

Territoire en Mouvement

Revue de Géographie et d'Aménagement

Call for papers (1/2):

CITIES OF EAST AFRICA IN MUTATION

In 2010, approximately 40% of Africans were city dwellers, but this proportion was only 23.6% in East Africa as defined by UN-Habitat which we can here discuss the criteria. If we follow this definition, the east-African urban growth is nevertheless very strong: between 1960 and 2010, the urban population in East Africa increased from six to 77.1 million inhabitants and during the next decade, it is expected to rise to 38.9 million more and reach 116.1 million in 2020, representing an increase of 50.4%. This spectacular increase tends to remain and the urban network of East Africa is often characterized by macrocephalic capitals, just like Mogadishu, the Somalian capital where live about 37,5 % of the population of the country, or Antananarivo which concentrates more than 30 % of the Malagasy population. The medium-sized cities, not exceeding 500 000 inhabitants, absorb from now most of this growth. Urban development occurs in a context of strong economic growth (5,8% GDP growth in 2011 in East Africa compared with only 2,7% for the whole continent), but still very unbalanced urban hierarchies in most countries has led to the concentration of wealth and power, and to strong inequalities of access to the urban resources.

Today, these cities are entering more or less rapidly in the competitive global system and are becoming key actors of this system. This results since the 1980's in a strong injunction to good governance by international institutions (UN-Habitat, World Bank), applied more or less successfully in different contexts and quite criticized today. Entering the era of globalization is also reflected in the economic liberalization and the opening up of urban spaces to private investments which have never been more important than today. It is also expressed by a political will of modernization and development, while 80% of the production of goods and services in Africa takes place today in the city: cities are now perceived and conceived by public authorities and by private actors as the main – if not unique – vector of economic and human development of countries. In this context, we can see today in East African cities some radical transformations that are both the result of the importation of globalized urban standards (including the introduction of the verticality), and sometimes the result of the heritage process seen as a tool for the (economic) development. Along with the enhancement of certain areas, programs of eradication of slums are implemented in the popular districts, as well as the ultra-fast construction of new housing. These programs are allowed by the creation or the strengthening of land/real estate market which accentuate more that they reduce the disparities of access to the city. Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that the urban reality is still widely dominated by the conjunction of poverty, inequalities and slums, whose articulation is about the difficulty of access to urban land, suitable housing and basic infrastructures.



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What is the price of these mutations? Are they happening at the price of the existing city, in its form and in its social reality? Can these mutations lead to an ever greater vulnerability of poor people and their relegation? Within this conceptual framework, several issues arise:

- What is the relation established between the spaces of modernity, rooted in the globalization of forms and flows, and the «ordinary» city, the popular spaces of everyday practices? Can we talk about dual cities, or rather about fragmented urban fabrics, in tension between urban transformation programs conducted by radical public policies and a daily city buffeted by these policies? What we observe today is indeed an atomization increasingly intense of the urban forms, conflicts between the planned city and the real-life city, between the decision makers and the inhabitants who have difficulty in asserting their role in the production of the city, conflicts between the modernity sought in the international standards and the popular districts that the public authorities want to clean, to hide or simply to eliminate.
- Behind the town planning policies, what «urban ideology» is defended by elites (urban authorities, private actors involved in public-private partnerships, investors of construction companies etc.)? How does this model forms part of the spatial forms and the social logics? What role do the international donors play in the definition of this model? We refer here to the NGOs and to the international organizations (the World Bank in particular) which have played a significant part in the current policies of decentralization and liberalization of the urban services. We refer also to diasporas: what are their investments, what role do they play in the definition of the urban policies?
- Finally, what mobilizations and resistances can we observe from the city inhabitants? Several authors note indeed the emergence of new urban spatial and social forms that are both ways to get around the urban programs and some kinds of urban patch-ups. What is the importance of personal networks in the capacity to circumvent and to adapt? How does the urban informal sector survive and how is it changing?

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