



A review of spatial planning in Ghana's socio-economic development trajectory: A sustainable development perspective



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 August 2014

Received in revised form 27 February 2015

Accepted 20 April 2015

Keywords:

Ghana

Spatial planning

Sustainable development

Urbanisation

Urban governance

Spatial development framework

Integrated development plan

ABSTRACT

This study provides a review of spatial planning in the context of Ghana's socio-economic development trajectory. Spatial planning has been integral to the economic policies of the country since colonial rule. Yet, its role has been overshadowed by the domain of socio-economic planning. Drawing from published literature, policy documents, legislative frameworks and interviews, this study reveals the different context and scope within which spatial planning has been implemented in Ghana, and the successes and failures thereof. While the colonial governments employed spatial planning on limited scale and for exploitative purposes, post-colonial governments have implemented broad-based planning grounded in the 'genuine' aspiration to promote a spatially balanced development. This study argues that post-independence planning has not been successfully implemented compared to pre-independence planning due to a myriad of factors including rapid urban growth, inadequate staffing, low capacity, lack of institutional coordination, political interference in planning, complex land tenure and evolving land markets among others. Consequently, urban centres in Ghana are beset with problems such as poor environmental conditions, poor infrastructure and service delivery, and uncontrolled growth; and these are inimical to sustainable urban development. The study lauds renewed efforts to transform planning in the spirit of sustainable development through the national urban policy framework and a proposed land use and spatial planning bill; the latter proposes planning based on spatial development framework, and a repeal of an obsolete 1945 planning ordinance that has underlain planning since. It is argued that if supported and harmonised the two initiatives present the best planning framework in the 21st century Ghana.

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1. Introduction

Spatial planning is often employed to manage one of the most valuable naturally endowed resources, land. Land is of central importance to the socio-economic development of people and nations as almost all human activities occur in space. The importance of land can be grasped from its key characteristics, among which include its finite nature (Duke and Wu, 2014), it provides direct livelihood sustenance to a large number of people but with declining per capita (De Wit and Verheye, 2003; Foresight, 2011; Lambin and Meyfroidt, 2011), it supports ecosystem services that are vital to the environment and humanity (Ahern et al., 2014; Andersson et al., 2014; Bierbaum et al., 2014), and also its socio-politico-religious functions that accord identity and sense of belonging to the people (Foresight, 2010; Fuseini, 2014; Kasanga, 2001). The emergence of the concept of sustainable development

has added another dimension to the need for judicious planning as the former seeks to integrate economic development with environmental and social equity.

Increasing competition for space among human activities has been the motivating factor for the practice of land use planning (Pacione, 2009). Rapid urbanisation is set to increase this competition and stake more claim for prudent management of land resources in the 21st century. This will especially be the case in the developing world which is forecast to be the epicentre of future urban growth (Angel et al., 2011; Cohen, 2004, 2006; Kundu, 2012; Montgomery, 2008; Oldfield, 2014; Roy, 2014). It is projected that as much as 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050, and most of the growth is expected in the developing world (Montgomery, 2008; UN-Habitat, 2009). The rapid urban population growth has been associated with demographic dimension of declining densities and spatial expansion of urbanised areas (Angel et al., 2011). For instance, between 1980 and 2000 urbanised areas of the developing world increased by about 118% (Singh and Asgher, 2005). According to Angel et al. (2011), while the world's urban population is expected to double in 43 years, the

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corresponding urban land cover is expected to double in only 19 years. The authors further intimate that between 2000 and 2030 the developing world is likely to witness a doubling of its urban population but a tripling of its urban land cover.

These projected trends of urbanisation and related processes in the developing countries present yet another urgent need for land management, in terms of urban land use planning in a broader sense of urban governance, so as to achieve sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in particular. Proper land use planning can contribute to effective management of urbanisation as the 1947 United Kingdom planning system is reported to have achieved its twin goals of curbing spatial sprawl and protecting good quality agricultural land (Pacione, 2009). Yet, many a developing country city managers are often faced with limited capability to cope with and manage such huge urbanisation engendered land use competition in a sustainable manner (Montgomery, 2008; Pacione, 2009; UN-Habitat, 2009).

It is in this context that this study sets out to review spatial planning in the socio-economic trajectories of Ghana, a rapidly urbanising West African nation. Assessing the role of spatial planning in urban governance in the Ghanaian context is relevant in that Ghana is only one of four countries in West Africa (and one of 21 in Africa) with more urban than rural population – similar to global trends of a more urban world (Obeng-Odoom, 2013). Ghana's demographic dynamics have shifted from predominantly rural at independence (70%) in 1957 to over 50% urban presently (Andoh and Dodoo, 2014; Ghana Statistical Service, 2012; Government of Ghana, 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2013).

