'Unplanning' the Planned City
Lessons from Ouagadougou for African New Towns

Keeton, Rachel

Publication date
2017

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
The Beeker Method

Important note
To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).
Please check the document version above.

The Beeker Method

Planning and Working on the Redevelopment of the African City

Retrospective Glances into the Future

Edited by Antoni Folkers and Iga Perzyna

This project was funded by:

**creative industries
fund NL**

Universiteit
Leiden

LeidenASA
Leiden African Studies Assembly

TUDelft
**Faculty of Architecture
and the Built Environment**

UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

13

'Unplanning' the Planned City:
Lessons from Ouagadougou for African New Towns

Rachel Keeton

Following the emergence of neoliberal economic policies across the African continent, over the last three decades many African countries have seen a shift from state-led housing development to fully privatized development. Increasingly, this urban development takes the form of New Towns: master planned communities developed on greenfield sites. Because they are dependent on market-driven returns on investments, these privately-developed New Towns tend to ignore existing social and environmental realities and instead accommodate only the upper and middle classes in spatially segregated enclaves. Although this urban model has recently become more popular with both investors and politicians, it is not entirely new. As early as the 1980s, Dutch urban planner Coen Beeker was a vocal critic of developments in and around Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which replaced vibrant traditional communities with both formally and demographically uniform developments. This paper argues for a re-examination of Beeker's own methods and the reasons for the sustained popularity of the urban projects that he led.

Déplannifier la ville planifiée. Leçons de Ouagadougou pour les villes nouvelles africaines

Suite à l'émergence des politiques économiques néolibérales à travers le continent africain, de nombreux pays africains sont passés, au cours des trois dernières décennies, d'une planification centrale à une approche entièrement privatisée du développement du logement. De plus en plus, cette tendance détermine les formes des villes nouvelles – des communautés aménagées sur la base d'un plan d'occupation des sols sur des sites vierges. Ces nouvelles cités, développées sur la base de financements privés et dépendantes des retours en investissement dictés par le marché, tendent à faire l'abstraction des réalités sociales et environnementales existantes et visent à répondre essentiellement aux besoins des classes supérieures et moyennes, en les logeant dans des enclaves spatialement délimitées.

Bien que ce modèle urbain devienne récemment de plus en plus en vue parmi les investisseurs et les politiques, il n'est pas entièrement nouveau. Déjà, au début des années 80, l'urbaniste hollandais Coen Beeker dénonce ardemment les aménagements menés à Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) et dans ses environs, où des développements formellement et démographiquement uniformes firent table rase des dynamiques existantes des communautés traditionnelles. Cet article plaide pour un réexamen des méthodes propres à Beeker, en affirmant le bien-fondé de la popularité constante des projets qu'il a pu mener.

As both per capita wealth and urban populations continue to increase, African countries have increasingly embraced New Towns as a way to provide housing. The benefits of this approach are immediately obvious: governments can allow the private market to fulfil housing needs (sparing them both financial and human resources); middle-class buyers can purchase homes in areas that are perceived as safe, with access to private services and amenities; and the developer can 'start fresh' on ground unencumbered by competing land claims and buried hundred-year-old sewage networks. The shortcomings of this urban model, however, are perhaps less obvious. As African governments allow New Towns to be built outside of existing cities, they antagonize already existing spatial divisions and create a problematic juxtaposition between the master planned New Town and the older, established city. This highlights the difference between the (perceived) security and predictability offered by the planned enclave and the vibrant, if potentially unsafe and unpredictable nature of the existing city. As inequality increases and these disparities become more visible, the extreme opposition between entitled wealthy groups and disadvantaged urban poor may lead to increased violence, political instability within African countries, and, ultimately, affect global networks and processes.[17] My contribution to this edited volume argues that it is useful to return to African urban development models that have proven successful, such as the 'redevelopment project for city districts in Ouagadougou' led by Coen Beeker from 1978 until 1989.

The African New Town is not a new phenomenon. For millennia, African rulers have ordered the construction of planned cities across the continent. Although most of these elaborate cities have been lost to the erosion of time and the violence of war, evidence of their presence remains. These highly

---

17 Fjelde, H. and Østby, G. (2014) 'Socioeconomic Inequality and Communal Conflict: A Disaggregated Analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990–2008', *International Interactions* 40: 5, pp. 737–762. Sassen, S. (1999) *Globalization and Its Discontents.* New York: The New York Press.

specific urban forms reflected local religious and cosmological beliefs, intricate social organizations, and political hierarchies. More recently, beginning with the advent of colonialism in the nineteenth century, openly racist urban planning was used to facilitate 'control' over native populations.[18] The ramifications of this approach remains visible in many African countries, including Kenya, Zambia, Malawi, Cameroon and Nigeria, among others.[19] Often, the spatial policies put in place by colonial governments continue to be used by contemporary planning departments, despite the segregationist implications of these regulations. Both 'soft' and physical divisions, barriers and retardants once based on race, can now be understood as agents of economic apartheid.

