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Are we planning for resilient cities in Ghana? An analysis of policy and planners' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets forth a set of four principles that define and operationalise the concept of urban resilience. Using these four principles, 105 registered planners with the Ghana Institute of Planners were interviewed and five most recent and relevant national planning documents (four legislation, and one policy) were evaluated to determine how well planning practice advances resilience planning. Findings indicate limited appreciation of the concept amongst planners, despite the national planning documents stating an intention to integrate urban resilience. In addition, these national planning documents do not provide balanced support for all four urban resilience principles, as they advance some principles significantly more than others. More importantly, there is a disconnect between these national planning documents on the one hand, and planning practice on the other, as planning actions are not consistent with the legislation and policies. This paper recommends education of planners on urban resilience issues, credentialing of the concept in the local context, and reconsideration of international agencies' role in resilience planning in Ghanaian cities.

1. Introduction

Urban resilience has been touted as a new planning agenda (Albers & Deppisch, 2012; Chelleri & Olazabal, 2012; Jabareen, 2013). Critical global environmental and health issues of climate change and rapid urbanisation have led to increased advocacy for more resilient urban planning practices (Brown, 2012; Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2016a; Lu & Stead, 2013; Walker et al., 2006; Waters, 2012). The United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-HABITAT) and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) continue to promote urban resilience through their reports, workshops and support (e.g., funding and technical) for national planning demonstration projects (UN-HABITAT, 2011; UNISDR, 2010, 2013; United Nations, 2012). Countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Portugal, Turkey, Sweden and the Netherlands have adopted state and national strategies mandating that urban planning and management actions integrate key principles of urban resilience (National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan, 2015; Planning Institute Australia, 2016; Schmitt, 2013; Walisser, Mueller, & McLean, 2005). Cities such as New Orleans (USA), Lisbon (Portugal), Istanbul (Turkey) and Rotterdam (Netherlands) have initiated urban resilience programmes to adapt to urban growth and changing climate and their associated impacts (Campanella, 2006; Lu & Stead, 2013; Schmitt,

2013).

Considering the increasing weight of responsibility countries and the international community have placed on urban planning in advancing urban resilience, it should be possible to determine whether urban planning is making progress particularly in developing countries of Africa where the impacts of these global environmental and health issues are predicted to be severe in the not-so-distant future (Cobbinah & Anane, 2016; Gentle & Maraseni, 2012). While the discussion of the concept of urban resilience is considerable (e.g., Dodman, 2009; Ernstson et al., 2010; Folke et al., 2002; Jabareen, 2013), there is little empirical evidence regarding the extent to which urban planning promotes it, particularly in African countries.

With Ghana as a case study, this paper uses five most recent and relevant national planning documents (legislation and policies), and interviews with professional planners to examine the influence of the urban resilience concept on planning practice. The sample consisted of one urban planning policy that explicitly focused on socio-economic and land use planning, and four legislation produced by the Parliament on spatial planning, the planning process and its legalities. The sample for the professional planners comprised physical planners (i.e. responsible for the preparation and management of spatial/land use plans) and policy planners (i.e. in charge of formulating and implementing socio-economic policies).

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Three basic questions are addressed in this paper:

- i. Are national planning legislation and policies that use urban resilience as an organising concept driven by local understanding and situations, and are they likely to build resilient cities?
- ii. Do urban planners' perspectives influence urban resilience efforts?
- iii. Do national planning legislation and policies achieve balance by supporting all urban resilience principles, or do national planning legislation and policies narrowly advance some principles more than others?

Responses to these questions provide an understanding of the general challenges of building resilient cities, particularly in African countries. This paper first discusses the set of urban resilience principles derived from the literature to guide the analysis of the national planning documents. This is followed by a description of the case study focusing on the planning experience, and research methods used to evaluate how well urban planning is promoting urban resilience. Next is the presentation and discussion of the results on how urban planning in Ghana has come to grips with the principles of urban resilience. Finally, concluding remarks on building resilient cities and areas requiring future research are outlined.

2. Contextualising urban resilience

Following the 1987 report *'Our Common Future'*, the concept of resilience began its emergence as an important and a necessary march towards building sustainability (Levin, 1993). Presently, the resilience philosophy, as an integral component of sustainability, has received considerable attention and popularity across many different policy spheres (Davoudi et al., 2012). It is unsurprising that the concept is sometimes applied synonymously with terms such as sustainable urban development or sustainable development (Adger, 2003; Brand & Jax, 2007; Davoudi et al., 2012). In the context of urban planning, Beinart (2005) states.

Cities, “after suffering wars, earthquakes, religious transitions, destructions with no reconstructions and the maintenance of ruins, still remain nowadays a place of special significance”.

