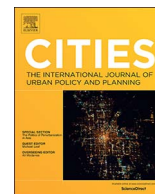


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Doing it ‘ourselves’: Civic initiative and self-governance in spatial planning

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, an analysis of civic initiatives to collectively realise a particular community ambition amongst informal settlers in a Ghanaian metropolitan area is presented. This community ambition is grounded in collective intent with no government or city authority intervention. Using secondary data review and interviews conducted in two selected neighbourhoods in the Accra Metropolitan Area, the findings show that self-governance mechanism has the potential to support informal settlers' capacity in terms of adapting to changing environmental situations by mutual cooperation and consensus building. The paper recommends a relook of planners' role in spatial planning in Ghana, emphasising a shift from development decision making to actors and facilitators of socio-spatial initiatives by community residents. This changing role may lead to suppression of the negatives and maximisation of the positives of self-governed initiatives for the benefit of society.

1. Introduction

The last few years have witnessed a remarkable shift in both planning theory and practice (Allmendinger, 2009). Fundamentally, this shift involved the growing awareness of a world beyond planners control: a non-linear world. Here, planners no longer seek certainty, they instead act as advocates and facilitators for actors involved in the planning process (De Roo, 2010). Similarly, governments and policy makers have emphasised the need to encourage self-organising civic initiatives of communities to supplement the services provided by the welfare state (Boonstra, 2015; Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2016). This signifies a move towards self-governance in spatial planning. Civic initiatives – conceptualised as bottom-up development or grass-root initiatives (Miazzo & Kee, 2014; Newman, 2011) – involve active engagement of citizens and non-governmental actors in making decisions to serve specific community interest beyond the spheres of ongoing public policy.

Essential to understanding spatial planning and self-governance is the realisation that the former (i.e. spatial planning) represents a manifestation of a ‘planned intention’ guided by formal rules whilst the latter (i.e. self-governance) is a ‘collective action’ led by actors (e.g., individuals, communities, non-governmental organisations) guided by

some form of internal coordination in informal structures. Though both are purposeful and geared towards achieving commonly agreed goals, in self-governance, actors enjoy a high degree of freedom in shaping the system within which they exist based on their preferences (see Rauws, 2016; De Roo, 2016).

An emerging view amongst urban theorists and researchers is that effective functioning of urban areas should embrace uncertainties, multiple possible alternative futures and flexible decisions (Albrechts, 2006; De Roo, 2010; Korah, Cobbinah, & Nunbogu, 2017; Rauws, Cook, & van Dijk, 2014) and further allow for self-organisation and self-governance (see Alfasi & Portugali, 2007; De Roo, 2016; Nunbogu & Korah, 2016; Korah, Cobbinah, Nunbogu, & Sarah, 2016; Rauws, 2016; Boonstra, 2015). Self-governed civic initiatives in spatial planning require urgent attention particularly in Africa and other developing countries where in Roy's (2005) view, most of the major urban transformations of the 21st century are likely to occur. Additionally, much of the ongoing and expected urbanisation would be happening in African cities (Cohen, 2006), with African urbanisation labelled as the fastest in the world (Ichimura, 2003), although this position is hotly contested (see Obeng-Odoom, 2010; Potts, 2009, 2012). The rate of Africa's urbanisation is expected to trigger complex spatial processes (e.g. city-regions and civic initiatives), which challenge traditional urban

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governance strategies (Agyemang, Amedzro, & Silva, 2017). Although self-governance has manifested in several developed countries and fields, for example, in fisheries cooperatives (Townsend, 1995), farmer cooperatives (Termeer, Sruiver, Gerritsen, & Huntjes, 2013), management of forest resources by local communities (Ostrom, 2005), management of green spaces (Mattijssen, Buijs, Elands, & Arts, 2017) and management of urban greeneries (Buizer et al., 2015; Lawrence, De Vreese, Johnston, Konijnendijk van den Bosch, & Sanesi, 2013), it is as yet limitedly appreciated in the spatial planning field in Africa and other developing countries. Self-organised civic initiatives have not received spatial planners' attention and are not part of mainstream planning practice in African cities.

In this contribution, the paper aims to make a case for civic initiatives in urban development and how spatial planners in developing countries of Africa, particularly Ghana can embrace these initiatives to generate wider and multiple benefits for society. Using empirical data from the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area of Ghana, this paper discusses how civic initiatives can transform urban areas, and the implications for spatial planning. The paper is structured into five sections. Section 2 presents literature review on the concept of self-governance in spatial planning. Section 3 describes the research setting and methods used. Section 4 analyses and discusses the cases. In Section 5, the paper concludes with some recommendations to improve spatial planning and urban governance in Ghana, and other developing countries.

