



Persistent, pragmatic and prolific: Urban master planning in Accra, Dar es Salaam and Lilongwe

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the persistence of urban master planning in African cities. Critiques of master planning in Africa label it as a stifling product of colonial legacies, an inappropriate imposition of external ideas, or a device to achieve the goals of global actors, all seen as being at odds with the rapidly changing settlement patterns and needs of many African urban contexts. This paper instead focuses on the role of local planning actors in the demand for and the production of master plans and proposes a different analytical perspective on the role of master planning in African urban contexts. Notably, we point to the weak presence of master planning in colonial contexts, in contrast with the strong activation of master plans to shape the ambitions of newly independent governments. We observe also the nuanced interactions between local actors and transnational circuits and influences in devising and implementing plans. The paper presents three case studies which demonstrate the persistence of master planning practices through the post-independence period and their proliferation in contemporary moments. We document the diverse range of local actors who have chosen to retain or revise colonial planning legacies, initiate new city-wide master planning, or solicit, shape and assume responsibility for master planning promoted by transnational circuits of development and planning. We find that actors embedded in local or national institutions, and a wide variety of transnational actors, are driven by a range of, at times conflicting, interests and ideas about what planning is and is meant to do. Historical surveys and in-depth interviews with current actors, as well as those from the recent past in Accra (Ghana), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Lilongwe (Malawi), help us to identify three aspects of urban master planning which challenge existing interpretations. We observe that master planning has been a *persistent* presence, although often taking a more ephemeral form in extended “silent” periods when outdated but valued plans remained operative. We note that complex political tensions and institutional landscapes shape enthusiasm for, and control over the nature, preparation, adoption and implementation of master plans, including their being side-lined or resisted – local-national dynamics are crucial here. This leads to a *pragmatic* engagement with transnational actors to bring forward different kinds of plans. The *prolific* production of master plans supported by multiple transnational actors in poorly resourced contexts constitutes a dynamic, although at times counterproductive, terrain of

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visioning and practical planning initiatives seeking to grapple with the pace and unpredictability of urbanisation. Our analysis provides an opening for considering the politics of urban planning from an African-centric perspective and as an active part of African urbanization.

1. Introduction

The history of urban master planning in Africa is often associated with the way colonial influences have continued to shape contemporary urban spatial patterns, legislative planning frameworks and local planning imaginaries (Watson, 2009). However, master planning has been shown to have only fragmented beginnings under colonial rule, emerging rather in the immediate post-independence era as an instrument for asserting post-colonial aspirations (Harrison and Croese, 2022). Nonetheless, after independence global actors continued their involvement in local planning exercises across Africa, with scholars indicating how this involvement reflects both ongoing connections with former colonial powers, and newer and more complex circuits of engagement which involve nuanced interactions with many different international players, including financing agencies and planning consultants, with each actor bringing their own interests and visions of development (Bromley, 2003; Ward, 2010; Home, 2013; Beeckmans, 2014; Stanek, 2020). Multilateral development agencies and bilateral donors, for example, exercise significant influence over the production of master plans in Africa (Beeckmans, 2018).

Recent years have seen the entry of non-traditional planning and development actors into the African planning space, ranging from large international architectural and design firms to Asian state-owned enterprises, that have been involved in the financing or development of master plans for both existing as well as entirely new cities (van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018; Bock, 2019; Moser et al., 2021). There has also been an intensification of the activities of actors with an existing urban planning footprint in Africa, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which has supported the development of spatial master plans in a growing number of African cities (Lane, 2021; Croese and Miyauchi, 2022). Multilateral or Western development agencies in turn have focused their support on the development of strategic urban development plans, rapid urban assessments and city strategies, in line with a shift towards the more participatory and collaborative approaches to planning initiated in the early 1990s (Healey, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Harris, 2014).

