Editorial

Urban Planning Education and Urban Development: Many Plans but Little Planning

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INTRODUCTION

With an estimated 38 per cent of its population classified urban, Africa is still the least urbanized continent but its urban population growth rates of about 3.3 per cent per annum are among the highest in the world. UN-Habitat projects that by 2030 half of the estimated total population in Africa will be urban. What is particularly striking, however, is that incidences of poverty are more extreme than elsewhere in the developing world. Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa is, associated with high unemployment, absence of basic infrastructure services particularly in settlements of the urban poor, widening social and spatial marginalization, wide-spread growth of informal settlements, and formation of slums. Africa’s ailing states are unable to effectively manage urban growth and provide basic services.

Yet decades of planning education and training in the disciplines of urban and regional planning and the establishment of more undergraduate and postgraduate educational training programs in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa has made little difference in terms of realizing coherent spatial urban development. Experience shows that urban planning and development in most cities in the region are worsening. At least one gets the impression that there was not much planning going on or there are no plans to guide land use development in our cities. To put it bluntly, the current urban planning system and practice in Sub-Saharan Africa have failed to keep pace with the very problems which gave rise to the evolution of modern town planning in Western Europe in the late 19th century. Adverse effects of economic globalisation, climate change and other global factors have further complicated the matter.

An assessment of the effectiveness of planning based on the eleven papers from nine countries presented in this issue of the Journal of Land and Building Development reveals that there is no scarcity of urban plans. In many cities spatial development frameworks, both general planning schemes viz. Strategic Plans, Structure Plans, Master Plans, Spatial Development Frameworks or detailed or local planning schemes (land-use zoning or neighborhood plans), exist but they remain unimplemented. This continues despite the fact that these are official documents that have been approved by the appropriate statutory bodies and are backed by befitting legislation. Because growth and expansion of most cities in the region are taking place outside the influence of plans and without guidance by planners, planning has come under severe criticisms and bewildered policy makers and lay-persons alike.

Meanwhile, planning education institutions in the region continue producing more planners every year. The little planning that is taking place in accordance with the approved planning schemes is primarily catering for the local elites, largely middle and high income groups. Therefore, the bulk of urban population, particularly low income households, sees little or no benefits of urban planning, planners or their plans.

The papers presented in this issue have asserted that most urban plans have failed to
promote public interests, foremost the welfare of the urban poor. Mabin et al, Kusangaya, Nnkya and Lupala, and Watson for instance note that the land market, both formal and informal, is one of the key forces driving growth of cities in South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania. Uchegbu adds that apart from market forces, politicians have much influence on the plan implementation in Nigeria.

Despite the gloomy picture, for decades governments in the region have upheld an optimistic view about the importance of urban planning and training of planners. Watson underscores this noting that spatial planning was introduced in South Africa as early as in the 1890s, i.e. over 100 years ago. Similarly the papers by Inkoom, Uchegdu, Nnkya and Lupala, Phiri, Kusangaya and Mosha show that spatial planning has been on the central agenda of the colonial as well as of the post-colonial governments in the region. Underscoring governments’ commitments to spatial planning they note that urban planning schemes and various instruments of planning systems were introduced in Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria, Zambia and Botswana in 1945, 1912, 1928, 1929 and 1966 respectively. Kusangaya notes that although the colonialists did not put in place a distinct legal instrument for urban planning, cities such as Laurenco Marques (now Maputo) had Master Plans already in early 1950s.

Most of the planning education training institutions were established rather late. However, Mabian and Todes’ paper show that the Diploma course established at the University of the Witswatersrand in 1943 is the oldest program. Later on, in 1958, the Planning Programme at Kwame Nkurumah University of Science and Technology at Kumasi followed. The other degree programs were not established until after the 1970s. As may be expected, almost all planning systems and training programs offered by the institutions presented in this volume trace their origin to planning systems, concepts and training curricula which were developed in the West in the early 19th century. The papers by Inkoon, Mosha, Phiri, Twarabamenye and Mukashema, Mabin and Todes note that the planning systems in their respective countries as well as the curricula initially used by their training institutions drew much from the UK. On the other hand, the planning programmes offered at UCB in Mozambique represent an alloy of planning education experiences in Southern Africa (largely from AAP schools), the Netherlands and Portugal.

