ajaja (2021, unpaginated), Nigerian “border guards are extremely corrupt; if you give them money, they will let you pass through any checkpoint.” The media has also reported on tensions between those heading the border bureaucracy and the central government regarding the causes of the situation, with the bureaucracy raising concerns over the complicity or indifference of border

communities, which is associated with the neglect these communities experience from the government (Onnoghen-Theophilus, 2022).

### **Trends, actions, and dialogues in rebuilding Nigeria–Benin border communities**

Based on the foregoing, the factors that have come to bear on Nigeria–Benin border communities include border porosity, weak governance structures, and poor living conditions resulting from an absence of government in terms of development. This general situation is understood to have fostered crime and insecurity, as well as illegal and illicit flows of goods. Political concerns over the economy, the weakness of the ECOWAS Protocol, and Nigeria’s closing of its borders in 2019 are also implicated in a complex set of circumstances.

Nevertheless, various dialogues and initiatives are underway to address this seemingly intractable and interlinked set of challenges. In terms of transnational academic collaboration, in 2018 the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and the University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin, began working together to help improve border management for the benefit of the two countries and Africa at large (*Africa Climate Reports*, 2018).

In addition, ambitious cross-national investment is set to transform at least one of the Nigeria–Benin border crossings on the route from Abidjan to Lagos. In 2014, Nigeria and Benin, along with Togo, Ghana, and Côte d’Ivoire, agreed to construct the ECOWAS Abidjan–Lagos Corridor Highway (Blum, 2014; African Development Bank Group, 2020). This long-standing project will connect the capitals of the five countries. A highway of over 1,000 km will connect the countries’ ports and cities, eventually becoming a major transportation corridor (Blum, 2014). As Blum (2014, p. 9) put it, “[t]he multi-million dollar infrastructure project aims at stimulating socio-economic development and enhancing the economic growth of the countries involved.” This no doubt will change life in the affected twin border towns, in particular Seme-Krake, through which the six-lane highway will pass. Likely impacts will be, first, through the construction activity and the short-lived economic activity this unlocks, and second through the lasting impact of rapidly moving traffic, with fewer spin-offs for local formal and informal service providers.

Nigeria and Benin have also constructed a joint border post, the Seme-Krake post, inaugurated in 2018 (Azeez, 2022), plans for which were mentioned in Blum (2014). Funding for the joint border post came from European and multilateral contributions (Azeez, 2022). At the inauguration, the presidents of both countries committed to jointly combat border insecurity and improve free movement in both countries (Azeez, 2022). The urbanisation of the Seme-Krake “twin city” boundary had already brought about increased regional integration and cooperation, brotherliness, and common interest

when Nigerian authorities decided, unilaterally, in August 2019 to close all land borders, as discussed earlier.

In order to modernise the facilitation and control of trade between Nigeria and Benin and among sub-regional communities, a bilateral agreement on the integrated Seme-Krake border post was signed in 2022 (Azeez, 2022) by Benin's Minister of Economy and Finance and Nigeria's Minister of State for Transportation on behalf of their respective countries. The operationalisation of the shared border post was discussed at the ministerial level. According to Ojiekwe (2022, unpaginated), "the two countries agreed to address the concerns mitigating the smooth operation of the border post." These concerns revolved around trans-border crime and criminality, terrorism, importation of illegal arms, and increased illegal migration, among others (Ojiekwe, 2022).

Although several initiatives have been put in place in recent years to support border towns in adjusting to their fluidity, improve the standard of living of border residents, and promote regional and international integration, as represented by the AfCFTA, the outcomes have been mixed and, at times, actively reversed, for instance through Nigeria's 2019 border closure. Thus, national priorities determine the extent to which transnational, regional, and global agreements are implemented. Blum (2014, p. 3) draws attention to "the nexus between peace, security and development," arguing that "a more holistic approach is necessary when looking at border issues." Added to this, though not covered in this chapter, is the importance of integrated spatial development strategies for border regions at multiple scales, also focusing in more detail on urbanising areas. This inevitably requires transnational cooperation. Policies to develop cross-border communities should take account of the realities of fluidity characterising the everyday life and livelihood practices of urbanised border communities. Simultaneously, such policies need to strive actively to improve the quality of life of residents through participatory and inclusive spatial planning, budgeting, and political decision-making at multiple levels, as promoted by the NUA for all types of human settlements (Habitat III, 2016). A holistic approach to developing cross-border communities requires coordination and alignment between the upgrading of urban and border infrastructure. The latter entails managerial advances to support anti-corruption programmes and technical advances to support the greater effectiveness of official border activities, such as detecting counterfeit documentation and goods. It is only through multi-sectoral, sustained, and coordinated efforts that the vicious circle in which border communities find themselves can be broken and lives improved.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the Nigeria–Benin border as a case study for an assessment of challenges in urbanised areas on African borders. The Nigeria–Benin border contains a variety of communities, ranging from villages to towns,

with a concentration of urbanisation on its southern one-fifth. The literature review affirmed the prevalence of complex and compromised realities of fluidity in border environments. When applied to borders, fluidity invariably serves as openness in terms of facilitating socio-cultural connections and as permeability in terms of facilitating essential trade linked to livelihoods, but also as porosity in terms of facilitating transnational organised crime.

Despite the numerous challenges in the Nigeria and Benin border region, there have been attempts, at times ambivalent and contradictory, at improved governance. Major problems remain the non-implementation of established mandates and resolutions and the weak or ineffective protocols for cross-border governance.

To address these issues, it is crucial to take the mandates of agencies as well as the realities faced by communities on both sides of the border into consideration when proposing projects or programmes. Implementation needs to be consistent and sustained, and not overridden by security interventions. These principles are critical in shaping a policy discourse at the international level that can contribute to the reconstruction, prosperity, and sustainability of settlements in the Nigeria–Benin and other African border regions. Whereas there is some awareness of the complex dilemmas facing border communities in peace-building initiatives, the problems and opportunities of borderland urbanisation still need to be mainstreamed in the global urban agenda with urgency in order to align cross-border urban development strategies with policies on migration, trade and economic development, peace and security, and crime prevention.

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# 13 Transport Infrastructure as a Driver of Sustainable (Urban) Development in Africa? Critical Reflections on the Interrelations between Sustainability Agendas and Infrastructure-Led Development through Experiences from Ethiopia

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## **Introduction**

Infrastructure-led development has been back at the core of discourses on development cooperation since the early 2000s. After the 2008 financial crisis, it gained particular momentum as a central approach in development strategies and projects, resulting from bilateral cooperation and the engagement of multilateral organisations and development banks (Schindler and Kanai, 2021). Africa is currently at the centre of attention in terms of this discourse. Academics and policy actors alike problematise the wide infrastructure gap in most African countries as posing an obstacle to development (Ncube and Lufumpa, 2017; Cirolia, 2020; Cirolia et al., 2022). However, this narrative and related policies have been criticised for not adequately representing the diversity of current infrastructural arrangements, needs, and actors involved (Cirolia, 2020). In the 2010s, African countries experienced a considerable increase in infrastructure investments predominately fuelled by bilateral cooperation and loans to African national governments with a downturn after the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 (Cirolia et al., 2022).

Ethiopia follows a highly ambitious state-driven development strategy aimed at making it a low-middle-income country by 2025 (Ethiopia National Planning Commission (ENPC, 2016). Over the past decade, it has been at the forefront of infrastructure-led development in Africa. With the aim of achieving economic growth and development, the approach is to promote the deployment of large-scale energy and transportation infrastructure (Beyer et al., 2021). However, the effects and causalities of such strategies, whether in Ethiopia or elsewhere on the African continent, in relation to the achievement of economic development and sustainability goals, remain disputed (Wethal, 2019).