Most of these plans are framed as contributing to more inclusive and sustainable pathways to achieving global urban development goals (e.g., JICA, 2013), while similarly reflecting a globally oriented shift towards infrastructure-led development through spatial planning as a tool for attracting foreign investment and generating economic growth (Schindler and Kanai, 2021). As such, an important critique of recent master plans is directed at the ways in which they cater to external economic interests and promote visions of cities inspired by places such as Dubai, Shanghai and Singapore, thereby bypassing efforts to engage with complex local, and often informal, urban realities (Watson, 2014; Myers, 2015). Yet, such critiques largely overlook the ways in which the circulation of, for example, ‘Asian urbanisms’ (van Noorloos and Leung, 2017) and attendant visions of modernity and ‘world class’ urbanity may be embedded in local planning interests, trajectories and imaginaries (de Boeck, 2011; Van den Broeck, 2017; Côte-Roy and Moser, 2019). As such, as Cardoso (2016, pp. 6–7) has argued, critiques of contemporary master planning provide little insight into the ‘unavoidably messy politics that go into planning and designing [...] the future of African cities’. This prevents us from ‘understanding what exactly constitutes and shapes official attempts to manage, regulate and service urban development in the African context’ and from apprehending ‘those plans as modes of city making with particular histories, practices and toolkits’ (ibid.). In this paper, we explore the role of local planning actors to consider the internal forces and motivations that drive the

development of urban master plans in Africa. How are master plans mobilized and kept alive, by whom and why?

Important contributions have been made in the planning literature about the ways in which flows of planning knowledge and expertise are always subject to ‘complex processes of translation, interpretation and adaptation’ (Healey, 2010, p. 5). Such processes include the ‘editing’ and ‘negotiation’ of externally ‘imposed’ plans, including those developed in colonial and early post-colonial times (Ward, and, 2002, 2010; Beeckmans, 2013). Others have emphasized the ways that plans can be developed, promoted and mobilized to serve multiple claims and purposes, ranging from the economic to the developmental and the political (Robinson, 2014; Lauermann, 2016; Wade, 2019). Plans can also play an important role in local planning circuits and imaginaries, even in the absence of their implementation (Kaza, 2019). However, few researchers have explored the role of local planning actors and circuits in the commissioning, development and implementation of master plans in cities in Africa. Instead, most of the work focuses on exploring either the poor fit between the everyday politics of city making and the spatial imagination of planning (Watson, 2009; Guma and Monstadt, 2021), or the politics of ‘non-planning’ in which interventions, ‘although undertaken in the name of some plan, appear to have little or no basis in existing city plans, designs or urban development strategies’ (Kamete and Lindell, 2010: 891).

In contrast, Cirolia and Berrisford (2017) use plans as an entry point to explore the everyday nature of planning implementation, based on an analysis of the many actors and complex alliances and dissonances involved in the implementation of spatial plans in the cities of Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Harare. Goodfellow (2013) explains contrasting patterns of planning implementation in the cities of Kampala and Kigali by looking at how different local political bargaining environments affect the degree of state intervention in the implementation of plans. Fourchard (2011) in turn points to the role of partisan politics, especially the complex array of local actors, including local patrons, associations, union leaders, and leaders of political parties, as central to explaining the ways in which land use plans in Lagos have been implemented (and not) in post-colonial years. In their review of urban master planning practices in Sub-Saharan Africa, Harrison and Croese (2022) therefore conclude that there is a need to explore the role and agency of local actors in shaping contemporary urban planning practice through case based and comparative research. We take our cue from their work by drawing on detailed empirical research in three contexts – Accra (Ghana), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Lilongwe (Malawi) – to explore the different actors, ideas and interests that are involved in (and shaped by) master planning processes. Three key insights emerge from this comparative analysis, which we find to be evident across all three cities but develop in detail per case.

Firstly, we use the case of Accra to illustrate the ways in which master planning practices can alternately wax and wane while retaining a persistent, albeit at times ephemeral presence, being pragmatically re-activated with the purpose of guiding and generating urban investments following extended “silent” periods of urban planning. Secondly, our research in Dar es Salaam shows the lasting influence of spatial master planning approaches among national planning officials responsible for initiating master planning processes, contributing to the persistence of the production of blueprint plans despite limited implementation and city-level support for more strategic and participatory forms of planning. Different local actors operate pragmatically to engage international support for their approaches. Lastly, the case of Lilongwe illustrates how the growing interest of international development actors in planning has resulted in the proliferation of multiple, at times overlapping planning

exercises in recent years, produced through interactions between transnational circuits and local planning practitioners. This prolific production of city-wide plans also reflects a range of different approaches to masterplanning.