Uchegbu’s paper further adds that both the Cantonment Proclamation of 1904 which is considered the first planning legislation in Nigeria and the Town and Country Planning legislation of 1946 were patterned after the experiences of the British colonial administrators. The University of Strathclyde in Glasgow is said to have midwifed the establishment of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Nigeria. During the early days, the Department used to receive guest lecturers from the University Strathclyde. Similarly, the paper by Nnkya and Lupala, shows that the initial planning education training program which was established at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Ardhi University in Tanzania, drew its inspiration first from the UK and later from Scandinavian experience; whilst the initial support came from the UNDP, later on most support including teaching staff was mainly provided by the Scandinavian countries. However, the planning system including the principal planning legislation, as in other countries, was imported from the UK.

Of course, some of the programs which started later have also drawn from the already established programs in the region. For instance, the Urban and Regional Planning programme at the University of Botswana is said to have borrowed from the sister programme at Ardhi University in Tanzania, whereas the Catholic University in Beira drew mainly from curricula used by AAPS in the region. Whilst South Africa had a planning education training institution already in the 1940s, most of the other countries in the region established their planning education training institutions after independence, primarily in the 1970s and 1980s, the most recent newcomers being Botswana, Rwanda, and Mozambique which established their Planning programmes in 1992, 2006 and 2008 respectively.
PLANNING EDUCATION CURRICULA AND PLANNING SYSTEMS

Several papers presented have shown that over the years the planning education curricula modeled on the training curricula and traditions in the West have been frequently revised and contextualized. Furthermore, authors have invariably reported that the mode of training of both undergraduate and postgraduate students has adopted a problem-based-learning approach using real-life projects to inculcate hands-on-the ground professional skills. This approach aims to ensure that trainees are abreast with the realities obtaining in their local environment. Also study-projects make an important contribution as they help planning trainees to appreciate and experience real life challenges of their career such as planning in poverty or in resource staved situations. Whilst most schools and planning departments have strong links with the industry, Phiris’ paper shows that the link between the Department of Planning in Zambia and the industry is weak, besides, unlike many other countries, Zambia and Mozambique are still to establish statutory boards for the registration of planners. Absence of regulatory institutions seems to have undermined the planning profession in these countries. Whilst contents of the curricula and approaches to training of planners, plan preparation and implementation have continued to evolve commensurate with unfolding local and global trends, salient features including the training philosophy that underpins the current planning education offered in the eight countries presented are as follows:

- The training mode in all the programs, both graduate and postgraduate, emphasizes inculcation and merging of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. This is seen by all authors as a cardinal principle in the training of professionals. The weight attached to each of the two varies from one institution to another. All training programs have adopted project-based learning that interalia aims to produce planners imbued with the requisite knowledge and technical competencies that enable them to work as professionals in the public and private sectors. During the training period, compulsory professional training is provided in most programs through attachment to public sector departments or professional planning offices and firms in the private sector. However the duration for industrial training (IT) varies remarkably. For instance Uchegdu reports that the planning program at the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, provides for a six month industrial training, whereas Mosha and Twarabamenye and Mukashema informs us that at the University of Botswana and the University of Rwanda only six and five weeks are designated for IT respectively. According to Nnkyaa and Lupala, at Ardhi University, the Urban and Regional Planning Department provides for a six weeks IT at the end of the first three years of the study making a total of eighteen weeks.\(^1\)

- Despite reviews and contextualization of the planning education curricula, overall the effectiveness of planning in almost all countries remains disproportionately low. Across the countries, planning has failed to create an efficient compact city structure, check informal urbanization and designate well-allocated and affordable land for housing the urban poor. It would appear that planning approaches and practice and the planning systems are not only unable to effectively respond to growing urban challenges but are probably also part of the problem. In other words, planners and policymakers in the region can hardly exonerate themselves from the problems prevailing in cities including widening social and spatial polarization.

- With the exception of a few programs such as the Urban and Regional Planning Program at the University of Free State, Bloemfontein, which offers a 1 year full time BSc. (URP) or the 3 year BSc. Tech. offered at the Cape Peninsula Technical University, both in South Africa, most of the other BSc. and MSc. programs range from 4 to 5 years and 1 to 2 years respectively. Spatial planning is emphasized in all programmes except in Kumasi, where

\(^1\) These field attachments exclude the two weeks field studies conducted during the semester or international visits which are conducted by some training institutions such as the University of Botswana. The 3 years National Diploma offered by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in South Africa includes a 42 weeks IT period.
Inkoom reports that the focus is on development planning approach.

