



Politics and the practice of planning: The case of Zimbabwean cities



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ABSTRACT

Planning is intrinsically a political process. This paper explores how the practice and profession of planning has been affected by politics. Available evidence in Zimbabwe shows that planning is problematized by unsettled national and local politics. However, contested politics can distort the intentions of a sound planning system through advancing political interests of politicians, the ruling elite. Interviews with political actors and planners allow an understanding of how politics has virtually eroded, if not eliminated, a sound planning system. This paper illustrates three dimensions of the relationship between politics and planning. First, the political contestation between the ruling and opposition party has severely undermined planning and its contribution towards coordinated development in cities. Second, planners often succumb to the politics of patronage at the expense of urban residents and town planning principles. Third, the integrity and credibility of planning is seemingly under constant threat from political actors.

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1. Introduction

Planning is defined as a 'self-conscious collective effort to imagine or re-imagine a town, city, urban region or wider territory and to translate the result into priorities for area investment, conservation measures, new and upgraded areas of settlement, strategic infrastructure investments and principles of land-use regulation' (Healey, 2004: 46). Thus, people who conduct planning as a profession are called planners. Planners are people who have received some professional and/or academic training in planning (UN-Habitat, 2009). The conduct of planning depends on planning systems defined as the 'institutional, legal, regulatory and policy framework, and rationalities, techniques, and ideologies' that inform and guide planning (Kamete, 2009: 898). These planning systems exist globally but differ contextually, based on the socio-economic-political relations of power in a particular society (Williams, 2000).

In the global South, rapid urbanisation is a common feature, especially in the age of globalisation (Castells, 2012). Urbanisation is managed through a process called planning (UN-Habitat, 2009). In this regard, the way cities are planned and managed is therefore fundamental in reaching Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, in particular, in global South cities, where there exist widespread contestations over the planning and management of cities. Through SDG 11, the international community committed itself to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' by 2030 (UN, 2016). This means, among other things, that cities have to be inclusive, through addressing

exclusion from the city and exclusion and segregation in the city (McGranahan, Schensul, & Singh, 2016). It is in this regard that the conduct of planners and planning approaches are important aspects that contribute to the achievement of SDG 11.

Planning plays a fundamental role in politics and communities subject to existing political regimes (Miller, Sahama, Grace, Wilson, & Hefferan, 2011). Whilst much attention at the global level has been given to urbanisation; little has been done to understand people who plan and manage cities—planners. Thus, the reality is that 'the role and expertise of planners remains largely invisible and poorly understood' (Dredge & Coiacetto, 2006: 29). In many instances, planners are subservient to the whims of politics and politicians. Such a reality compromises the independence and integrity of the planning profession.

Planning deals with the configuration of space, though space is highly contentious (Crawford, 2009). In particular, planning engages with the distribution of competing land-uses. Hence, by nature, planning is a conflict generating activity. As such, politicians tend to use power and authority to resolve such conflict often citing 'public interest'. Yet, in some instances, they will be protecting private and personal interests.

This paper focuses on how Zimbabwe's politics affects the profession and practice of planning. Primarily, such a focus is driven by the unsettled nature of the country's politics which has spilled into planning. The political environment in Zimbabwe is also of greater importance in the sense that planning is caught up between two contesting political parties—Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) controlling the national government and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) controlling the majority of the urban local authorities. We define politics as formal and informal power relations among actors such as central government, local authorities, political

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parties, and non-state actors. In addition, the relations between central and local governments have been frosty (Muchadenyika & Williams, 2016) and therefore, the paper explores the effects of such relations on planners in a highly contested political environment. Further focus is placed on Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order (OM/RO), a campaign against informal housing and economic activities implemented by the Government of Zimbabwe in 2005. It is through OM/RO that the role of planners came to the fore. In this regard, we explore the public image of the planning profession after such a demolition campaign.

This paper is structured as follows. After a brief introduction, we provide a critique of how politics and planning have been conceived in extant literature. Thereafter, the paper provides the context of planning and politics in Zimbabwe by indicating key political issues and programmes which influenced planning *in situ* such as economic structural adjustment programmes, land reform programme, politics of urban control and OM/RO. Next, we explain how data for this paper was collected. The paper moves to a discussion on central-local relations and planners, planners and turbulent politics and OM/RO and the planning profession. The paper concludes by critically assessing the credibility and integrity of planning.

2. Politics and planning

Studies on politics and planning have focused on motivations and experiences of planners (Miller et al., 2011); engagement of political actors in spatial planning (Walsh, 2014); planners and politicians (Krumholz, 2001); relations between planners and politicians (Campbell, 2001); politics of difference in planning (Iveson, 2000); planning amidst conflicting societies (Fenster, 2004) and preparing planners to deal with 21st century challenges (Sandercock, 1997) among others.