A concluding section confirms these analytical insights as based on shared experiences across the three cases and offers reflections on the study's policy implications. We especially note the value placed on different kinds of master planning exercises, and the strong role of local consultants, different government actors, and the wider knowledge communities formed around pre-existing plans in shaping new initiatives. In policy terms we suggest that various kinds of master plans can have an important role to play in guiding even relatively informal and unanticipated urban development. Analytically, we encourage scholars to look more closely at the nuanced and mediated production of these plans, rather than dismissing them as irrelevant or externally imposed. Notably, we insist that master planning is a strongly post-independence practice, reflecting longstanding hopes and ambitions for urban development in different contexts. All three cases indicate the need for further research. More certainly needs to be understood about how transnational development actors and investment circuits play a central role in financing and producing master plans. Yet, further detailed analysis is indicated to consider how complex local political tensions and institutional landscapes are central to the demand for and production of master plans, as well as mediating and shaping the ways in which resulting plans may be implemented, kept alive beyond their expiry, but also sidelined, resisted, or otherwise impact the long-term nature and form of urban planning, policy and development.

2. Methodology

The paper builds on the study of original master plans, secondary literature and online news sources. This was combined with a total of 39 online and in person in-depth interviews with a duration of approximately 1–1.5 hours each, undertaken with a range of different planning actors, including (former) senior officials in national and local government or planning authorities, as well as local, international and private town planners, planning consultants, development practitioners and community activists, in the cities of Accra ($n = 11$), Dar es Salaam ($n = 18$) and Lilongwe ($n = 10$). Shared interview guides were used and included sets of questions organized around the key actors, motivations, processes, contents and outcomes of key city-wide master plans in the three cities. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to facilitate collective comparative analysis. Informants were selected based on their knowledge of and involvement in key city-wide planning processes and approached through methods of snowball sampling. While the size of the community of actors and experts engaged with master planning varies according to the size of each city, local planning communities are generally relatively small, allowing us to achieve a fairly high coverage and ensure that there was a reasonable representation of different categories of planning actors.

3. Accra: from 'silence' to the (re)activation of city planning

3.1. Colonial-era planning

The practice of preparing spatial master plans in Accra has been a chequered one despite the city's continuous territorial expansion, beginning from 1877 when it was made the national capital of Ghana (then Gold Coast) by the colonial British authorities (MLG/DTCP, 1993; Grant and Yankson, 2003; Owusu and Oteng-Ababio, 2015). In 2018, Accra had a recorded population in the metropolitan municipal area of about 2.4 million, while the Greater Accra metropolitan region counts about 5 million inhabitants, with an estimated annual population growth rate of 2.2% until 2030 (UNDESA, 2018). Under colonial rule, master plans were focused on infrastructural improvement across the colony. These included the so-called Guggisberg and Burns Plans,

developed in the 1920s and 40s respectively, which focused on the development of transport infrastructure (railways and roads), public services (water, sanitation, schools and hospitals) and town improvement in the form of housing development schemes (Acheampong, 2019, p. 31). Although these plans have been criticized as serving the interests of colonialists by facilitating the expropriation of resources, the physical infrastructure and its specific geographic focus on Ghana's southern coastal towns laid the foundation for the country's future spatial development and the pattern of its contemporary urban development.