Entrance to one of the original gated compounds in Sheikh Zayed (Source: Rachel Keeton)

As an organizational tool, the top-down master plan was widely used during the colonial era and remains popular today among governments struggling with weak institutional frameworks, capacity shortages, and lack of sufficient funds. The master plan's potential for clear organization stands in opposition to what many politicians see as existing cities' chaotic and unmanageable na-

18 Silva, C.N. (ed.), (2015) *Urban Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial and Post-colonial planning cultures.* New York: Routledge. Myers, G.A. (2003) *Verandahs of Power.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
19 Njoh, A.J. (2009) 'Urban Planning as a Tool of Power and Social Control in Colonial Africa', *Planning Perspectives* 24: 3, pp. 301–317.

ture. For this reason, New Towns continue to be embraced as an alternative to largescale urban expansions, upgrading, or redevelopment.

As neoliberal policies have spread across the continent and evolved, public-private partnerships have morphed into 'private projects with state approval'. As governments step back from planning practice and allow private developers to fill the void, New Town construction has become synonymous with privileged enclaves that limit access and exacerbate spatial segregation. There is simply no (financial) incentive for private developers to build low-income housing. This phenomenon can be seen in contemporary, 'middle-class' New Towns like the proposed Konza Techno City, Kenya; Appolonia, Ghana; Sheikh Zayed New Town, Egypt; and Eko-Atlantic City, Nigeria. These New Towns are often based on imported urban models, left largely unadapted to complex African landscapes.

The perceived dichotomy between the planned city and its 'unplanned' neighbour, the informal settlement, has been repeatedly called into question and definitions of 'formality' have rightly been stretched broadly in recent discourse.[20] However, planning practice in Africa since the colonial period has remained firmly attached to the concept of the master plan, and – with notable exceptions – largely unconcerned with unregulated 'informal' areas. This sharp divide does nothing to support inclusive development. Rather, it reinforces separation and creates boundaries to the growth of hybrid, heterogeneous societies. Those notable exceptions of the post-independence period, then, deserve a second look.

The planning narrative of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso follows the pattern of many African cities. Originally a political and trading centre, the city was destroyed by French troops in 1897. Seven years later, the city was rebuilt in a typically French style, and attracted an influx of rural-to-urban migrants in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1919, the new French governor, François Hesling, oversaw the redevelopment of the city into an imposing administrative capital, "and forced the population living [in the city center] to move to traditional settlements on the periphery."[21] This reorganization set the precedent for spatial division between the 'planned' city and its 'unplanned' suburbs.

20 Van Ballegooijen, J. and Rocco, R. (2013). 'The Ideologies of Informality: Informal Urbanisation in the Architectural and Planning Discourses', *Third World Quarterly* 34: 10, pp. 1794–1810. Roy, A. (2005) 'Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning', *Journal Of The American Planning Association* 71: 2, pp. 147–158.
21 Folkers, A. (2011) *Modern Architecture in Africa.* Amsterdam: SUN Publishers, p. 102.

In his work in Ouagadougou in the 1970s and 1980s, Dutch urban planner Coen Beeker implemented a series of projects that addressed the need to formalize property ownership in the traditional settlements surrounding the city centre. Looking back, Beeker's approach was ahead of its time. Using a participatory planning method that engaged residents directly in the process, clever financing strategies that acknowledged realities on the ground, and respect for the existing environmental and residential conditions, Beeker achieved what many land formalization projects have not: namely, a sustainable long-term solution that legalized tenure for 30,000 households and increased access to multiple public services.[22]

In 1985, Beeker was an early critic of the type of New Town currently under development across the continent: namely, the neoliberal prestige project that responds to an existing market (the so-called middle class), but fails to acknowledge the need for low-income housing, mixed demographics, or environmental considerations. In response to President Thomas Sankara's proposed *Cités* (urban developments with a clear formal lineage to France's *villas nouvelles*), Beeker wrote:

> The typical and heterogeneous (in terms of income rates) character of the households in the old and spontaneous neighborhoods was broken up by Sankara and his comrades. It is peculiar that this operation was carried out by a military regime that on the one hand claims to be inspired by the ideas of Marx and Lenin, and on the other hand in Ouagadougou seeks to establish an exclusively middle-class neighbourhood. In reality, *Cité An II* and *Cité An III* comply with the colonial French distinction between *quartiers traditionels* (comprising different income groups) and *zones résidentielles* (homogenous groups in terms of income and intended for the French and native elite).[23]

A decade later, in response to the 1996 African Summit Meeting in Ouagadougou, President Blaise Compaoré's *Ouaga 2000* New Town project emerged as proof that the shift from African socialism to neoliberalism was complete. *Ouaga 2000* was originally planned to accommodate the elite visitors to the Summit and, to this day, remains off-limits to the majority of Burkinabé.