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In parallel with the comeback of infrastructure-led development, there was a shift in attention to urban areas in development theory and practice. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) not only echo the ideas of infrastructure-led development in Goal 9 (“Industry, innovation and infrastructure”) but also explicitly dedicate one of the 17 goals to urban development. Goal 11 calls for the development of “[s]ustainable cities and communities” and UN-Habitat’s New Urban Agenda (NUA) approaches cities as the site to address social, economic, and environmental challenges (Watson, 2016). The NUA sets out a vision in which cities ensure “the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate housing, as well as equal access for all to public goods and services, food security and nutrition, quality and accessible public spaces, livelihoods and decent work” (Habitat III, 2017, s. 13) and demands the creation of enabling conditions in urban planning, management, and governance. Commentators from policy and academia have welcomed the SDGs and NUA, partly because the idea of “well-planned urbanization . . . [as] a powerful tool of sustainable development” (Watson, 2021, p. 19) brings planning back to the centre of debates on development and offers various openings for progressive urban planning. National and local governments across Africa have taken up the SDGs and NUA in their policies. An alignment with the goals of sustainable development became important to attract international funding for urban development projects. It enabled the mobilisation of considerable amounts of resources and actors to this end and helped question the status quo of urban development policies and strategies (Valencia et al., 2019).

According to Gillespie and Schindler (2023), many African governments pursue infrastructure development strategies to synergise economic development efforts and steer urban development. The sometimes-harmful effects on (urban) environments and the failure of infrastructure projects in terms of their intended developmental effects are often understood as problems of implementation, planning, and institutional settings on a local level, or pictured as challenges to be addressed by technological fixes (see Ncube and Lufumpa, 2017; Thacker et al., 2019; Rode et al., 2020). In this chapter, I argue that the potentially problematic impacts of transport infrastructure provision are not just a matter of implementation but can also in part be traced back to influential development policy agendas that embraced the ideas of infrastructure-led development, their internal contradictions, and their understandings of (urban) development.

This chapter, therefore, takes a closer look at how the SDGs and NUA engage with transport infrastructure. I discuss the treatment of infrastructure in these agendas against the backdrop of academic critiques of sustainability strategies and critical scholarship on the interrelations between infrastructure and urban development, as well as experiences of infrastructure projects and policies in Ethiopia and other African countries, to illustrate the contradictions and resulting problems of sustainable development. The discussion draws on scholarly literature and policy papers. The analysis is additionally

informed by expert interviews with Ethiopian planners conducted in late 2018 in Addis Ababa and Mekelle.

The remainder of the chapter is organised as follows. The second section briefly introduces critical scholarship that advocates for relational perspectives on sustainable urban development and infrastructure deployment, outlines the specificities of transport infrastructure in relation to urban development, and looks at how transport infrastructure is addressed in the SDGs. In the third section, the chapter sets the context of infrastructure-led development in Africa, with a particular focus on Ethiopia. The subsequent section critically discusses the treatment of infrastructure deployment and its linkages to urban development issues in the NUA and the SDGs, drawing on examples from Ethiopia and other African countries. It identifies four main problems relating to the nexus between economic growth and development, the beneficiaries of infrastructure, the institutional and sectoral contexts of infrastructure planning, and the understanding of urban development in contemporary Africa. The chapter concludes with reflections on the interrelations between infrastructure and urban development.

### **Sustainable development and transportation infrastructure**

In recent years, scholars researching sustainable urban development strategies under conditions of “planetary urbanisation” in North America, Europe, and West Africa (Wachsmuth et al., 2016; Vormann and DeDauw, 2018) showed that many of the strategies and projects that intend to make inner cities greener, healthier, and safer fall short in acknowledging the spatial interrelatedness of urban development and tend to obfuscate related externalities. Attempts to increase sustainability in a certain district or city may have negative effects on other places, for instance through the relocation of pollution-heavy land uses (Vormann and DeDauw, 2018). Angelo and Wachsmuth (2015) term the fallacy that sustainability can be achieved in one place “methodological cityism.” Vormann (2019) argues that networked infrastructure provides a particularly useful entry point to study the trans-local effects of transformations aimed at more sustainable places, as infrastructure provides the often-uneven connections between different places that might benefit one place but create harm in another.

Informed by these debates, the discussion in this chapter focuses on the linkages between sustainable (urban) development and transport infrastructure, as this sector has attracted the largest investments in Africa over the past decade (Cirolia et al., 2022) and has a direct and massive impact on urban form and development trajectories, strongly influencing land-use patterns (Knowles, 2006; Gillespie and Schindler, 2023). Transport infrastructure provides access to places, thereby facilitating and channelling the physical movement of people and goods necessary for participation in economic, social, and cultural activities that require spatial mobility. However, particularly the use of motorised transport infrastructure is often associated

with negative externalities for its immediate surroundings, such as noise and pollution (Knowles, 2006; Taylor, 2021).

A large body of scholarship has researched these powerful direct and indirect impacts of large-scale transportation infrastructure on urban development (e.g. Wiig and Silver, 2019; Cirolia and Rode, 2019). While certain parts of the urban population might benefit from the increased accessibility and connectivity provided through the deployment of infrastructure, it might exclude or represent a threat to the livelihoods and health of other inhabitants. Based on these experiences, scholars from planning, architecture, anthropology, and urban geography advocate for a relational perspective on the production and organisation of the urban fabric in order to shed light on how infrastructural networks spatialise socio-economic power relations and inequalities (e.g. Rodgers and O'Neill, 2012; Wiig and Silver, 2019; Kanai and Schindler, 2022).

The SDGs prominently address infrastructure in Goal 9: “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation” (UN, 2015). Two of the targets under Goal 9 detail to which ends infrastructure should be deployed. Target 9.1 calls for the development of “quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.”

(UN, 2015)

Target 9a is more precise about the action needed to provide “sustainable and resilient” infrastructure for industrial development in “developing countries,” emphasising the need for “enhanced financial, technological and technical support to African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states” (UN, 2015). Both of these targets directly address infrastructure as a means to increase the connectivity of places. Other targets under Goal 9 place infrastructure development in the context of industrialisation (Target 9.2) and the integration of small-scale businesses in developing countries with markets and value chains (Target 9.3). Transportation infrastructure is directly related to the achievement of seven targets of different SDGs and indirectly to others by providing accessibility (Thacker et al., 2019). Thacker et al. (2019) argue that infrastructure provision contributes to the attainment of all 17 SDGs. However, these goals can conflict with each other and alternative ideas of sustainable development, as discussed in detail later.

### **Infrastructure-led development and sustainable development in Africa**

The statements on infrastructure investment in the SDGs echo the discourse on infrastructure-led development promoted by a global growth coalition



comprising development banks, governments, multilateral institutions, transnational corporations, and consultancies (Schindler and Kanai, 2021). Statements such as those stressing that “[t]he growth and hence prosperity of African cities will depend on the extent to which infrastructure is adequately provided, upgraded and maintained” (Arimah, 2017, p. 246) can be found in numerous sources, both in academic literature and in policy documents (e.g. African Union Commission (AUC), 2015; Ncube and Lufumpa, 2017). Many African countries show significant shortfalls in their centralised infrastructure inventories and services. When it comes to transport infrastructure, the African Development Bank’s “Africa Infrastructure Development Index” shows that the ten countries with the highest scores are all in North Africa, in Southern Africa or Small Island States. The bottom ten countries mostly consist of states that have experienced violent conflict in recent decades. However, this index only considers the length of a country’s total and paved road network in relation to its surface area and population (Ncube and Lufumpa, 2017; Africa Infrastructure Knowledge Program, 2022). Nevertheless, in many cases, responses rooted in “popular economies” (Simone, 2019) have emerged to fill the gaps in infrastructure provision, such as decentralised small-scale sanitation solutions, improvised extensions of electricity networks, and paratransit services, which are rarely considered in the dominant discourse on infrastructure services and needs in African cities (Cirolia, 2020).

In many African countries, the lack of efficient transport infrastructure and the relative remoteness from global markets translate into high transportation costs (Pieterse et al., 2018; Wethal, 2019, p. 4), making it difficult to attract industrial investment (Collord et al., 2021). Thus, the deployment of infrastructure is expected to reduce transportation costs and time, stimulate inter- and intra-regional trade, enable the development of industries linked to global value chains, facilitate integration with global markets, and increase the competitiveness of African countries. Through trickle-down effects, as these kinds of policies argue, infrastructure is understood to contribute to poverty reduction (Wethal, 2019, p. 4). In Agenda 2063, the development of a pan-African infrastructure network features prominently, with a high-speed rail network being one of the envisaged flagship projects. Agenda 2063’s call for “world-class infrastructure” (AUC, 2015, p. viii) across the continent can be regarded as broadly aligned with the SDGs’ statement on infrastructure (Hansmann, 2019, p. 40).