- Despite recent euphoria for decentralization and a growing desire by local communities and other stakeholders to be substantively involved in plan making and implementation, an assessment of the planning systems reveals disappointingly low levels of decentralization of planning systems in a number of countries. Botswana operates with largely centralized planning systems, whereas Tanzania seems to operate with a pseudo-decentralised system. In both cases several planning functions are still discharged by the respective central government ministries. South Africa, Mozambique, Nigeria and Ghana operate with more clearly decentralized systems. In fact, the federal system in South Africa seems to even allow Provinces to enact their own specific planning laws. Watson reports in her paper that the Western Cape Province has initiated a process to draft its own planning legislation that will combine planning, environmental and heritage legislation.

- With the exception of few programmes such as the B.Sc., Diploma and the MSc programmes at the Copper Belt University in Zambia and the Catholic University in Beira respectively, most of the planning programmes have been accredited by the respective national professional accreditation bodies. There are also initiatives by some universities to accredit planning programs with international accreditation institutions. Such initiatives are on-going at the University of Witswatersrand, the University of Cape Town, Botswana, Ardhi University and the University of Free State.

- Most programmes offer a breadth of design and social science orientation as well as an assortment of natural science related courses. The programs thus present a wide range of courses which aim to produce planners who are well informed and knowledgeable about the subjects that directly and indirectly concern spatial planning professionals. In the light of the increasing complexities and challenges of planning coupled with the multi-disciplinary nature of the plan-making and implementation processes, the approach to cover a wide knowledge base especially at undergraduate level is appropriate. This seems to have been a deliberate move by the institutions so as to produce professionals who will be widely exposed but also have to be experts in their specific areas of planning. Invariably, the authors report initiatives to mainstream contemporary global issues into the curricula, but it is not apparent what actions have been taken to incorporate the same in the planning system.

- In all the countries presented, the growing backlog of low-income housing and rapid expansion and densification of informal settlements are among the key manifestations of the failure of urban planning. In response Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia seem to be more tolerant by adopting strategies such as in situ upgrading and regularization of informal settlements, whilst South Africa is generally intolerant. It has opted for massive construction of new subsidised houses and allocation to low-income households and the eradication of informal settlements. Mosha informs us however, that the government of Botswana has adopted a two pronged approach, which involves upgrading of existing unplanned or informal settlements and bulldozing of emerging unauthorized settlements. Interestingly, in most countries problems associated with the growth of informal or unplanned settlements, crowding, and formation of slums persist, suggesting that planners are yet to find lasting solutions or a preventive innovative response to this conundrum.

Across the countries represented, urban plans have been increasingly discredited because they have generally failed to tackle growing urbanisation challenges. South Africa and Botswana however, present a different picture: they have an urban population of about 25 per cent living in unplanned informal settlements, whereas the rest of the countries in the region have more than 65% of their current urban population living in urban settlements that have eluded services of urban planners, planning system and norms. This suggests the
need for varying planning interventions for the two categories of countries. A number of scholars have repeatedly called for nuanced and rounded views that not only acknowledge the spatial unevenness of the urbanization process but also treat African urban residents as active builders of meaningful lives for themselves.

Underscoring the unique features associated with ineffectiveness of planning in South Africa, Mabin et al, Tapela and Watson have observed that urban planning in the country has neither provided prime land for housing the poor, nor been able to address and resolve the apartheid urban planning problems related to racially segregated planning and poor delivery of basic service especially for the poor. Stapelberg and Steyn add that despite the existence of several training institutions, lack of capacity for planning prevails in Bloemfontein. Many other cities in South Africa are also facing a severe shortage of planners and other land-based professionals. Besides, paper of Mabin et al shows that training institutions are also facing a shortage of teaching staff. Why this shortage prevails in a country which has been offering planning education for over a century or why municipalities cannot outsource, remains a paradox.

The authors of the papers ascribe the ineffectiveness of planning to institutional deficits including inappropriate legislation, planning standards and other aspects associated with the regulatory framework for urban land development and to poor or non-involvement of stakeholders in plan-making and implementation. The call by the authors for more knowledge among planners about the community they are planning for or with as well as appreciation of the institutional contexts within which planning is taking place, especially power and politics that surround and influence planning implementation, underline the unbridged gap in the training of planners.