In line with colonial-era planning in many other contexts (Home, 2013), early master planning efforts in Accra focused only on restricted parts of the city. Infrastructure development and service provision was limited to European and government areas, while indigenous areas identified in plans were lacking in detail and subject to slum clearance (Jackson, 2019). The first city-wide master plan for Accra was prepared in 1944 by Maxwell Fry, who was the British Town Planning Advisor to West Africa, together with Jane Drew (who he was also married to). Fry undertook a detailed study with his assistant Theodore Shealtiel Clerk as a basis for this plan, which preceded the Gold Coast's Town and Country Planning Act (CAP 84) of 1945. Although the 1945 Planning Act conceived of the idea of city-regions or metropolitan regions, it focused on a limited number of areas in towns that were declared as planning areas, meaning that planning was fragmented and generally lagged behind actual physical development.

3.2. Independence, and a 'silent period' for planning

Accra's first statutory master plan was developed in 1958, exactly one year after the country's independence, by the then Town and Country Planning Division (TCPD) of the Ministry of Housing under the leadership of the country's first president, Kwame Nkrumah. The master plan for Accra sought to develop the city in a manner that befitted the status of any 'modern national capital', with Nkrumah writing the foreword to the plan (Acheampong, 2019; TCPD (Town and Country Planning Department Ghana), 1958). As part of a wider agenda to achieve rapid industrialization and modernization, President Nkrumah also expanded ongoing efforts to develop a new port city of Tema to the east of Accra (Jackson and Oppong, 2014). Initial work on the design of Tema had been undertaken by the firm Fry and Drew, with a leading role for Fry's former assistant Clerk as chief architect.⁸ In 1961 Nkrumah hired the Greek planner, Constantinos Doxiadis, to complete the task - leading eventually to the development of a plan for an Accra-Tema metropolitan complex (Doxiadis Associates, 1962). These ambitious and wide-ranging planning efforts came to a halt with the overthrow of Nkrumah's government by the military in 1966, ushering in a "silent period of spatial planning" (Amedzro, 2021). This period lasted for three successive decades, during which very little in the form of citywide spatial planning was done (Acheampong, 2019; Fuseini and Kemp, 2015). The silent period of spatial planning coincided with a period of poor socio-economic performance and the general mismanagement of Ghana's economy. Even though national economic development plans were formulated after 1966, including pro-growth policies following on the devastating effects of Structural Adjustment Policies in the 1980s, these plans had very weak spatial planning policy components, and lacked a city focus.

As such, these decades had adverse consequences on the spatial development of Accra because, in the absence of an effective land use planning framework for the city, development proceeded with little or no control. As one retired senior planner (17 March 2021), noted, "There had not been a plan for Accra for a very long time. Things were just going

⁸ Notably, Clerk's leading role is nearly absent in the academic literature on the development of Tema. Exceptions are Ghanaian sources, eg. <https://rtomedi.com/2021/10/13/history-of-first-ghanaian-architect-city-planner-designer-and-developer-of-tema-theodore-shealtiel-clerk/>

haywire.” Even where spatial (local) plans were prepared, they were based on a fragmented and piecemeal approach to planning, and in many cases implementation of the plan never materialized. As another key informant observed “... there was no sense of proper sequential planning, there was a lot of leapfrogging of development all over the metropolitan region. Nothing was coordinated whatsoever and the net result was that there was enormous damage done to infrastructure. One agency dug out what another agency had put in several years before because nobody knew where the plans were” (International consultant, 24 March 2021). Moreover, as this informant indicated, extant plans were focused on land use zoning, and were dispersed across different agencies, fragmented, and literally disintegrating physically.

3.3. Spatial planning revived, with strong local input

The absence of a master plan to guide the rapid expansion of Accra was remedied in Ghana’s transition from military rule to civilian democratic rule in the early 1990s. The then military head of state, President Jerry Rawlings, played a central role in the resuscitation of planning efforts, by requesting international support to fund the preparation of a new master plan for the city. As noted by an international consultant subsequently involved in the development of the plan: “He [Rawlings] had been flying around and he was upset about the sporadic development of Accra, so he asked the UN if they could prepare a new plan for Accra.” (International consultant, 24 March 2021). Yet, the need for a plan as a tool to generate much needed investments in the city was just as important: “at the time, Ghana needed some re-investments in the capital because the infrastructure had broken down and we didn’t have adequate urban services” (Private development planning practitioner, 10 June 2021).