In the case of Ethiopia, infrastructure development is featured as an essential part of the country’s state-led industrialisation strategy, with a focus on light manufacturing industries with the aim to make the country a “leading manufacturing hub” (ENPC, 2017, p. 136). These efforts include the expansion of airports, the establishment of a robust inter-regional road network, the expansion of rural roads, and a railway network connecting the country’s major urban and industrial centres (Beyer et al., 2021), with most of the projects depending on external support regarding funding and expertise (Beyer et al., 2021). In the national government’s Growth and Transformation Plan II,

a central policy document laying out the country's development strategy, infrastructure is explicitly mentioned as an important means to attract investment in the manufacturing sector. The plan also commits to the achievement of the SDGs and their statements on the role of infrastructure in sustainable development (ENPC, 2017).

The amounts being invested in infrastructure in Africa and the number of large-scale projects have increased considerably in the past decade. Between 2012 and 2017, African governments, members of the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa,<sup>1</sup> China, other multi- and bilateral organisations, and the private sector spent more than US\$60 billion per year on infrastructure across the continent (Cirolia et al., 2022). In 2017, US\$34 billion was spent on transport infrastructure (Cirolia et al., 2022). Ethiopia attracted particularly large amounts of foreign capital, with Chinese partners being key to the country's infrastructure roll-out (Collord et al., 2021; Carmody and Murphy, 2022). The financing of infrastructure projects currently makes up around 60% of the African Development Bank's portfolio, and a considerable part of the World Bank's activities focuses on infrastructure in Africa (Wethal, 2019; Cirolia et al., 2022). Still, according to African Development Bank estimates, the needs are substantially higher.

### **Problematising the (urban) development–infrastructure nexus as treated in sustainable development agendas**

There is a broad consensus that transportation infrastructure linking African cities to each other and places outside the continent is crucial to achieving more sustainable futures, in addition to enhancing accessibility within urban regions. Also, the SDGs and NUA's positive impacts on urban development practices across the African continent are widely recognised. Nevertheless, these agendas' treatment of infrastructure bears problematic consequences for policies at the interface of infrastructure deployment and sustainable (urban) development.

#### *Sustainable development agendas as reiteration of growth policies*

The SDGs have been criticised for promoting a growth-orientated vision of sustainable development, which echoes ideas of development that dominated mainstream policy discourses in past decades but often failed in practice and were subject to manifold criticism from different theoretical angles (Wethal, 2019). Eisenmenger et al. (2020), for example, show that the SDGs prioritise economic growth over ecological concerns and reveal contradictions between the imperative of economic growth as promoted in SDG 8 and the sustainable use of natural resources. Hickel (2019) argues that the SDGs promote economic growth but do not provide an explanation for the assumed links between growth and sustainable development. While the post-2015 agenda acknowledges that the current hegemonic model of economic development is

untenable (Pieterse et al., 2018), the SDGs and NUA's approach to sustainable development nevertheless implies the same assumptions regarding the necessity of economic growth. In the case of the NUA, critics point out that it promotes techno-managerial approaches to foster growth that have proven ineffective in the past (Kaika, 2017). Agenda 2063 reveals a similar understanding of economic development, emphasising the need to make African countries attractive locations for doing business (Karuri-Sebina, 2020).

Thus, mainstream development policies understand the deployment of infrastructure in enhancing connectivity as a major driver of economic development and growth in mainstream development policies, as noted by Wethal (2019) and Hansmann (2019). This is despite the fact that

[t]here is not yet evidence of a coherent vision either within the donor community, among international financial institutions or at the level of governments of how this infrastructure will benefit African societies other than by ameliorating logistical bottlenecks seen as impeding economic growth.

(Goodfellow, 2020, p. 14)

An African Development Bank study arguing for the developmental benefits of infrastructure investments, for instance, only used gross domestic product (GDP) growth as a measure, without considering which sectors and what kind of companies would benefit from the infrastructure (Wethal, 2019, p. 4). Various studies question the posited causality and the idea of development implicit in infrastructure-led development policies (Ncube and Lufumpa, 2017; Hansmann, 2019). Nevertheless, positive developmental effects or large-scale infrastructure deployment across the continent are still taken for granted, even though there has been evidence over many decades that developmental effects often remained weak (Wethal, 2019; Scholvin, 2021).

Similar observations can be made in Ethiopia. While the country's industrialisation strategy (focusing on light manufacturing sectors) and the massive roll-out of infrastructure partially translated to industrial development, allowing for a considerable GDP increase, the promised trickle-down effects could not be realised. The effects of the economy's development on poverty reduction remain weak, partly because of the extremely low wages in the newly created jobs in construction and manufacturing (Tegenu, 2019; Di Nunzio, 2022). Similar observations can be made regarding the investment in Addis Ababa's built environment, which "failed to trickle down to produce direct benefits for the urban poor" (Di Nunzio, 2022, p. 405).

While most African governments committed to the SDGs and aligned development policies respectively (Croese, 2022), Wethal (2019) shows that their outcomes in the form of large-scale transportation infrastructures are largely the same as those of developmental policies of earlier decades. Based on experiences with megaprojects in Lagos, Olajide and Lawanson (2022) suggest the apt phrase of "urban paradox" to capture the discrepancy

between the promised benefits of large-scale infrastructure projects and the widespread failure to deliver on these and their envisaged trickle-down effects.

In spatial terms, the approach of concentrating the use of resources in large-scale infrastructure results in the strengthening of growth poles, for example, large urban agglomerations or growth corridors (Enns, 2018; Cirolia and Rode, 2019; Scholvin, 2021). This approach “thus advocates for intentional but temporal inequalities of infrastructure access, assuming that these will be mitigated over time” (Cirolia and Rode, 2019, p. 3), contradicting SDG 10, which promotes the reduction of inequalities within and among countries, as well as the SDG principle to “leave no one behind” (UN, 2015). In Ethiopia, patterns of spatially concentrated investments in infrastructure can be observed, as national-level infrastructure planning privileges road and rail connections for large-scale export-oriented production activities located in the country’s main urban regions (Beyer et al., 2021). The Ethiopia 2030 development plan furthermore calls for the establishment of development corridors, which are meant to concentrate future infrastructure investment (Planning and Development Commission, 2021).

#### *Whose infrastructure for whose benefit?*

To assess infrastructure’s contribution to sustainable development, it is crucial to take a closer look at the intended beneficiaries of transport infrastructure deployment. The NUA and SDGs either largely ignore the question of whom infrastructure might serve or make broad and vague statements in this regard. The NUA, for instance, states infrastructure should enable “sustainable economic development” (Habitat III, 2017, s. 65), promote “sustainable and inclusive industrial development” (Habitat III, 2017, s. 45), and “stimulate sustainable economic productivity” (Habitat III, 2017, s. 96). Rather than naming industries or actors that should benefit, the statements remain on the level of those buzzwords. Similar formulations can be found in the formulations of SDG 9 and its related targets, as cited earlier.

Although the mainstream development discourse on infrastructure in Africa suggests that infrastructure investment benefits everyone, experience shows that benefits tend to be highly selective (Scholvin, 2021). In African urban regions, small-scale economic activities, characterised as “popular economies” by Simone (2019), prevail while large-scale transportation infrastructure tends to prioritise the transnational movement of large volumes of goods (Simone, 2014; Scholvin, 2021; Kanai and Schindler, 2022). In addition, the financing mechanisms that currently dominate tend to favour large-scale projects (Cirolia, 2020, p. 6; see also Chapter 4 in this book). In the case of SDG 9, however, target 9.3, calling for the support of small-scale businesses, fails to address physical infrastructure (UN, 2015). The NUA, which pays considerable attention to informal housing, remains relatively silent on small-scale, informal economic activities (Fraser, 2018), which are crucial in the current service delivery constellation in most African cities.