2. Self-governance, social intelligence, and spatial strategies

2.1. Changing relations between government and citizens: from 'command and control' towards self-governance

More often there are tradeoffs between normative planning approach that outlines idealised stages to be followed, and the 'real world', which is often messy and less straight forward (Allmendinger, 2009). With the reality that planning issues are increasingly becoming complex and more unpredictable, planning approaches which move away from the desire to achieve predefined outcomes are gaining attention in literature. There is a burden on planners to 'make sense' of the everyday life and activities in space and act as 'transition managers' by suppressing, guiding or even triggering these activities to achieve a desired intent (De Roo, 2010; Korah et al., 2016). This is more so because with limited budget and fiscal resources available to city authorities especially in developing countries, there is gradually a fundamental shift from redistribution towards a philosophy of self-help (see Bailey & Pill, 2011). This changing role of the state can be regarded as a transition, often referred to as a shift from government to governance (Kooiman & van Vliet, 1993).

Although this shift has been described in various ways, most accounts underline the fading importance of the government as the epicenter of society (Ansell, 2000; Büchs, 2009; Salamon, 2001). According to Beck (1994), decision-making about societal development is no longer solely in the hands of government, but actors such as companies, scientists, the media, new social movements and the citizenry. Teubner (2011) argues that in a contemporary society, no social subsystem, not even politics, can represent the whole society. The transition to governance manifests in citizens and communities possessing greater control and freedom in taking initiatives for their welfare. As discussed in Section 1, self-governance processes are revelatory in several ways such as fisheries cooperatives (Townsend, 1995), farmer cooperatives (Termeer et al., 2013) amongst others. In the context of urban development, self-governance has been mainly related to street refurbishment initiatives, co-housing projects, and water and sanitation infrastructure development (Boonstra, 2015; Miazzo & Kee, 2014; Nunbogu & Korah, 2016).

Self-governance, as used in this paper, refers to the freedom with which individuals and communities undertake initiatives and

coordinate their actions for accomplishing a set of objectives (Arnouts, van der Zouwen, & Arts, 2012; Kooiman, 2003). Individuals and communities thus have a high degree of freedom in shaping a system they are part of. According to De Roo (2016), self-governance is intended and, in fact, a general term for the processes of self-regulation and self-management. Self-regulation is deliberate and with intent, starting with a joint initiative and with actions in support of this initiative. In this sense, spatial interventions are mainly driven by actors in a form of actor-networks, cooperatives or associations. These spatial interventions cover the emergence of urban development out of coordinated and collective actions by multiple actors (see Nunbogu & Korah, 2016). Self-governance and citizens' initiatives are receiving attention and recognition in several countries because they are believed to make society stronger by getting more people working together and putting more power and responsibility into the hands of groups, networks, neighbourhoods and local communities.

There are, however, instances where professionals (e.g. planners) find it difficult to engage with citizens' initiatives adequately (Boonstra, 2015; van Dam, Salverda, & During, 2014). When citizens start putting their ideas and ideals into practice, they organise things in their own way, which may oppose formal plans. More importantly, and in relation to the nature of citizens' initiatives in the urban area, Alberti and Waddell (2000) argue that the urban spatial configuration results from a collective and aggregate order through numerous locally made decisions involving many intelligent and adaptive agents. The behaviours of these agents are subject to changing their rules of action based upon new information. This is true for many neighbourhoods in cities of the Global South where informality is dominant (see Roy, 2005). For instance, urban land in Maputo (Mozambique), is physically structured and planned by urban dwellers aspiring to establish legitimate and viable forms of socio-culturally informed physical order (Andersen, Jenkins, & Nielsen, 2015a, 2015b) and in Ghana, individuals dictate the pace of urban development based on local conditions and discretions rather than the state (Yeboah & Shaw, 2013). The foregoing analysis highlights the challenges of self-governance (e.g. the plurality of civic initiatives and potential contradictions with formal national policy agenda). In this regard, governments have a role in protecting the boundary of self-governance, which is described variously as 'framing' and 'enabling, facilitating and encouraging diversity in styles of organising' (Healey, 2006, p. 289). In other accounts, this role of government in self-governance is termed as coproduction (Albrechts, 2012; Ostrom, 1996; Watson, 2014). Coproduction aims to combine the provision of public goods/services needed and the empowerment of mutually supportive communities that could influence policy to meet their needs (Albrechts, 2012). This role of governments, according to Albrechts (2012), involves changing the perceptions and the approach of many professionals (public and private) about how plans, policies and public services are conceived and delivered, with the objective of enabling the change needed in an open and equitable way.

However, despite the growing importance of self-governance, its application is limited in the milieu of spatial planning and development in Africa particularly Ghana. This situation has arisen because self-governance is barely understood by planners and not captured in the planners' modalities (e.g., zoning, development control) for delivering planning services. For instance, even though slums in many cities in Africa form socio-spatial neighbourhoods, which constitute face-to-face interaction, identity and a common understanding of joint challenges and objectives, these neighbourhoods are often marginalised and overlooked in terms of spatial planning and land-use rights (see Cobbinah, 2017; Parnell & Pieterse, 2010). Naturally, in this case, spontaneous civic initiatives and individual ambitions dedicate the pace and configuration of development in cities (Nunbogu & Korah, 2016; Yeboah & Shaw, 2013). Unfortunately, but true, this situation makes 'official plans' obsolete even before their implementation.

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