

Parallel session B1

Urban studies – starting in Africa: Land and urban conflict

Monday 11 November, 14.00 – 15.30

IAS Forum

Chair: **Dr Colin Marx**, Senior Lecturer, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL

Discussant: **Dr Beacon Mbiba**, Senior Lecturer in Urban Policy and International Development, Oxford Brookes University

Land use planning and traditional authorities in Lilongwe City, Malawi: Spatial practices in the production of urban space

Dr Evance Mwachungu, Lecturer and Head of Geography and Earth Sciences Department, Chancellor College, University of Malawi

The paper seeks to understand residents' perceptions and their associated practices in the contestation and production of urban spaces, including how peoples invade, claim and defend those urban spaces. The paper commences with an analysis of perceptions of urban residents with regard to urban land and the role of traditional authorities ('town chiefs'). Thereafter, the paper investigates spatial practices of residents of Area 49 in Lilongwe, Malawi, based on one of the three elements of Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad, namely, spatial practice. A survey conducted among 115 residents investigated the perceptions regarding the role of the state in land control and which spatial strategies and tactics the residents of the area employed to claim and defend their spaces. It can be noted that invading groups of residents are not ignorant of the state's potential strategies to repossess the land, but the majority believe that the state would not repossess the land they have invaded. Five specific themes of spatial practices and tactics employed by the invaders were identified: (1) spatial strategies; (2) temporary farming; (3) use of temporary shelter; (4) mimicking the state; (5) deliberation setting. The study has shown that the land invaders probably have more respect for traditional leaders as owners of the land as opposed to the state. By willingly disregarding the law, land invaders acted based on their perceptions as opposed to their knowledge, in this case that of urban planning. The knowledge of planning does not seem to serve the people being planned for. The apparent trust in chiefs as legitimate owners (but not legal owners) and custodians of the land effectively means chiefs and the so-called encroachers are on one side while the state as an institution is on the other side.

Urban Land Nexus in African Cities: The State and the Market at the Cross-Roads

Prof. Wilbard Kombe, Professor of Urban Land Management and Director of the Institute of Human Settlements Studies, Ardhi University, Dar es Salaam

Transformations taking place and shaping urban space in African cities are largely driven by the market/real estate sector without a significant regulatory role of the state. Inadequate capacities of the central government and local authorities expound the growing challenge African cities are facing. Unfortunately, the private sector, the drivers of the market and the state, which is the custodian of public interests in urban space formation and transformation, are in a dilemma and caught up in protracted conflicts that emanate from dysfunctional space that is neither supportive of short- nor long-term interests of the public or the market. This paper will attempt to explore this phenomenon using findings from a study on urban land nexus in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza cities, Tanzania. One of main observations is that unregulated transformations have given rise to spontaneous innovations at the grass-root level, where local communities are creating informal platforms for negotiations and interventions. The questions that this paper will attempt to answer are: i) What are the dynamics shaping and transforming contemporary urban space in African cities? ii) How are local communities in urban settlements responding to the market-led transformation? iii) What are implications for planning practice and theory?

Theorising from Black Global Souths: Young people's embodied experiences of public space and everyday power relations in Accra, Ghana

Victoria Okoye, PhD candidate, School of Architecture and Department of Urban Studies & Planning, The University of Sheffield

In this paper, I employ a critical Black feminist lens to reflect on the power dynamics that inform young people's embodied experiences of public space in the Nima neighbourhood in the postcolonial city of Accra. This paper is part of a larger collaborative PhD research project between myself – a Nigerian-American PhD researcher – and my research partner – a youth-focused Ghanaian NGO. Using arts-based participatory methods, a site-specific intervention, and collaborative analysis with NGO team members, we explore young people's everyday practices claiming public space and resisting counter-claims within the context of diminishing public spaces in Nima. I ground this paper with an epistemic approach rooted in the NGO's Pan-Africanist stance, NGO team members' grounded theorising, and the work of Jemima Pierre on Blackness in postcolonial Ghana, Katherine McKittrick on 'black sense of place,' and Kimberlé Crenshaw on intersectionality theory. Through this approach, I demonstrate how the power dynamics that inscribe young people's movements and experiences in space are both structural (shaped by the economic, political, and the material built environment of the neighbourhood) as well as interpersonal (and shaped by their everyday personal movements and encounters). This paper adds to existing literature on Black geographies, urbanism, and space by bringing into conversation local theorising from our research process in Accra, with academic discourses from African Diaspora contexts that share histories of colonial and race-based oppression, resistance, and the production of alternative geographies.