Ethiopia provides several insightful examples that illustrate the potentially contradictory outcomes of infrastructure deployment for sustainable development. The Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway, a flagship project in Ethiopia’s infrastructure strategy, is used mainly for the movement of large volumes of goods for import and export and bypasses many smaller urban areas along its way. According to the assessment of a senior planner in Ethiopia’s transport ministry, developing the railway link to Djibouti was not the most efficient solution to the actual transportation needs of the current Ethiopian economy; instead, it was a politically motivated decision (Anonymous, 2018). Carmody and Murphy (2022) view the high-capacity link to Djibouti as a potential danger to domestic industrial development. This is because it could predominately benefit the import and influx of manufactured goods and help to increase the country’s trade gap. Despite its industrial growth, Ethiopia’s economy still largely relies on the export of agricultural raw materials (Carmody and Murphy, 2022). A study of the developmental effects of road construction in the rural surroundings of Mekelle in northern Ethiopia revealed that new road linkages to urban centres benefitted predominately larger, export-oriented agricultural businesses (Rammelt, 2018), contradicting target 9.3, which stresses the integration of small-scale enterprises into value chains and markets. These examples from Ethiopia demonstrate Simone’s (2014) argument on the importance of looking at the specific flows of goods that infrastructure enables and their directions when assessing infrastructure’s impact on sustainable development.

Although funding sources and mechanisms for urban development projects and infrastructure are key concerns, the NUA and SDGs hardly address this issue (Soederberg and Walks, 2018; Cirolia, 2020). As most African states do not have direct command of the funds needed to finance large-scale infrastructure, many projects depend on aid programmes, investments by external actors, or loans (see Chapter 4 in this book). The respective arrangements include inter-state cooperation and, increasingly, private actors, given the growing number of public–private partnership arrangements in Africa’s infrastructure sector (Wethal, 2019). The actors providing funds have their own economic and/or geopolitical agendas that are reflected in the conditionalities of these funding schemes and might complicate sustainable development efforts (Pieterse et al., 2018; Cirolia et al., 2022). A striking example is natural resource-backed infrastructure loans, such as those provided by China to several African countries. In these cases, which mostly involve transport infrastructure, the repayment is directly in natural resources or in anticipated incomes derived from future resource extraction. Following Alves (2013), infrastructure funded this way has not considerably contributed to diversifying African economies and it can be assumed that it has reinforced—or at least stabilised—extractive production modes in the respective African countries.

The export of natural resources is a major driver of the development of port and railway projects across Africa (Oliete Josa and Magrinyà, 2018;

Enns, 2018). Accordingly, these kinds of transportation infrastructure projects are often designed to serve the needs of extractive industries (Oliete Josa and Magrinyà, 2018). Thus, an infrastructure project might have beneficial and seemingly sustainable economic outcomes in one place while enabling activities with devastating environmental and socio-economic effects elsewhere, demonstrating that it is necessary to look at the different places connected by infrastructure in order to assess its contribution to sustainable development (Vormann, 2019).

These reflections on the questions of who funds, uses, and benefits from large-scale transportation infrastructure demonstrate that private economic actors and foreign state-owned companies play a crucial role. Nevertheless, the NUA pays little attention to the role of business actors in urban development (Watson, 2016, 2021). Against this backdrop, Watson (2016, p. 440) asks the legitimate question as to whether this conception of governance “fully recognises the nature of the global economy which currently drives change in so many cities and towns.”

### **Enhancing connectivity and sustainable urban development—two separate fields of sustainable development policies?**

Large-scale infrastructure projects have massive impacts on urban development, documented by an ever-growing body of scholarship on African cases. These include evictions for the construction of a railway line in the Kampala region (Wiig and Silver, 2019) and in the context of land acquisitions for the Lekki Free Trade Zone in Lagos (Olajide and Lawanson, 2022). On the scale of neighbourhoods, public health issues caused by high levels of air pollution as, for example, in the surroundings of port facilities in south Durban, are prevalent (Mpungose and Maharaj, 2021). In Addis Ababa, the two largest, most recent transport infrastructure projects, the Addis Ababa Ring Road and the Light Rail Transit (LRT), contributed to the segregation of neighbourhoods. Both structures not only enable but also limit specific movements and types of commercial activities as they form spatial barriers, impacting inhabitants’ livelihoods (Delz, 2018; Rode et al., 2020). The anthropologists Rodgers and O’Neill (2012) propose the concept of “infrastructural violence” to analytically link these kinds of harmful consequences for everyday life and people’s livelihoods to specific material infrastructures and the underlying politics. Reflecting on the case of the Addis Ababa ring road, Delz (2018, p. 200) concludes that “designing a road means simultaneously designing a region, a city, and a neighbourhood as well.”

It is surprising that the SDGs and NUA treat urban development and the deployment of infrastructure to provide wider connectivity as mostly separate from each other. This is particularly so when considering the well-documented effects of infrastructure on communities, with the resultant academic debate gaining momentum in the early 2000s (Graham and Marvin, 2001),

and long-standing practical experiences with infrastructure-led development predating the post-2015 agenda. The NUA discusses large-scale infrastructure largely in the context of the intended effects on economic development. However, the broader and unintended effects on urban development are widely neglected (see, for instance, Habitat III, 2017, s. 44). The SDGs and the NUA do not offer guidance when it comes to the type of infrastructure that should be deployed and the mode of transportation that should be enabled, except for the obvious specification that it should be sustainable, resilient, and accessible to all (Habitat III, 2017, s. 50). In particular, the SDGs have been criticised for their neglect of non-motorised transport (Lubaale and Opiyo, 2021), which is especially problematic given the prioritisation of investments in infrastructure for motorised transport in African cities (Acheampong et al., 2022). Also, SDG 9 is vague, misses definitions, and fails to address the role of local stakeholders, who are key to developing successful projects (Misselwitz and Salcedo Villanueva, 2015). The only indicator for infrastructure developed for SDG 9 simply measures the “total official international support (official development assistance plus other official flows) to infrastructure” and thus does not allow for a differentiated assessment (UN, 2015).

While Thacker et al. (2019), neglecting the internal contradictions of the SDGs, point out that all the potentially negative impacts of infrastructure on sustainable development are addressed in the complex set of goals and targets of the SDGs, I argue that it is necessary to make interrelations with other fields of policy and planning explicit. Firstly, there tends to be a mismatch regarding the decision-making on infrastructure and the spatialities of their impacts. Examples from Ethiopia, which resemble experiences across the continent, show that infrastructure planning and deployment have mainly been negotiated on the scale of national-level government agencies dealing with infrastructure and industrial development. Local planning authorities only became involved after locational decisions had already been taken, posing challenges to the integration of the new infrastructure in local structural planning efforts, which were partly undertaken retroactively (Schindler and Kanai, 2021; Beyer et al., 2021). The insufficient involvement of local planners in the development of Addis Ababa’s LRT translated into inadequate design decisions and deficits in the integration of these projects into their urban context (Rode et al., 2020). Secondly, the separated treatment of infrastructure and urban development mirrors the predominantly sectoral organisation of (local) governments. This “poses challenges to the integrated, transversal and collaborative work required to implement agendas such as the SDGs and the NUA” (Valencia et al., 2019, p. 19). Valencia et al. (2019) argue that the absence of an integrated and cross-sectoral perspective in the localisation of the SDGs contributes to the prioritisation of projects that follow growth-orientated logic mainly serving the interests of large businesses. Integration between government institutions in different sectors, scales, and regions also remains a major challenge with regard to Ethiopia’s

development strategy aligned with the SDGs (Gizaw, 2017, p. 6). While SDG 9 is prominently addressed in Ethiopia's 2017 Voluntary National Review of the SDGs, it refrains from linking infrastructure to urban development issues. In general, the review only mentions urban issues on the margins (ENPC, 2017). The separate treatment of infrastructure and urban development in the SDGs, and particularly the NUA, not only is a conceptual problem but is also mirrored in governance structures, complicating the development of infrastructure projects that meaningfully contribute to the creation of more sustainable urban futures.