UN agencies responded positively to this pragmatic re-activation of city planning, leading to the extension of financial and technical assistance for the development of an integrated and comprehensive *Strategic Plan for the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA)*, which was completed in 1993 and formally covered a 20-year period. The central government contributed with some counterpart funding while local planners played an important role in the conception and development of the plan, even if the consultants maintained control of the overall presentation and writing process to drive investor interest (International planning consultant, 24 March 2021). Lead planners involved were both Ghanaian and international, and the plan was commissioned and led by the central Ministry of Local Government with a direct mandate from the President, and co-ordinated by a central government official, suggesting strong local involvement.

One senior town planner active at the time commented that the Town and Country Planning Department had prepared the concept note for the plan: “Yes, it was mooted by us, it came from us, that a unit was set up for that. So that unit was called the Structure Planning Unit that was set up within the Department of Town Planning under the direction of head office. Even it wasn’t under the regional office, it wasn’t under the Accra metropolitan office, it was directly under the head office of town planning.” (Retired senior planning officer, 17 March 2021). International consultants worked closely with local technical departments and local consultants such that one local planning officer recalled that, “it was often personnel with the requisite expertise and then they joined the staff and they worked day to day with the staff. So, it wasn’t like they prepared it, we prepared it.” (Retired senior planner, 29 March 2021). Another planner involved in the process agreed:

We, the locals were driving the process. We were driving it because they depended on us as they were not familiar with the terrain and they don’t know what goes on here. It’s not because we’re daft but there’s a new concept that we are probably not familiar with. So, they are only in to direct us as to how it is done then we do the work. So basically, the work was done by us with their expertise

(Retired senior planner, 17 March 2021).

Many planners involved in the preparation of the Plan agreed that it was unique in Ghana and to some extent the rest of Africa, as at the time it represented the first real large-scale metropolitan development plan for any city in Africa (International consultant, 24 March 2021). As part of the work for this plan the functional region of Accra was defined, focusing planning attention on the wider metropolitan region, which was a valued and long-lasting outcome (Public sector planner, 14 March 2021). It projected that the population of GAMA would be about four million in 2010, “which will in turn place severe strain on the demand for land for housing, industry, recreation, open-space, etc.” (Owusu, 2013, p. 9). Besides the Plan’s goal to curtail uncontrolled sprawl of Accra by promoting efficient use of land through mixed land uses and compact development, the plan emphasized the need to address the growing metropolitan region’s needs through detailed sector studies in the areas of infrastructure, employment, education, health, solid waste management and transport. Many planners stressed the importance of this shift beyond purely physical planning to a multi-sectoral and regional approach, both of which were seen as ground breaking. For its preparation, the lead consultant drew from the innovative New Zealand and Australian Integrated Planning experiences (International Consultant, 24 March 2021), and it was also influenced by UN-Habitat’s new enthusiasm for strategic planning, rather than detailed structure plans or blueprints, although detailed plans were prepared for the central areas (Senior Private Consultant, 15 May 2021). Some senior Ghanaian planners travelled and studied abroad, to Australia, Canada and the UK, to become familiar with integrated strategic planning, and study tours abroad were arranged for ministers and key officials (International Consultant, 24 March 2021).

Reflective of its dual purpose of guiding both growth and investments, the GAMA Strategic Plan also included separate volumes on a Financial Plan (Volume 3) and an Implementation Plan (Volume 4). This was instrumental to funding many initiatives during the project and soon after, with the lead planners playing a strong role in directing private investment and external project funding from the World Bank and other donors as well as NGOs. The lead International Planner commented that “we had to make a series of attractive packages to get by and attract key international stakeholders. If we didn’t the plan was never going to work” (International Consultant, 24 March 2021). However, similar to earlier plans its overall implementation faced numerous challenges. A private planning practitioner summed up these challenges as follows:

The unfortunate thing about the Strategic Plan or the Accra Structure Plan was that after all this very deliberate planning had been undertaken, there was no instrument given to it to give it some legal capacity and therefore to oblige its implementation. So, it was like a commitment by the government without force, that is what the document became. Secondly, the institutional set up for the Accra Structure Plan envisaged that the lead institution would be the Town and Country Planning Department [TCPD]. However, the Town and Country Planning Department itself had suffered a capacity deficit for some time in terms of the numbers of planners available. It [TCPD] also had a very fluid institutional anchor or organizational anchor being moved from one ministry to another and so there was no champion at the ministerial level to drive the implementation through the Town and Country Planning Department.