**Looking into the Future: Planning Education, Plans and Planners**

Most of the papers in this issue and recent literature on spatial planning seem to suggest that an important milestone in making urban planning more effective is to synchronise and consolidate the links between Planning Education and the three inter-linked pillars which frame it namely: Planning Policy, Planning Theories and Planning Practice (Also see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Elements Shaping Planning Education](image-url)
This implies that planning educators have to be more proactive in interrogating planning practices, policies and theories so as to persistently assess their relevance and appropriateness in the rapidly changing socio-economic and political milieu. Tapela emphasises these issues in his paper. Furthermore, planning educators have to be the driving force in forging closer working links with planning systems and intensifying interaction with practitioners. Current links facilitating activities such as industrial training or field-work attachments, accreditation of the planning programs, registration of planners by professional boards and study-projects based on real-life needs of local communities are considered insufficient. Improving effectiveness of planning, plans and planners requires also attitudinal changes among planners and trainees to work more closely with stakeholders in urban development especially marginalized settlers in informal settlements as well as policy makers. A number of authors including Tapela have rightly underscored this, noting that in the future, planners will require social and political skills, knowledge and competencies so that they are able cope with emerging challenges and not least be in a position to convincingly draw their arguments especially during plan generation and mobilisation of resources for plan implementation.

The point being emphasized is that planning educators and training institutions have a great responsibility to produce planners who are first aware and secondly appreciate the fact that mastering concepts, theories and techniques which produce plans is neither sufficient to generate better and implementable plans nor enough to produce planners who can play leadership roles in planning and management of our urban future. Situations experiencing scarce resources amidst a rapidly changing planning landscape such as ours demand that educators persistently interact with practitioners as well as with policy makers in the search for planning strategies and interventions that work. It is for this reason that planners have to appreciate and engage more in social learning processes as well as do much more to assess local potentials so as to forge strategic partnerships and alliances with non-traditional actors including social grassroot institutions in the informal sector. In other words, it is simply an illusion for planning educators, policy makers or planners to think that they can build sustainable cities without collaborating with the key agents of change in urban land use development, however strong or weak they may be. Steyn and Stalpelberg, caution that this does not however, mean that planners have to compromise their professional competencies.

The call for more inclusive and collaborative approaches which has been raised in the papers underlines a legitimate concern that has been on the developmental planning discourse for over four decades now. For, the era when the state or the public was seen as the most dominant player or effective agent in urban land use planning and management has changed. Apart from deploying interdisciplinary approaches and engaging public participation, planning making and implementation has to increasingly articulate social, economic, institutional, and environmental issues in plan generation, implementation, review and monitoring. This is the basis for better planning and strengthening planner’s position in multi-disciplinary teams as well as enhancing arguments for planning.

Whilst the curricula presented emphasise the integration of theory and practice, the theories being pursued by the schools or departments are somewhat diffused. However, since most of the urban planning practices being advocated today such as collaborative planning or advocacy planning stem from some form or other of theory strands, it is necessary that planners and planning educators critically examine theories being pursued in planning education within the context of the evolving political, social and economic environment. This is inter alia what the merging of planning theory and planning practice ought to achieve.

Meeting the developmental and sustainability prerequisites of urban development also requires that planning schools make routine appraisals of the contents and relevance of planning policies. It also means critical review of macro-policies and contemporary global
issues such as climate change and globalization with a view to assessing their impacts and mainstreaming them in the planning curricula and practice as deemed appropriate. Invariably, most planning schools and departments seem to be struggling with these and other issues that are critical to produce planners who can meet the real demands of the 21st century. However, as noted in most papers, resources paucity remains a critical constraint.

Due to disproportionate powers planners and policy makers have in issues that concern planning, the intimate experiential local knowledge held by particularly urban poor communities especially in informal settlements is often ignored or left on the fringes of the planning process and decision making in planning matters. It is indeed the underestimation of the local experiential knowledge and the needs of the bulk of the urban population that is significantly rendering planning ineffective.

Most countries in the region are also facing common challenges related to unprecedented urbanisation, increasing urban informality which is no longer a residual but a constituent part of urban development, inadequate public resources and capacity deficits to address planning challenges, etc. These are real problems which require planning schools to take a lead in bringing together academics, policy makers and practitioners to deliberate upon these common challenges and chart a way forward. This, however, presupposes that planning schools and departments in the region are networking, sharing and enriching their experiences among themselves as well as with other schools, departments and professional institutions outside the region. This, unfortunately, is a weak area, although commendable efforts that ought to be consolidated were taken recently by the Association African of Planning Schools (AAPS) to initiate an information exchange network and facilitate international academic interaction through workshops, conferences and access to relevant publications including journals etc. The articles in this special journal issue, which were presented at the first meeting of AAPS in 2008, indicate the value of schools in Africa coming together to share experiences and knowledge. AAPS could also play an important role as a pressure group in the region, especially in the areas of facilitating regional accreditation of the programmes as well as lobbying the governments to accord planning bodies the support so that they can function effectively as professional regulatory bodies.