*Reductionist and outdated understanding of urban development dynamics and trajectories in Africa*

The relative neglect of the impact infrastructure has on urban development, the simplifications and contradictions regarding sustainable development, and the role of infrastructure as discussed in the NUA and the SDGs need to be understood against the backdrop of their theoretical underpinning and their understanding of the urban. Sihlongonyane (2021), for instance, argues that the NUA promotes a “node-centric” perspective on urban development and reproduces a dichotomous concept of urban and rural spaces that neglects the respective interlinkages (see also Chapter 2 in this book). The NUA's perspective on urban regions does not adequately consider the dependence of cities on “things that do not happen within their borders” (Vormann, 2019, p. 67). The multiple linkages, enabled by infrastructure networks, that fundamentally co-constitute cities have been intensively discussed in urban and regional studies since the 1990s. Yet even though scholarship on globalising cities was influential in the formulation of the NUA (Barnett and Parnell, 2016), the understanding of urban spaces partly

hark[s] back to an earlier era of planning thought and practice which assumed cities were bounded spaces responding to spatially adjacent territorial change and are now perhaps out of step with urban and regional processes in a globalised and highly interconnected world.

(Watson, 2016, p. 445)

This conception of the urban, rooted in “methodological cityism” (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2015), complicates the development of adequate approaches and policies to tackle sustainability challenges that stretch far beyond the limits of individual cities. This is particularly true in the planning of large-scale infrastructure that has immediate effects on the places it connects and thus requires translocal planning approaches. The relative neglect of a relational perspective on development has also been pointed out as a deficit that complicates a deeper understanding of inequalities that the NUA and the SDGs prominently address and that are needed to develop effective policies (Kaika, 2017; Butcher, 2022).



As Barnett and Parnell (2016) note, debates on Southern Urbanism have arguably influenced the NUA and, as Swilling and Robinson (2017) acknowledge, the NUA pays attention to challenges pertaining to African cities. Nevertheless, the NUA has been criticised for offering a one-size-fits-all approach, mostly building on debates and experiences from the Global North (Watson, 2021). This approach does not do sufficient justice to the fact that urbanisation processes in Africa develop in different ways from those initiated by industrial growth in the 19th century in North America and Europe (Schindler, 2017; Kaika, 2017; Watson, 2021). Particularly relevant to the interrelationship between infrastructure provision and urban development are different patterns of flows of goods and people. These, for instance, result from multi-sited livelihoods, specific temporal migration patterns, and economies shaped by both the activities of the urban majority and extractive industries, as well as from fundamental differences regarding service delivery and institutional contexts and capacities (Simone, 2014; Schindler, 2017; Enns, 2018; Sihlongonyane, 2021).

The missing adaption of infrastructure projects to local contexts, particularly to surrounding infrastructure, local markets, and institutional capacities, was a key factor contributing to the failure of many large-scale projects in the post-independence period in African countries (Wethal, 2019). The work on the Addis Ababa ring road and the LRT is a more recent example of the problematic effects of infrastructure deployment owing to the neglect of local needs and conditions (Delz, 2018; Rode et al., 2020; see also Chapter 4 in this book, which discusses the need to contextualise transport infrastructure by looking at examples from Kenya and Tanzania). Discussing infrastructure investments across the African continent, Simone (2014, p. 221) argues that, in order for them to do their job, they must take into consideration the impetus, practices and movements adopted by Africans across the region as they construct new spaces of operation, habitation and transaction. In a similar vein, Watson (2021, p. 6) calls for taking city-specific problems as a starting point in designing policies for sustainable cities that are situated in local contexts, and to consider translocal interdependencies by linking “‘the local’ to ‘the local elsewhere’.”

## **Conclusion**

This chapter showed that the SDGs and the NUA, which inform many national and local sustainability strategies across Africa, treat the deployment of large-scale transport infrastructure and its interlinkages with urban development in a problematic way. It identified four main issues. Firstly, infrastructure is predominately treated as part of growth-orientated conceptions of economic and industrial development that contradict other sustainability dimensions, such as environmental concerns, while the proclaimed causalities regarding socio-economic impacts are questionable, as experiences from Ethiopia and other African countries show. Secondly, these

agendas miss clear statements regarding the type, functions, and beneficiaries of infrastructure and remain on the level of vague statements that allow the framing of all kinds of projects as contributions to sustainable development. This vagueness is particularly problematic as it obfuscates the complex and diverse realities in African urban regions. Infrastructure development is inevitably confronted with many sustainability challenges regarding economic power relations, planning and governance structures, conditional funding schemes, and the conflicting needs of different groups and their livelihood activities, as the examples from Ethiopia and beyond demonstrate. None of these challenges is new or undocumented. Instead of providing guidance or a corrective to the agenda of infrastructure-led development, the SDGs, the NUA, and Agenda 2063 simply echo its underlying assumptions. Appropriately tackling these challenges requires prioritisation, particularly in light of scarce resources and limited state capacities. This links to the third issue: the separate treatment of infrastructure deployment and urban development in sustainable development agendas and the neglect of translocal linkages and interdependencies. This complicates the understanding of infrastructure's urban impact and hence the design of adequate planning approaches. Infrastructure planning capable of balancing different dimensions of sustainable (urban) development must build on an interplay of different sectors, actors, and territorial entities. Fourthly, it can be argued that these shortcomings can partly be traced back to the universalist and simplifying conception of cities and their relations to other places on which the NUA and SDGs were built.

Nevertheless, by mainstreaming debates on urban approaches to sustainable development and mobilising resources, the NUA and SDGs are having an important impact on planning approaches and practices across African cities. Hence, their shortcomings in the treatment of large-scale transportation infrastructure can be regarded as a missed opportunity to providing a corrective to problematic practices of infrastructure-led development in urban regions.

Global agendas that claim validity across different spatial contexts and build on assumptions regarding development require scholars and practitioners to be critical towards their implications for (urban) development policies and planning. The design of infrastructure projects that contribute to sustainable development and benefit both the urban majorities and economies beyond formal city limits requires place-based strategies. These must be integrated into wider urban and regional planning frameworks and remain attentive to the concerns of all stakeholders, including those who currently provide infrastructural services in the absence of centralised systems. Therefore, respective approaches need to be built on detailed knowledge regarding the specificities of how economies and cities work. This requires studying the flows of people, goods, and finance that make up cities and economies, and identifying the infrastructure services they actually need. Doing so would mean taking seriously the interventions and propositions put forward by scholars arguing for an African perspective on urban development as well as

those calling for focusing on the spatial interrelations on which cities depend. As debates are shifting to the issue of the localisation of the SDGs and the NUA in the “decade of action,” possibilities to engage with their inherent contradictions and shortcomings may open up.

## Note

1 The Infrastructure Consortium is a platform that aims to promote investment in infrastructure in Africa, from both the public and private sectors. Its members include the G8 countries, Spain and South Africa, the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the African Union Development Agency, as well as multilateral and regional development banks and bilateral financial institutions (e.g. the African Development Bank, World Bank, West African Development Bank, and French Development Agency) (Cirolia et al., 2022).

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## 14 Conclusion

### Towards Realistic Global Frames that Embrace Everyday Urban Practices in Africa

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#### **Introduction**

As is widely understood, African cities are in the untenable position of having to absorb unprecedented levels of urbanisation, yet in the framings that globally seek to determine their futures they are overlooked, misunderstood, over-generalised, and misrepresented (Murray and Myers, 2006; Robinson, 2006; Parnell and Pieterse, 2014; Grant, 2015). As noted in Chapter 1 of this book, the pace of growth and the scale of cities on the continent, in the face of poorly conceived and carried-out interventions, often result in devastating implications for residents as well as the local economies on which they depend. Where do such insights take the agenda for research and policy engagement on the African continent?