(Private development planning practitioner, 28 June 2021)

One informant puts the lack of legal instruments down to controversy over the plan’s proposal to declare Dodowa rather than Accra the regional capital (Retired senior planner, 29 March 2021). Also, as a long, detailed and technical document it was not easily absorbed by political leaders or the wider public: “people couldn’t actually connect in real time what this plan was to do and what it meant. The aspirations of this plan weren’t at their fingertips” (Public sector planner, 14 March 2021). Lack of political weight behind the plan and dispersed institutional

responsibility for different elements of the plan meant that there was no dedicated government funding or co-ordination of technical implementation across different sectors (Senior private consultant, 15 May 2021). Some aspects of the plan did not find political favour – such as an integrated metropolitan authority, or scope for a green belt to contain urbanization (Public sector planner, 14 March 2021), and several informants note that changes in government undermined commitment and continuity (International consultant, 24 March 2021). In broad terms, the implementation of the Plan can be described as fragmented, following a piecemeal approach, with only some selected strategic areas informed by the plan. Settlements on family and stool lands held by traditional authorities were barely affected. Areas slated for specific development projects, open spaces or wetlands areas, or reserves for future road developments failed to be protected, often because of complexities of land ownership, and were encroached on (Senior private consultant, 15 May 2021). Moreover, ongoing rapid urban growth meant that three decades after the Plan was produced, the urban footprint of the metropolitan region stretched far beyond the area considered in the plan, which means that it failed in its stated goal of containing urban sprawl, undermining its ongoing relevance (Owusu, 2013).

3.4. The persistence of masterplans, as an ephemeral presence

The GAMA Strategic Plan expired in 2010, turning the years that followed into another ‘silent’ period of spatial planning in Accra. However, many of the proposals or recommendations in the expired Strategic Plan continued to influence medium term plan preparation (Municipal planning officer, 23 July 2021). The vision of the Plan has continued to shape development projects, with funders referring to the plan and supporting documents in their proposals for quite some time. One planner described it as highly influential on future plans, calling it “the bible” (Planner and consultant, 17 March 2022). Another noted that he had been “heavily involved in its implementation, especially in the second half of the Plan. That is from the early 2000–2010, when the Plan was technically supposed to have expired. But due to the relevance of most of the propositions in that plan, we continued implementing it.” (Public sector planner, 15 March 2021). Through development of areas such as Makola precinct, the Airport City development, some slum and sanitation upgrading, major road infrastructure works and through constant references in technical, policy and data work by government departments, as well as research, “the structure plan lived on beyond a certain time” (Retired senior planner, 29 March 2021; International planner, 24 March 2021). This also includes the implementation of large-scale urban development projects, such as the recent World Bank funded Greater Accra Resilient and Integrated Development Project (GARID) and the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Water and Sanitation Project (Senior civil servant 11 May 2021). Moreover, the continuities with earlier plans, notably the 1958 post-independence plan, in terms of strategic infrastructure and focus for larger scale developments, gave strong continuity to planning ambitions in Accra (Public sector planner, 14 March 2021).

