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‘Negotiated planning’: Diverse trajectories of implementation in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Harare

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ABSTRACT

This paper unpacks how plans are implemented in three African cities: Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Harare. Three planning implementation instruments form the basis of the comparison across cities. These instruments aim to give effect to plans and include development regulation, infrastructure investment, and land allocation. In contrast to reading African planning efforts as a catalogue of failures, this analysis allows us to see the many actors and complex alliances and dissonances which play out through implementation. Here we propose the concept of ‘negotiated planning’ as a useful conceptual tool. We argue that the concept is useful for: its departure from normative assumptions about good or proper planning; unpacking the everyday nature of implementation; grounding and contextualising practices; and depathologizing the African city.

1. Introduction

Spatial planning is seen as central to fixing the challenges which rapidly urbanising cities face. Emerging consensus over the necessity and centrality of planning has been solidified through the UN Habitat ‘New Urban Agenda Debates’, which form part of the Habitat III preparations, and will likely feature heavily in the final commitments (Turok, 2016). Never has it been a better time to question if our understanding of planning, particularly in African cities, is sufficient.

In African cities, planning is often seen as a failure. Most of the planning literature focusses on the departures from ‘good practice’ (Myers & Murray, 2006; Pieterse, 2010). Centralised plan-making, rigid regulations, lack of implementation capacity, abuses of human rights, corruption and many more negative traits are associated with planning and planners in African cities. It would be irresponsible to suggest that these critiques are wholly incorrect. However, as Goodfellow (2013) points out, the implementation of plans across and between cities varies considerably. Variation is even more obvious when implementation is disaggregated into specific planning implementation tools, as we do in this paper.

In line with this thinking, Watson (2013) calls for a shift in planning theory, away from normative frameworks and assessments and towards a study of planning contexts and practices. Understanding context requires unpacking particularities of places and focussing on what is actually happening. In response to these calls, we have explored the actual practices of plan implementation in Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Harare across three planning implementation tools – investment in infrastructure, regulation of development, and land allocation. These three tools are important ways in which states work to materially shape urban outcomes and implement urban plans.

We argue that planning implementation and outcomes in African cities can best be described as ‘negotiated’. This negotiation is not a product of discursive and collaborative decision-making towards a shared vision, but rather built on persistent and power-laden compromises, contests, and deals among various arms of the state, civil society, and the local and international private sector (in particular developers and lenders). It reflects the actions and agendas of a whole range of stakeholders who together work to configure a fragile system which is constituted through and co-constitutive of each urban context.

This paper contributes to the refinement of a comparative approach in urban studies (McFarlane, 2010; Myers, 2011, 2014; Roy, 2009; Watson, 2009a). Within the growing debate on comparing cities (particularly in the global south), there is growing

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emphasis on exploring difference, rather than searching for sameness (Robinson, 2014). To this end, the research utilised the multi-case method, a critical mode of inquiry within the study of cities (Duminy et al., 2014; Yin, 2003). The purpose is both to compare cases, recognising the incredible difference among African cities, as well as use the cases to jointly speak into existing planning theory.

Interviews with local and national officials, developers, parastatals, academics, and NGOs aimed to understand the nature of planning implementation, paying particular attention to the actors and practices involved. The interviews and a detailed policy review were conducted between December 2014 and June 2015. The structure of the paper includes a selective review of the literature on planning in African cities. Following this, the paper unpacks the planning implementation practices in the three cities, focussing on the explicit and tacit negotiations among actors implicated in urban spatial outcomes. Finally, there is a discussion on the implications of the case findings for planning theory and practice, in particular the value of the concept of 'negotiated planning'.

2. Spatial planning in African cities: a review of key concepts

2.1. Spatial planning

There has been much debate about what planning is and how it happens. Peter Hall (1992) describes planning as "the making of an orderly sequence of action that will lead to the achievement of a stated goal or goals" (3). Cities, Healey (2006) argues, have been planned, using various instruments and to differing extents, since their inception.