Faced with decreasing public involvement and intensifying inequality, African New Towns could benefit from a re-examination of Beeker's methods. Specifically, the application of participatory planning that acknowledges the

---

22 *Ibid*., p. 118.
23 *Ibid*., p. 130.

realities of chronic poverty and finds viable alternatives to existing models. Planning has the ability to provide greater access to public services, closer proximity to employment and amenities, as well as incorporated public transport options. All these advantages are desperately needed in the contemporary African urban landscape. African New Towns must now begin to transform backwards, 'unplanning' their highly regulated spaces to allow access to a greater diversity of residents, and supply services more democratically. By combining the nuanced, adaptive planning methods employed by Beeker and his team in Ouagadougou, one imagines the emergence of a hybrid, inclusive planning practice: a New Town for *everyone*.

References

Fjelde, H. and Østby, G. (2014). 'Socioeconomic Inequality and Communal Conflict: A Disaggregated Analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990–2008', *International Interactions* 40: 5, pp. 737–762.

Folkers, A. (2011). *Modern Architecture in Africa*. Amsterdam: SUN Publishers.

Myers, G.A. (2003). *Verandahs of Power*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Njoh, A.J. (2009). 'Urban planning as a Tool of Power and Social Control in Colonial Africa', *Planning Perspectives* 24: 3, pp. 301–317.

Provoost, M. and Keeton, R. (2017). 'African New Towns', in: Forsyth, A. and Peiser, R. (eds.) *21st Century New Towns*. Forthcoming.

Roy, A. (2005). 'Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning', *Journal Of The American Planning Association* 71: 2, pp. 147–158.

Sassen, S. (1999). *Globalization and Its Discontents.* New York: The New York Press.

Silva, C.N. (ed.). (2015). *Urban Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial and Post-Colonial Planning Cultures*. New York: Routledge.

Smit, B. and Wandel, J. (2006). 'Adaptation, Adaptive Capacity and Vulnerability', *Global Environmental Change* 16, pp. 282–292.

Van Ballegooijen, J. and Rocco, R. (2013). 'The Ideologies of Informality: Informal Urbanisation in the Architectural and Planning Discourses', *Third World Quarterly* 34: 10, pp. 1794–1810.

Watson, V. (2002). 'The Usefulness of Normative Planning Theory in the Context of Sub-Saharan Africa', *Planning Theory* 1: 1, pp. 27–52.

Watson, V. (2013). 'African Urban Fantasies: Dreams or Nightmares?', *Environment and Urbanization* 26: 1, pp. 1–17.

she lectures and coordinates modules on housing theory, policy and finance and has a particular interest in public and social housing. In addition, she has developed curricula for short courses on, e.g. institutional housing sector support, housing policy, participatory housing, informal settlement upgrading and retrofitting of housing. She is an experienced trainer in working with professionals from urban management sectors, including all tiers of government, private sector and NGOs. Her geographical focus is on Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa in particular.

Joseph Guiébo est sociologue-urbaniste, titulaire d'une maitrise à l'université Paris V-Sorbonne, d'un DEA en urbanisme et aménagement puis diplômé de l'Institut d'urbanisme de Paris 12-Créteil. De 1980 à 1995, il a été successivement directeur de l'Urbanisme et de l'aménagement, directeur général de l'Urbanisme, de la topographie et du cadastre, conseiller technique du ministre puis secrétaire général du ministère chargé de l'Urbanisme au Burkina Faso. De 1995 à 2014, il a été également conseiller technique principal au Bureau régional pour l'Afrique au sein de l'ONU-Habitat.

Muhammad Juma PhD, Director of the Department of Urban and Rural Planning, Zanzibar. Architect, and planner from Zanzibar. He works as the Director of Urban and Rural Planning since 2011. Before that, he was the Assistant Director General of the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority (STCDA). From 2009–2011, he worked as an in-house consultant at the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris and advised on urban conservation on the African continent.

Rachel Keeton is an urban researcher specialized in contemporary New Towns. She obtained her Master's in architecture in 2008, and worked at the International New Town Institute from 2009–2015. In 2015, Keeton opened her own office for urban research: Urban Anecdote. She is the author of Rising in the East: Contemporary New Towns in Asia (SUN, 2011), and a Global Initiative Fellow. Keeton is currently pursuing a PhD in urbanism at TU Delft, under the Design as Politics chair.

Gilbert Kibtonré Originaire du Burkina Faso, marié et père de deux enfants, Gilbert Kibtonré est géographe-urbaniste de formation. En 1958, c'est à Ouagadougou qu'il fait ses premiers pas à l'école. Ce n'est qu'en 1972, en débutant ses études supérieures, que son parcours scolaire l'amène à se déplacer entre Ouagadougou, Kumasi au Ghana et Toulouse en France.