As such, the GAMA plan continues to influence the region’s physical infrastructure development as well as other urban development plans and projects. According to one planner, “what that structure plan did was that it left us with some blueprint; blueprint that has some relevance even today notwithstanding the criticisms that others have laid on it” (Private development planning practitioner, 10 June 2021). In that regard, the plan’s focus on investment was key to guiding the effective implementation of a number of projects. As noted by an international consultant involved in the development of the plan,

The whole plan was geared up to focus on attracting investment. We knew we had little money because Ghana at that time didn’t have much money [...] Ghana went through a particular difficult time in 1993 and 1994 but it was interesting that by 1996 and 1997 when

nothing was happening, the French government and other governments picked up the investment strategy side of the plan and that is why you get a lot of the projects developing through the later parts of the 1990s and 2000s in Accra. So that plan was very instrumental in securing funding finance for a number of those major projects (International consultant, 24 March 2021).

A renewed acknowledgement of the value of master plans for attracting international funding and investments may have contributed to a more proactive posture of the Ghanaian state towards urban development and spatial planning in recent years, in contrast with the ambivalent attitudes in the 1970s through the 1980s. This marks a return to spatial planning and the development of several policies on urbanization and spatial development. Key policies include the National Urban Policy Framework and Action Plan, 2012; National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF), 2015/2035 and the promulgation of the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act (Act 925, 2016). This Act replaced the obsolete Town and Country Planning Ordinance (CAP 84) of 1945, heavily criticized for its piecemeal approach, lacking the capacity to deal with the complexities and development issues of rapidly expanding urban areas and metropolitan regions in contemporary times (Acheampong, 2019).

The passage of Act 925 came along with the restructuring of the institutional arrangements for spatial planning and the establishment of the Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority (LUSPA). The Act provides for a three-tier system of spatial planning instruments, namely Regional Spatial Development Framework, District Spatial Development Framework and Structure and Local Plans. In line with this new spatial planning framework, in 2017 a new Greater Accra Regional Spatial Development Framework (GARSDF) was prepared by a South African consultancy firm (GIBB) with the support of many local experts and institutions. GARSDF was funded by the World Bank as part of an extended version of the umbrella Land Administration Project in Ghana. The South African firm won via international competitive bidding in line with national procurement regulations and LUSPA played a major role as a client by ensuring quality control, coordinating multiple workshops with municipal local governments, central government departments and agencies, and other relevant stakeholders. The GARSDF spans a period of 20-years and is wider in terms of geographic scope than its predecessors, covering the entire political-administrative jurisdiction of the Greater Accra Region although not as detailed as the 1993 strategic plan. However, GARSDF has several major proposals such as an urban growth boundary (green belt) which mimic the 1993 strategic plan.

Following persistent calls for a detailed new master plan for GAMA by government, international development agencies and donors, as well as civil society, a new plan titled *Structure Plan for Greater Accra Metropolitan Area* is currently being prepared with funding from the African Development Bank as part of the Accra Urban Transport project (African Development Bank (n.d.)). The main client is the Ministry of Roads and Highways, while LUSPA is the principal technical agency overseeing the plan preparation (Ghana News Agency April, 2022). A Danish planning consultancy firm, COWI, together with its local partner Maple Consult won the competitive bid for this project, with the Plan being developed by three experts from COWI and seven local Ghanaian experts. The Plan covers the entire Greater Accra political-administrative region plus five other municipalities in the Eastern and Central Regions which are seen as functionally and geographically part of GAMA. Interestingly, a private planning consultant noted of the GAMA plan, “That old structure plan is one of the base documents that is to be shared with the consultants” (Private development planning practitioner, 28 June 2021) and another planner involved in this earlier plan suggested that “the plan even if it’s picked now it’s still relevant. Government can still work with it. I think the new plan being formulated should [be] more of a review than to start something afresh.” (Senior retired planner, 17 March 2021).

In conclusion, planning efforts in Accra have historically been

intermittent, with implementation being fragmented and often lagging behind rapid urban growth. The case study also demonstrates the powerful influence of wider policy, political and economic trends in shaping master planning. An international policy trend against spatial planning, extensive political turmoil and long-term structural adjustment all determined a prolonged period of planning ‘silence’ through the 1980 s, coupled with extensive underinvestment in urban infrastructure and service provision. However, the development of the *Strategic Plan for the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area* in 1993 illustrated the central role of national political institutions, in this case including the capacity of high-level political leadership to catalyse international support for renewed urban master planning. While the implementation of this plan was hampered by the lack of a supportive legal framework and institutional capacity, it proved central for informing investments in infrastructural development, long beyond its official expiry date. The recent re-emergence of interest in master planning for Accra illustrates the continued importance of, but also possibly disproportionate reliance on, transnational funding, support and partnerships in the urban planning realm, especially considering the wealth of local planning expertise that the country has developed through its various urban planning exercises over time. This also raises questions over plan ownership and exposes the inconsistent commitment of political leadership to ensuring spatial plans are regularly prepared and implemented.