This book is written midway on the 15-year journey towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although framed as the “decade of action,” the period from 2020 to 2030 also entails reflection and deliberations towards an agenda beyond 2030. In this chapter, we consider what research and engagement is needed at this juncture. We take forward the normative disruption developed in the four substantive parts of the book and draw together the findings across the chapters, noting the concern and unease that permeate them. We then turn to pointers for engagement in agenda setting and policymaking via regional bodies at the global level. Though applying to the diverse African context, in two chapters the empirical incorporation of a city in the Global North, Berlin, allows us to provoke a projection of the African urban reality and everyday practices, with the research and policy agenda this calls for, onto cities elsewhere.

#### **Engaging the decade of SDG implementation and negotiations towards a post-2030 agenda**

Whereas the New Urban Agenda (NUA) will remain the main global urban reference until Habitat IV in 2036, a post-2030 agenda will no doubt engage with the urban condition and help refocus the then-not-so-new “New Urban Agenda.” While the SDGs, NUA, and other frameworks have succeeded in

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gathering wide support, a certain fuzziness and openness to interpretation of many of the normative buzzwords have also made space for political negotiations over their meaning. As a result, they are not always true to their initial intentions. In this book, we find the dominant theory, discourse, and practice of urban development, driven by international organisations and presented as a panacea for development, wanting. Our main concern is that the concepts in this discourse and the buzzwords that represent them are often not suited to the diverse and sometimes contradictory African context. The analyses presented in the book chapters suggest more complex situations than those assumed in the dominant discourse. The book notes that the implementation of policies framed around ill-fitting normative buzzwords has been insensitive to the local context. Some of the chapter authors identify tensions between, on the one hand, the logics of modernity that rely on the premises of colonialism and capitalism as a universalising project and, on the other, the reality in which ordinary urban inhabitants find themselves. Some of the chapters demonstrate misalignment and yet others show a deeper chasm or disconnection between the prevailing international frameworks and local realities.

An emerging discourse on the post-2030 agenda focuses much-needed attention on the relationship between the planet and humanity (Saxena et al., 2021), but couches many of its recommendations in Western modernity. Examples are systemic as well as systems change and innovation (Moallemi et al., 2022), the scaling up of innovation (Long et al., 2023), and a shift from solving problems to seeking opportunities that embrace technological progress and artificial intelligence, though noting the unevenness of such opportunities across the North–South divide (Wakimoto, 2018). More relevant to our own findings, the post-2030 discourse also considers the importance of dialectic thought that is able to hold more than one perspective or truth, with the academy needing to play a role in furthering such an approach (Saxena et al., 2021). Keith and Santos (2021, p. 171) close their discussion of collaborative futures for African cities with a recognition that an inside view is needed, in addition to a rigorous analysis that can be conducted from the outside with “critical distance,” but examining and representing the city in a relational way, connecting the local or “inside” with the global.

In what way, then, can the contributions in this book constructively inform a refocus of the NUA and contribute to the post-2030 agenda? This book brings complex local realities into interaction with normative ideas, often reduced to policy buzzwords, at the level of global agenda-setting. Its approach is not an attempt at systematic or comprehensive coverage of themes and regions. As a result, there are regions (e.g. North Africa) and critical themes that the chapters in this book do not cover. None of the chapters engages feminist or environmental frameworks. However, we acknowledge the significance of gender, flow of finance, climate change, and language (as a normative instrument of global dominance) for engagements with the urban future on the African continent. They would be paramount to a research agenda that embraces different realities and approaches and that interacts



with global agenda-setting without being subjected to the hierarchical ranking of knowledge that Mungwini (2013), whom we review below, cautions against. The results presented in this book can therefore be understood as a starting point for further academic inquiry and policy discourse.

### **Epistemologies and research agendas that embrace African urban realities**

There is no single method and framing, understanding of reality, or epistemology that can capture and make sense of the complicated, diverse, and rapidly changing urban situation in Africa. As Murray and Myers (2006, p. 3) observe in this regard, “urbanization is a complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory process that encompasses multiple pathways without a privileged, common end-point.” Reviewing and commenting on shifts in African studies, Bob-Milliar (2020, p. 2) questions the relevance of “methodological approaches . . . designed for research in Western societies,” arguing that they must undergo “some modification before being applied to empirical studies in Africa.” Other scholars have argued for a more fundamental overhaul of knowledge production. Maffie (2009, p. 61) coined the term “polycentric global epistemology,” an approach that recognises multiple “dynamic knowledge practices, sites, or perspectives” that are “inescapably local” and that decentre and provincialise Western epistemologies. Taking this concept further, Mungwini (2013, p. 90) argues that polycentricism recognises that “African epistemology” is neither “synonymous with the inferior Other of the West, nor is it an imitation of its Western counterpart”; rather, “it is defined by its own difference, free from all the hierocratic reasoning and ranking implications implied in history.” As he noted a decade ago, there is an urgency “to identify, apply and problematise the basic African epistemic frameworks and principles in” analysing discourses, and doing so in a way that renders “African traditions useful” not only “to the present” but also to “changing the global knowledge landscape” (Mungwini, 2013, p. 90).

With polycentrism in mind, the editorial team of this book organised the chapters around the non-hierarchical themes of heterogeneity, fluid belongings, persistence, and interplay. However, the chapters themselves are produced within the academy with its own colonial legacy that continues to shape urban knowledge frames and hierarchies in countries such as South Africa and Nigeria, thus placing strictures on knowledge production and presentation. We can therefore not claim that the indigenous authors among us have fully brought their indigeneity and culture into the research and writing, as Mungwini (2013, p. 90) recommends, if “[p]olycentrism also implies liberating the academy.” But, as Legodi and Shai (2021, p. 155) argue, it is vital not to fall into a trap of inherited identity politics, and hence, it is not necessary to be black/African to be Afrocentric and counter the monocentric narrative. Here, we would like to note that the chapter authors’ and editorial

team's positionalities, where relevant, are alluded to in the chapters and briefly explained in the preface. In approaching the book project, we sought to embrace liberating practices in small but meaningful ways, which at times had to be negotiated, so as to produce the chapters in an inclusive, collectively debated and mutually commented, unhierarchical fashion. This has allowed considerable exchange and some adjusting of our individual positionalities. The North–South and South–South collaboration within the team of authors and editors opened windows onto different academic traditions. Whereas we collectively submitted to Anglo-American academic standards (more entrenched in South Africa than in Germany or Nigeria), the exchange helped us question the intensely individualised, ownership-oriented, and hierarchised nature of the Anglo-American or now-global academic project.

The chapters converge around an unease with neat normative framings, often based on an imagined urban ideal drawn from urban contexts in the Global North rather than on an achievable and desirable future for the African context that takes the current reality into account. Some of the chapters put forward alternative knowledge frames. These build on local agency, self-determination, diversity, and acknowledging and working with messy realities rather than wishing these away through neat policy concepts. However, the role of reduction (or representation through a certain simplification) in policy discourse must not be underplayed. This is where normative “buzzwords” in policy, with which this book takes issue, may have their silver lining. Clear framings can more easily inspire and move a discourse forward than those that are seemingly caught up in portraying minute and locally specific detail. Abstraction and reduction are powerful tropes and at times justified, but caution is needed. Here we point to Hall (1997, p. 277), who, in discussing cultural representation, speaks of an ongoing “struggle over meaning” that manifests in a “politics of representation.” Tying this discussion back to Chapter 1 in this book, if the “everyday” is to be sufficiently abstracted to become a term that speaks to the diverse African urban reality in a transformative way, an ongoing struggle over its meaning and meaningfulness will be needed.

Collectively, the chapters in this book push for a paradigm shift in urban development that is accountable to diverse local populations and future generations. This is a call for creating a new meaning of the urban in Africa—one that holds the possibility not only of deeper democracy on the continent but also of diverse voices from the continent participating in the international urban arena. Based on the findings of this book, which we present in the remainder of this section, transformative urban research should develop a rich methodological and thematic agenda incorporating different disciplines and perspectives. This reinforces long-standing calls for a transdisciplinary approach while being aware of its potential shortcomings (Nicolescu, 2002; see also Olayowo, 2023) and may open space for radical incrementalism, as coined by Schram (2015, cited in Krumer-Nevo, 2022) and referring to collaborations with the state that would gradually bend it into reforms.