The shift from technocratic, top-down to collaborative planning doctrine that seems to have been successfully adopted in some schools, as the paper by Ninkya and Lupala describes, seems to blend with the mainstream thinking in current planning practice even though it is still to be appreciated across the region. The reservations suggested in the paper by Mosha that in recent years public participation and partnership have become “catch words” in urban planning and management literature but their practical application is still elusive, are food for thought. Planning discourse has repeatedly underlined the inadequacy and at times absence of conceptual knowledge and practical skills in participatory planning.

Dialoguing, negotiating and communication skills which in the past were not very instrumental for successful performance of planning work are nowadays not only essential working tools but crucial determinants of whether planners and their plans will make a difference or not. Experience seems to suggest that planning activities, decisions, and issues in which stakeholders are active players do not any longer warrant the use of the traditional expert-driven top-down tools and approaches. The in-service and new generations of planners require an assortment of not only a wide range of subjects and techniques but also hands-on skills that are more management oriented. This is a critical consideration because many a time planning education does not automatically equip trainees with the requisite management skills.

Appropriate application of planning theories, methods and techniques also requires critical thinking and reflections on the planning system and existing macro-policies which have an effect on urban plan generation and subsequent implementation; such policies include land, fiscal and economic policies. The unfolding global issues such as climate change and intensification of urban informality
inevitably have a bearing on the city at large as well as on the welfare of communities at the local level. As such, they both require creative pro-active planning responses. In this regard, the importance of applied multi-disciplinary research necessary to inform responses to urgent problems cannot be over-emphasized. Needless to add that a critique and contextualization of the “received theories” still dominant in planning curricula, requires informed planning educators and planners alike; as observed by several authors the research and community outreach are weak areas in most planning institutions in the region.

CONCLUSION

Despite enormous efforts and resources which have been dispensed since the colonial era to promote and make spatial urban planning and management effective, including institution of planning systems, proclamation of planning policies, laws and regulations and not least the establishment of numerous schools and departments to train planners in Sub-Saharan Africa, by and large spatial planning remains ineffective. Many cities in the region are facing similar urban planning and development problems which cities in the West were facing in the 19th century. As the papers show the nature and dynamics of urban growth taking place in most cities is often quite different from what planning educators, policy makers and planners have planned and committed themselves to achieve. Modernist, elite-led urban planning approaches and practices especially with regard to spatial planning and management seem to be one of the primary sources of the widening gap between plan making and plan implementation. In other words, what most papers underline is that planners, their plans and planning systems are increasingly proving ineffective and unable to cope with the emerging urban challenges. The forces rendering spatial planning ineffective have made it apparent that planning educators have the duty to rethink the quality, utility and impact of their products. In particular, they have to re-examine their training approaches and curricula with a view to assessing whether they are realistically tuned to requirements and demands arising from the unfolding urban planning and management challenges.

One of the key observations which runs across the papers is that local contexts including social, economic and institutional aspects all have a strong influence on planning. In this respect, probably, there is nothing more destructive for spatial urban planning and management than to ignore or undermine the planning context including the resource limitations, roles and potentials of stakeholders in plan making, implementation, monitoring and review. Unfortunately, looking at the curricula presented and current practices this is not apparent. In a situation where over two thirds of cities are built outside the planning systems or planners’ direct influence, as the case is in Sub-Saharan Africa, bridging the formal and informal sectors deserve more acknowledgement and ought to feature much more prominently in the planning curricula and practice.

It should be also reiterated that training planners alone cannot guarantee that current and future towns and cities are places where we and the future generation can live, work, enjoy and peacefully pass away. There is no doubt that training of skilled personnel is the backbone of any planning system and indeed excellence in professional capacity. However, academic and in-service training of planners ought to carefully assess the demands which are, or shall be, put on planners in the real-life situation in order to ensure that training programmes are relevant and outputs are making a difference. The increasing acknowledgment that urban planning and management cannot be achieved by emphasizing rationalistic and technocratic approaches or cannot be reduced into a neat mathematical model is a critical step towards a meaningful change necessary to make planning education more effective. Effective planning in impoverished situations such as ours is a process that requires, above and beyond technical competence, more collaborative, managerial and human (viz. leadership) skills. These are areas which planning schools have to critically reflect upon as they embark on the review of the curricula envisaged in the papers.
Unless planning is made more results-oriented and planners more accountable to the public for their actions, the general public will have unquestionable justification to continue asking what are the planning educators’ institutions, planners and their plans for?

REFERENCES


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