Spatial planning (also called physical planning) is a particular type of planning, focused on the making of spatial order. The core scale of the town or city is of particular significance as it is usually at this scale that the urban spatial planning apparatus is constructed (Hall, 2014). Healey (2006) identifies spatial planning as unique from other forms of planning (such as economic or operational) in its focus on spatial plans and their implementation. Spatial plans are forward looking and two dimensional visions of how a town, city, or region should look. Historically, master plans were the core tool of spatial planning. Master plans are a complete spatial picture of the future of an area (Goodfellow, 2013). Academics have criticized the rationalist tendencies of master planning, advocating for more strategic and less prescriptive planning instruments (Fainstein, 2000; Healey, 1992; Winkler & Duminy, 2016). This has led to a move towards spatial development frameworks, strategic plans and other new tools.

Within the literature on urban planning implementation, focus is generally on regulation (Goodfellow, 2013). This is largely because it tends to be the core implementation tool which the planning department itself has in its purview (Ennis, 1977). However, regulation is just one aspect of plan implementation. Infrastructure investment and land allocation practices, when viewed in conjunction with regulatory efforts, in fact make up a fuller picture of the implementation toolbox.

This framework for thinking about urban spatial planning, in terms of land use regulation, guided infrastructure investment and land allocation, is particularly useful as it brings to the fore the many tools with which states work to influence the spatial direction of urban areas. These tools are discussed in more detail below:

- **Regulatory controls:** Land use regulations are the rules which indicate how land in particular areas can be used and developed (Goodfellow, 2013). Common land use regulations include: building codes pertaining to the development of physical structures and the standards of construction, minimum standards or guidelines for the provision of infrastructures (e.g. road width, public space, service levels), zoning regulations and schemes, density regulations including minimum plot size and subdivision regulation and 'floor area ratios'.
- **Infrastructure investment:** Infrastructure investment is the material development of systems which provide necessary urban services. Water, sanitation, electricity, and road development can be used to realise urban plans. Infrastructure works to 'open up' new areas for development or creates additional bulk capacity where intensification is desired.
- **Land governance:** Turok (2016) defines land governance as 'the institutions and mechanisms that allocate land to appropriate uses within urban areas, including property rights, land valuation systems and rules that control property development' (35). These systems have profound impacts on the spatial development of urban areas. Most economists argue that market-based systems are much more efficient at allocating land based on the principle of 'best and highest use' (Alexander, 2001).

The connected logic of these tools (and the systems which underpin them) requires explanation. Turok (2016) describes this as the 'urban land-infrastructure-finance nexus'. This logic rests on a reinforcing cycle of activities. The urban land use regulations set out the criteria, indicators, standards and rules in terms of which the state regulates land use and development. The land use and forward planning frameworks guide the type and location of investment in different infrastructures. The nett effect of these two land use activities is the creation of better living and working conditions for society, through the promotion of a higher quality urban environment and the rationing of opportunities for land development by the public. This leads to more efficient and increased investment in urban land by the private and public sectors and rising land values, which in turn leads to increased revenue to government (and especially local government). Therein lies the inherent logic that drives planning-led urban management: land use regulation and planning creates land value, which translates into increased state revenues, which then enables the state to invest more in the human and other capabilities needed to manage and enhance the urban environment. Where the underlying land tenure, land market, and land governance conditions are weak or compromised, the cycle described above cannot even begin to move. Not surprisingly, this ideal falters when plans and regulations fail to trigger private and public investment or when tax and budget systems fail to capture and distribute rising values.

Spatial planning, since its inception, has embodied normative assumptions about what makes for a 'good city' (Healy, 2006). Plans, regulations, and land systems have been designed and pursued with the intention of realising these normative goals. In this case, 'good' takes clearly spatial and often aesthetic forms, and is premised on the revenue-generating value of planning. Within planning discourses, attention is not only given to what a good plan looks like, but also what good planning processes, to arrive at this plan, would be. Two important themes which continue to resonate in current debates are that planning should be based, firstly, on evidence and data and, secondly, on participatory or collaborative decision-making. These are dicussed below:

- **Data:** In the lineage of the European Enlightenment movement, physical planning was seen as a scientific practice, the outcomes of which could be best achieved through rational, technological, and analytical reasoning (Healey, 2006). The logic was that data and the scientific method should be used to inform plan-making (Davoudi, 2006, 2012; Krizek, Forysth, & Slotterback, 2009). Even in cases where it is recognized that planning is contested