The recommendations that the chapters in this book provide for further research cover aspects in need of enquiry, data, and understanding, as well as discussions on the nature of the research endeavour. The need to understand the flow of finance, goods, and people is articulated in the broad review by Sihlongonyane (Chapter 2), with a particular pointer to the linkages between what is termed rural and what is termed urban. Elsner (Chapter 13) suggests the need for further research on these flows in relation to the specific ways in which individual cities and economies actually function, the spatial relations on which this depends, and what kinds of infrastructure are needed to support this. Connecting to these research themes, Appelhans (Chapter 4) calls for studies on how financial and corporate interests shape infrastructure innovation and technology in public transport. Research directed at understanding the corporate world has to be complemented with analyses of diverse everyday conditions and practices, as called for by Rawhani and Steigemann (Chapter 3). This includes collecting disaggregated data on people with disabilities (Lawanson, Chapter 5). Misselwitz and Roberts (Chapter 7) in turn call for an increase in the spatialised knowledge base on where refugees and internally displaced people locate in cities and the conditions under which they live.

The chapters also identify the need to research urban development from an African perspective (Chapter 8, Huchzermeyer and Kornienko; Chapter 13, Elsner). In their approach of bringing research on a Global North city (Berlin) into a joint analysis with counterparts from the African continent (Johannesburg and Lagos), two chapters in the book actively break down North–South hierarchies and assumptions about the crisis-ridden exceptionalism of African urban conditions. However, as Misselwitz and Roberts (Chapter 7) argue, these research transformations on their own will not close the policy–practice gap. This means that critical urban research on and from the African continent needs to be integrated into the process of norm-making and policy formulation at the global level as well as the local and national levels, strengthening the iterative process between them. Huchzermeyer and Kornienko (Chapter 8) step back in suggesting a need for enquiry into whether promoting and adopting the radical approach of the right to development, thus opening space for and resourcing pluralism and self-determination in policy and programmes, could lead to more just and culturally responsive everyday lived experiences and realities. This suggests the need for radical action research and modes of solidarity in research in which the distance between theory and practice is closed through the co-production of research in action.

### **Policy implications of the everyday: Heterogeneity, fluid belongings, persistence, and interplay as disruptive concepts**

What conclusions then can be drawn from an edited collection that presents various critical engagements with urban everyday practices and diverse settings on the African continent and, through these, seeks to disrupt globally

accepted normative buzzwords and the way they are used in global agendas? The chapters across the book come to a variety of stances regarding policy implications. This is partly owing to the specific relation between global urban norms and policies on the one side and the local everyday on the other that they describe. Some chapters note that the policies they explore are well formulated but poorly implemented (Chapters 5 and 11), others find the policies they explore are not sensitive to context (Chapters 2, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10), yet others suggest policies are not true to the original intention of the norms they seek to follow (Chapters 3 and 6) and some deal with contexts for which they find that policies are non-existent (Chapter 12). In this section, we will describe some of the insights from the book chapters in relation to the organising concepts of the book. The concepts and policy implications have thereby been excerpted not only from the chapters of the respective sections but also from the chapters beyond.

Referring to the concept of *heterogeneity*, several chapters in this book identify a tension between the imagined ideal reality inherent in many of the norms found in global agendas and the diverse realities that exist in African cities. Norms that universalise and homogenise are a concern across the chapters. A universalising norm that two chapters confront directly is that of “inclusion.” Leuta (Chapter 6) addresses the blunt assumptions on how inclusion can be effected and the absence of actual tools tailored to the reality that the homeless experience. This is compounded by a poor understanding of how people (even those with disabilities) invent spaces and claim their space in cities (Chapter 5, Lawanson), tying back to notions of agency and self-determination. Other chapters confront the homogenising of policy directives, whether related to local transport (Chapter 4, Appelhans), large-scale transport infrastructure (Chapter 13, Elsner), public space (Chapter 3, Rawhani and Steigemann), or housing provided for refugees (Chapter 7, Misselwitz and Roberts). When such norms are translated into targets that set out to measure progress towards compliance with the norms, they are too standardised to engage with the nuanced and diverse forms of progress actually taking place (Chapter 10, Sithagu).

Leading out of the need for a more open-ended and self-determined conceptualisation of urbanity and development comes an important question, namely whether global norms can promote pluralisation rather than projecting an idealised future. To this end, *global norms would need to engage more directly with processes than with ideal solutions*. Appelhans (Chapter 4) calls for negotiation around development models (in this case local public transport systems), so that these are integrated into existing systems and not imposed. This also applies to the development of large-scale, centralised infrastructure. Complementing this, Elsner (Chapter 13) calls for the involvement of the voices of stakeholders in already existing systems, which are often overlooked. At the localised scale, Rawhani and Steigemann (Chapter 3) recommend the embrace of conflict, contestation, and difference rather than the assumption that these can be erased through normatively driven

designs of public space. Similarly, Appelhans (Chapter 4) calls for the recognition of ordinary people's contestation of imposed, homogenising, and ill-fitting public transport norms. This underlines the political nature of urban norm-making, which is all too often wished away. *Projecting an end state is less contestable in policy negotiations than projecting a route or process, as this requires interaction with the political process.*

There are circumstances where policies incorporating global norms around inclusion and belonging are developed with noble intentions. Examples are the disability policy in Nigeria (Chapter 5) and social policy on homelessness in Johannesburg, South Africa (Chapter 6). However, the underlying normative assumptions of sedentariness and belonging in the policies do not reflect the everyday realities of *fluid belongings* (to which one can add "becomings") in the study locations. The complexities of this are presented by the extreme case of homeless habitation in cemeteries where no easy solutions exist within the available policy toolbox (Chapter 6, Leuta). In the case of Johannesburg, the invocation of the policies becomes the central pillar for fomenting harassment, persecution, and castigation of the poor.

The cases of multiple belonging (Chapters 2 and 3), exclusion by inclusive frameworks (Chapter 5), or mobility across institutional realms (Chapters 7 and 10) question the policy assumptions on how to govern certain population groups and suggest that *consideration of everyday realities of vulnerable minority groups must lead to informed reconsiderations of policy formulation.* At the same time, decision makers should not assume that those who have found a home in officially unplanned-for spaces can easily be uprooted and moved (Chapter 6, Leuta; Chapter 8, Huchzermeyer and Kornienko) or that these residents do not have the ability to contest being moved or excluded (Chapters 8 and 5). Thus, as Lawanson's narrative (Chapter 5) suggests in relation to vulnerable minorities, such as people living with disabilities, a *finetuning of engagement approaches, and processes leading to true inclusion,* are required to ensure that the voices and realities are acted upon in supportive ways.

Several chapters identify the agency of ordinary people through *persistence* to derive norms based on their needs in terms of public space (Chapter 3, Rawhani and Steigemann), particularly when considering people with disabilities (Chapter 5, Lawanson). However, this agency is limited by precariousness, uncertainty, and temporariness (Chapter 7, Misselwitz and Roberts). At the same time, it can be resourceful in a less benign way, with exploitation and power coming into play in bottom-up processes (Chapter 10, Sithagu).