Geographically, colonial investment and planning created imbalanced spatial development where resource rich areas received most of the infrastructural development with very little or none in the resource poor areas, notably northern Ghana (Adarkwa, 2012; Dickson, 1968; Songsore, 2003, 2009). Therefore, retrospective analysis of pre-independence planning suggests that an important ingredient of sustainable development, equity, was missing because there was no social and spatial equity in planning. Post-independence governments have attempted to promote spatially balanced development through planning. Yet, questions remain as to how successful these have been in terms of approach and results. Particularly, how does spatial planning in Ghana respond to the rapid urbanisation, increased land use competition and international and national demand for sustainable development? Adarkwa (2012) notes urban land use planning and governance weaknesses in contemporary Ghanaian cities. Similarly, Boamah (2013) and Boamah et al. (2012) have also noted development control challenges in the Offinso South and Wa Municipalities, which may apply to many Ghanaian Metropolitan, Municipal and District authorities. Obeng-odoom (2013, p. ix) goes further to assert that “urban governance in Ghana has . . . produced predominantly ineffective and inequalitarian” outcomes, the result being growing inequality in Ghanaian cities. The Ghanaian experience adds an interesting twist to the argument as to whether or not urbanisation in Africa impacts positively on the continent's development (see for example Njoh, 2003; Obeng-Odoom, 2010a; The World Bank, 1999), especially the scope of such benefits or otherwise across the economic and social strata of society.

What are the implications then: is there the need for different planning approaches to promote the country's socio-economic development in a sustainable way? And what form should such approaches take? These are some of the concerns that motivate this study. Consequently, this investigation contributes to our understanding of managing the rapid urbanisation processes, through planning, in Ghana in ways that promote effective integration of the social, economic and environmental facets of development. Even though a great deal of research has been done on urbanisation and related management issues in Ghana (e.g. Adarkwa, 2012; Boamah,

2013; Boamah et al., 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2010b, 2012, 2013; Otiso and Owusu, 2008; Owusu, 2010; Songsore, 2009; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom, 2010; Yeboah et al., 2013; Yeboah, 2000), the present study seeks an historical review of spatial planning in the socio-economic development trajectories of Ghana; with special highlight of new developments that are geared towards improving spatial planning for the attainment of better urban governance and sustainable development.

Structurally, an overview of the concept of sustainable development in urban governance follows this introductory section. In Section 3, the methodology for the investigation is presented, which leads to the substantive matter of spatial planning and development in Ghana. The first part of the main presentation (Section 4) concerns an historical discussion at three distinct planning periods – pre-independence, post-independence, and contemporary eras – in terms of the scope, successes and failures relative to the concept of sustainable development (which essentially seeks an integration of the social, economic and environmental components of development). The second part of the presentation (Section 5) will then focus on new developments in Ghanaian spatial planning, highlighting the key features as well as whether or not such development presents better planning approaches to those witnessed in the planning history of Ghana. This is done by drawing on the historical presentation and relating it to the recent developments with a view to highlighting lessons learnt in the concluding section of the paper.

2. Conceptualising sustainable development in urban governance

Since its emergence during the later part of the 20th century, the concept of sustainable development has enjoyed a wide acceptance in different dimensions of development including in the practice of [urban] land use planning and management. Thus, it has become quite common to encounter expressions such as “planning sustainable cities”, “sustainable urbanisation”, “sustainable land use planning”, “sustainable urban development” among others (Berke and Conroy, 2000; Drakakis-Smith, 1995, 1996, 1997; Kruger, 2014; Rapoport, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2009, 2012, 2014). It may be argued that the popularity of the concept emanates from the high level political platform it enjoyed, its core proposition for integrating economic and social development with environmental issues as well as its future-centredness regarding development discourse (De Wit and Verheye, 2003).

Urban land use planning is increasingly being perceived as a major role-player in achieving sustainable development as more of the world's population now live in urban areas amid challenges such as environmental degradation, food insecurity and spatial sprawl (Berke and Conroy, 2000; Satterthwaite, 2007; UN-Habitat, 2009). This recognition has been associated with efforts at designing planning schemes that promote sustainable development agenda (Angel et al., 2011; Berke and Conroy, 2000; Chobokoane and Horn, 2014; Rapoport, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2009). However, integrating the three core elements of sustainable development – economic development, environmental/ecological preservation and social development and/or equity – into land use planning is not without conflicts (Angel et al., 2011; Godschalk, 2004; Rapoport, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2009). These conflicts relate to the procedures and means of attaining sustainable development, which in turn concerns how to balance the trade-offs that emerge from the integration process. Some scholars are also of the view that there are inherent contradictions in the concept of sustainable development that foster these conflicts in attempts to apply sustainable development principles in land use planning (Godschalk, 2004). Owens and Cowell (2002) state that:

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