Planning has been used to portray 'contradictory expressions and belonging of Jews and Palestinians in Israel' (Fenster, 2004: 403). In this case, planning has thus been the main method to which fights over territory and belonging affect the built environment. In post-war Naples, Allum (2003) examines how politicians thwarted the implementation of planning policies such as master plans. In particular, the study argues how private interests of real estate developers were championed by politicians (in return for campaign funds) at the expense of sound town planning.

Politics comes with the exercise of power. Here, power is defined as 'a general matrix of force relations at a given time, in a given society' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 186), where 'certain actions structure the field of other possible actions' (Foucault, 1983: 222). In this regard, the practice and profession of planning navigates through power differences. In relation to power and planners, Forester (1989) argues that understanding of power relations by planners helps the planner's decision making. As such, often institutional actors who wield more power tend to dictate planning processes to citizens, based on among others, how and when resources are allocated to planning programmes at grassroots level.

In other sub-Saharan African cities such as Maputo, it has been argued that planning by the state has limited practical impact with non-state actors playing a vital role in shaping urban development (Anderson, Jenkins, & Nielsen, 2015). Other political actors such as coalitions of the urban poor, community based organisations and civil society organisations have profound impact on how planning shapes the form and structure of cities. Various actors in planning processes means among other considerations that planners have to mediate contradictory interests. Moreover, in African cities, urban residents are building cities using a grassroots approach which is contrary to state-led top-down approach to planning (Jenkins, 2013).

Flyvbjerg (1998: 322) argues that in mainstream planning approaches, issues shaping planning 'are defined more by stable power relations than by antagonistic confrontations'. However, in a context where politics and power are both inherently and deeply contested,

the conduct of planning becomes tenuous and problematic. In Zimbabwe, tension between central and local governments has revolved around politics associated with land for urban planning and housing development (Muchadenyika, 2015a). In this instance, central government has seemingly usurped the powers of local authorities in determining planning processes and outcomes. On the other hand, local authorities have accused central government of running a parallel urban planning system.

The preceding discussion implies that planning is inherently a political process. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to understand how planners conduct planning in the face of contested politics. Before proceeding to such analysis, the paper provides the context of politics and planning in Zimbabwe and the research methodology used to empirically ground this article.

3. Politics and planning in Zimbabwe: the context

In colonial Zimbabwe, planning has been used as an instrument of white settler control and restriction (Potts, 2011). In the post-independence era, planning has mainly been used as an instrument to re-organise the society and economy as well as advancing political interests and objectives of the ruling regime. In essence, planning was and is used as a tool to achieve national development goals as well as political objectives of the ruling elite. However, where planning militates against the interests and objectives of the ruling elite, it is either ignored or rendered useless (Muchadenyika, 2015a).

This section highlights four main issues or programmes which had profound influence on planning in Zimbabwe. First, in the 1990s, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) resulted in the formal adoption by the government of non-residential activities in residential zones. This is despite that these informal activities existed way before the 1990s. Such non-residential activities (such as medical resource institutions and centres; shops and offices; service industry; warehousing and general maintenance; storage and special industrial use) were permitted through Statutory Instrument 216 of 1994 in residential areas (GoZ, 1994). Urban economies in sub-Saharan Africa were profoundly altered by structural adjustment programmes (Potts, 2006a). In Zimbabwe, structural adjustment programmes also precipitated the sudden rise in informal business, popularly referred to as home industries. In the Zimbabwean context, a home industry is 'a site legally zoned for small scale urban informal economic activities' (Kamete, 2004: 120). Home industries were initiated in the 1990s as part of the government's indigenisation and economic empowerment drive (Jones, 2010). The permission of industrial activities within residential zones meant that planning was supposed to deal with inherent issues emanating from mixed-zoning. In brief, structural adjustment programmes challenged and changed the conventional approach to planning.

Second, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) which started in 2000 has extreme and far reaching implications to coherent urban planning and development in cities (Muchadenyika, 2015a). In fact, the programme reversed planning procedures of layout planning, surveying, servicing and occupation. In other words, the land reform programme transgressed the bureaucratised and technocratic planning system in Zimbabwe. Due to the chaotic manner in which the FTLRP was executed and the politics associated with it, returning to the use of rational planning frameworks faces enormous opposition (Marongwe, 2011). Planners became enmeshed between adhering to planning principles and government's radical objective of land redistribution. In a way, town planning was set aside, as it became difficult to stand in the way of the FTLRP with logical arguments without being a victim of harassment both professionally and physically. The wilful disregard of planning is evidenced by the lack of planning, infrastructure and basic services in most rural and urban settlements which developed during and after the land reform programme (see Matondi, 2012).

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