Far from idealising these diverse realities and the agency on which they depend, it must also be acknowledged that states' mismatched policies are implicated in the need for ordinary people to constantly break rules to get by (Chapter 9, Oyalowo). Not all "alternatives" are alternatives by choice. They can also arise from an exploitation from below of the mismatch, and therefore of the unmet demand (Chapter 10, Sithagu). Exploitation or interest in maintaining the status quo also manifests from above, through active

undermining of democratic processes, even when these are guaranteed by constitutions (Chapter 11, Onifade *et al.*). Taking the notion of agency further, Huchzermeyer and Kornienko (Chapter 8) point to community solidarity and self-determination, which is often underestimated. Their chapter shows how ordinary people are capable of self-determining their development trajectories; however, this is undermined by their being framed as informal. Indeed, development models, whether for refugees or residents of “informal” settlements, are often based on “paternalistic care” rather than support for self-determination (Chapter 7, Misselwitz and Roberts). Some cases studied in this book show that cities on the African continent resist deterministic models and the underlying norms that prevail in legislation, policy, and plans placed onto these cities, which instead have demonstrated path-dependence (Chapters 4, 6 and 13). However, some of the cases show that, at the same time, a combination of the poor fit of these models and a divergence of interests in the implementation, if not non-implementation, has led to an urban self-determination from below (Chapters 4 and 8). Policy revision based on these insights would foreground *empowerment and the necessary enablement that is aimed not at rolling back the state but instead at its reorientation into a support role, rather than meaningless or biased regulation.*

Speaking to questions of governance across scales and systems, the question of *interplay* has been centred in a number of chapters. Democracy is embraced in many African constitutions, but government institutions, as shown in Onifade *et al.* (Chapter 11), often do not function democratically. As a result, many countries in Africa have constitutions without constitutionalism and the rule of law, meaning that the constitution exists but the politics is not submissive to the law (Grimm, 2010). Global urban norms should acknowledge this reality and the extent to which non-credible or compromised government institutions undermine idealised policy intent. Can global norm-making in any way contribute to empowering municipalities and ordinary people to determine the shape and direction of development, as called for by Onifade *et al.* (Chapter 11)? Whereas there is a need in many cases for *transformation in grassroots formations to ensure integrity and commitment to democratic principles*, we also underline the importance of *local government autonomy and integrity in terms of its responsiveness to grassroots constituents. This synergy, when achieved, provides a starting point for effecting relevant self-determination.* As suggested by Appelhans (Chapter 4) and Onifade *et al.* (Chapter 11), *global urban norms should promote the capacity and autonomy of local governments to ensure locally informed and negotiated decisions suitable to local circumstances.* This also applies to urbanised areas in borderland regions, where decision makers tend to override human socio-economic development with concerns over national security (Chapter 12, Ojo, Faniran and Huchzermeyer). In this case, regional inter-state negotiations and agreements play an important role in the political landscape. Less clear in the implications for future policy is the case of competing governance systems (Chapter 10, Sithagu), where democratic, traditional, and

pseudo-traditional governance systems expose a current bias of global urban norms towards systems of linear governance.

The recommendations across the chapters in this book thereby go beyond a call for global norms to “travel better” as policymakers transfer them from global agendas and commitments into national and local policies and programmes. This extends to respect for diverse spatialities and the need to “develop” where people already are (Chapter 2, Sihlongonyane). This argument echoes through various chapters that call for recognition of the spatiality of overlooked types of urbanisation, be they border towns (Chapter 12, Ojo, Faniran and Huchzermeyer) or displaced urbanisation (Chapter 10, Sithagu), but also habitation that is established in places not officially planned for (Chapter 8, Huchzermeyer and Kornienko). Further, there is a need for new terms that recognise, for instance, what “development” and “developed” mean to different societies in terms of urban space (Chapter 2, Sihlongonyane). The mainstream meaning of “development” is questioned by the conceptualisation of the right to development, with self-determination in the foreground. Two chapters actively call for recognition and embrace of self-determination. Huchzermeyer and Kornienko (Chapter 8) recommend recognition of the housing and neighbourhoods created and aspired to by so-called “informal” settlement dwellers. Misselwitz and Roberts (Chapter 7) recommend the creation of living environments for refugees in a way that embraces interstitial and invented spaces, as well as self-provisioning, supported by strategic assistance. There is a concrete recommendation that the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development (UN, 1986) be used to inform a different kind of development decision-making (Chapter 8, Huchzermeyer and Kornienko). As yet, as this book has only covered a small set of cases in a limited number of locations, there is further need for exploration on the disruptive themes generated in this book and on topics beyond this scope.

### **Concluding pointers for agenda-setting**

In this book, we are concerned with the misalignments or chasms between normative ideas in international frameworks and local realities on the African continent. We find that these arise because the world has been seen and read from vantage points other than from within the continent. Robinson (2006, p. 39) contributes to the struggle over the meaning of the urban when she argues that “[p]arochial [Western] descriptions of urban ways of life have sedimented into universalizing theories of cities, with disturbing consequences.” In a persistent continuity with modernisation theory, international development agencies such as UN-Habitat and the World Bank have used Europe and North America as their reference points. O’Shaughnessy (2008, p. 5) points out that this is a function of a hegemonic urban view that invariably focuses on certain visible economic distinctions that overlook the alternate, often invisible patterns that make “other” cities work in alternative ways.

The findings across the chapters of this book show that there is a need to shift the mindset through which Africa and the Global South in general are viewed within the making of global frameworks. Historical and contemporary processes have led to a dominance of Western modernist ideals essentialised in many global, regional, and national policies (Robinson, 2006; Cociña et al., 2019). Notwithstanding encounters and currents in a number of directions (Watson, 2012, cited in Cociña et al., 2019), processes underpinning Western knowledge domination include resource and power imbalances in knowledge production, circulation, and the validation of this knowledge at the global negotiation table; imbalances may be between organisations such as the World Bank and community organisations (see McFarlane, 2006, cited in Cociña et al., 2019) or between regions (Cociña et al., 2019). At the same time, recent shifts in geo-political alignments have strengthened the negotiating positions of the Arab oil states and Chinese economic interests related to urban issues (Colombo and Lecha, 2021). This changing set of dynamics calls for a rigorous interrogation of the attitudes, methods, and means of policymaking, policy transfer, and policy implementation, to prevent processes of knowledge domination, especially those intended for the construction of exploitative economic links or control. At this juncture, Mungwini (2013, p. 83) calls for the championing of “partisan knowledge” that is focused on “the interests of African peoples” and uses “an Afrocentric orientation to, and vision of, knowledge production.” Rather than being an antithesis of Eurocentricity by merely shifting the centre and the universal meaning, Afrocentricity focuses on multi-centricity and pluralistic viewpoints and is thus an alternative concept (Legodi and Shai, 2021).

Bringing Africa more effectively into agenda-making requires dialogue between academics, regional bodies, and political representatives, ensuring these are engaged in transformative urban research more seriously, while at the same time committing to resourcing such research enquiry. The African Union (AU), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and UN-Habitat should partner more effectively to allow both a better flow of understanding and alignment. An important challenge for scholars on the African continent and the knowledge institutions at which they are based is to find ways to insert research insights into the negotiated process of agenda-setting, which is often dominated by well-resourced think tanks that outsource research to knowledge consultants. Whereas academics may serve in that capacity, such assignments compromise the critical depth of enquiries. Means must be found for the results of in-depth scholarly enquiries to feature on the radar of regional decision-making bodies, in particular the AU. Interaction and dialogues with a wide range of researchers, rather than a selection of consultants, must serve to inform African positions in negotiations towards the global agenda. This renders research political—a dimension from which academic scholars ought not to shy away. At the same time, North–South collaborations will remain an important feature that resources and inspires the African research landscape. However, beyond Global North



scholars collaborating with African scholars on knowledge production in urban Africa, there is a growing rationale for North–South comparison and reading the cities of the Global North through new lenses generated from insight gained from studying contradiction, ambiguities and, indeed, heterogeneity, fluidity, persistence, and interplay, as suggested by the organising principles in this book.

Dialogues with “others” and the creation of platforms to hear omitted and silenced voices respectfully, ethically, and empathically can act as an antidote to the disempowerment of lasting colonial imposition. Such approaches will bring policy imperatives to speak to experiences of local issues so that they can effectively deal with colonisation, environmental disasters, gender dynamics, and spiritual realities in context. This could enable UN-Habitat to develop policies that are context sensitive, where the maximum number of decisions possible can be within the effective reach of as many people as possible.

The chapters in this book support the notion that frames that are overly universalising may be disrupted productively when their translation into national and local policy is scrutinised, their implications for diverse and complex everyday realities are presented, or they are viewed directly against that reality. As laid out in Chapter 1, such disruption, we hope, may open space for an embrace of local specificity and plurality, without falling into the trap of “scattered representation” and “fragmentation” that Lefebvre (2003/1970, p. 158) warns of in the theory and practice of urbanists.

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