(Beinart, 2005, p. 181, also cited in Chelleri & Olazabal, 2012, p. 11)

The concept of resilience first appeared in the urban planning literature in the late 1990s (Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2016a; Mileti, 1999) and was subsequently discussed within a broader framework of global environmental change at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa (Chelleri & Olazabal, 2012). The declaration that emerged from the Summit was that resilience pursues the precautionary principle in relation to resource use and emerging risks, the avoidance of vulnerability and the promotion of environmental quality into the future (Adger, 2003; Chelleri & Olazabal, 2012). Consistent with Beinart's (2005) description, the central goal of urban resilience relates to addressing shocks and building rebounding mechanisms in the face of ongoing global threats (e.g., climate change).

To help governments and communities to achieve this goal, scholars (e.g., Ahern, 2011; Jabareen, 2013; Vale, Campanella, & Thomas, 2005) and international organisations (e.g., United Nations [UN], 2012) have attempted to focus on confronting the challenges of adapting to climate change, managing rapid urbanisation, alleviating poverty, and promoting inclusiveness. The UN (2012) recognised that the conventional decision-making and governance imperatives of exclusion and inequity that characterise many countries (particularly those in Africa) must change to recognise the benefits of self-sufficiency, focus on social equity, learning and adaptive capacity to minimise human suffering, and be accountable to an ecological imperative to safeguard the environment.

On the surface, urban resilience is a simple term: the concept of

shocks and rebounding mechanisms amidst global threats. Despite this simplicity, there is no general agreement on how the concept should be translated into reality or practice. While the concept is increasingly being used to guide urban planning, its implementation is not immediately clear. Cobbinah and Darkwah (2016a) argue that within the planning field, there is a general sense that resilience is a good thing, but will require practical definition and implementable elaboration, as do terms such as sustainable development. Other observers are more critical. Jabareen (2013, p. 221) maintains that the current concept of urban resilience, though a laudable development pathway, is vulnerable to the same criticism of vague romanticism made against sustainable development concept as there appears to be a lack of “a multidisciplinary theory that integrates a variety of urban dimensions such as social, economic, cultural, environmental, spatial and physical infrastructure, into a unified conceptual framework for understanding the resiliency of cities and how they should move towards a more resilient state.” Leichenko (2011) further observes that urban resilience is primarily symbolic rhetoric; while there is much overlap and cross-fertilisation amongst diverse sets of literature, each highlights different facets of resilience and each emphasises different components of cities and urban systems.

While these perceived limitations have some legitimacy, attempts focused on translating the concept into planning practice are emerging. An analysis of various definitions from the planning literature reveals basic principles that can be used to derive a more precise understanding (Ahern, 2011; Jabareen, 2013; United Nations, 2012; Vale et al., 2005). One principle is ‘responsive and adaptive capacity’. Walker and Salt (2006) define urban resilience as a capacity of an urban system (e.g., city) to respond to change or disturbance without changing its basic functional state. Their notion of responsive and adaptive capacity is considered to mean not just the identification of stochastic processes and disturbances, their frequency and intensity, but how cities can develop a responsive and adaptive capacity to these disturbances whilst maintaining their functionality (Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2016a; Davoudi et al., 2012). Accordingly, planners must consider urban resilience as a prime strategy of adapting to unprecedented and unexpected changes, in order to anticipate and prepare for the scale and nature of future urban development and management challenges – both natural and anthropogenic – by addressing existing and emerging community needs, and formulating plans and policies to guide the delivery of those needs, and that cities will be able to continuously maintain their functionality amidst global threats. By this interpretation, cities become resilient in terms of liveability, healthy ecosystems, responsible economic development, and equitable distribution of improved economic and environmental benefits.

A second principle is ‘inclusiveness/participation’ of multiple stakeholders in the decision making process. Ahern (2011) argues that achieving urban resilience is a process requiring a meaningful participation of stakeholders in planning and policy decisions. Achieving inclusiveness usually entails effective coordination, negotiation, and compromise. When all attributes are not considered, urban resilience cannot be realised. If the process of building resilience lacks coordination, then the basic foundation upon which stakeholders engage cannot be sustained. If the urban resilience process is not built on stakeholder negotiation, then the fundamental source of cooperation and mutual engagement is denied. If compromises are not reached in urban resilience processes, then resilience efforts may not meet the expectations of various stakeholders, and may not fairly serve all interest groups (see Campanella, 2006; Chelleri & Olazabal, 2012; Waters, 2012).

A third principle is that spatial plans and policies must respond to the evolving transformation of urban areas (Jabareen, 2013; Lu & Stead, 2013). Urban resilience requires that cities reach beyond ‘traditional land use planning’ in future development to account for integrated spatial planning where, important policy measures in relation to infrastructure (social and physical), mitigation measures and rebounding

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