4. Dar es Salaam: master planning caught between central-local tensions

4.1. The influence of colonial-era masterplans

Master planning for the port city of Dar es Salaam, with a population of about 6 million in 2018 and an estimated annual population growth rate of 4.8% until 2030 (UNDESA, 2018) dates back to the colonial presence. Founded by the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1862, German colonial authorities occupied the city and drew up its first planning scheme in 1891, after initially having used Bagamoyo as the administrative capital of (then) Tanganyika. The British took occupation after WWI and passed a Town Development (Control) Ordinance in 1936, followed by the preparation of the *Outline Plan for Dar es Salaam* in 1949 by Harry Ford of the London-based firm, Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners, as part of the launch of a series of master plans for leading East African towns (Armstrong, 1987). It was a segregationist plan, typical of the period, and drew on contemporary ideas such as the Garden City and the neighbourhood that were circulating at the time. Described as a relatively amateurish plan, largely reflecting colonial interests in sanitation and security, like most other plans of the period in African cities it concentrated on planning European and commercial areas, paying only ‘perfunctory attention’ to the residential areas of the African majority (Armstrong, 1987, p. 137). It had no statutory basis and implementation was weak but it did set in place the broad directions of spatial development for future growth, and reinforced inequalities between high density (African), medium density (Asians) and low density (European) areas (Armstrong, 1987; Kironde, 2006).

However, at the same time, Ford drafted national planning legislation which had long-lasting impacts on master planning practices in Dar es Salaam. Based on his previous work on developing an Ordinance for Nigeria, this was promulgated as the Tanganyika’s Town and Country Planning Ordinance (1956). The Ordinance placed all powers for urban planning oversight and approval at the level of the Ministry responsible for town planning but did allow for delegation to an Area Planning Committee, which may be a City Council (Kironde, 2006). The resulting tensions between central and local government in planning practice are evident to the present.

4.2. Urban master planning in post-independence Tanzania

After independence in 1961, the city of Dar es Salaam experienced a

period of ‘uncoordinated decentralized planning’ (Halla, 2007, p. 134), marked by rapid growth and limited state control. The city’s first post-colonial master plan of 1968 aimed to guide the city’s rapid expansion through the development of several satellite sub-cities and neighbourhood and village units, but with little attention to existing unplanned areas (other than proposals to clear them). President Julius Nyerere turned to a Toronto-based firm, Project Planning Associates, to prepare the master plan, even though this came a year after the adoption of the Arusha Declaration which emphasized socialist values and self-reliance. Van Ginneken (2015) finds Nyerere’s reliance on Canadian planning (and funding) to be ‘fairly ironic’. Lugalla (1989, p. 189) is more forthright stating that ‘the actual nature of urban planning in Tanzania contradicts and in fact runs counter to the aspirations stated via the Arusha Declaration of 1967 of building an egalitarian society based on socialism’. Lugalla concludes that part of the explanation is that Tanzania’s post-independence elites considered urban planning to be a largely technical matter separated from ideology, in contrast with the ideologically charged national strategy for Ujamaa. Nyerere was thus comfortable in turning to well-regarded consultants in a capitalist country with which he had good relations (he held, for example, an honorary doctorate from the University of Toronto). The Dar es Salaam plan was broadly based on North American patterns of suburban development and clearly lacked local ownership, but there was nevertheless an attempt in the plan to break down the racial and class divisions in the city which had been reinforced in the 1949 plan (Armstrong, 1987; Peter and Yang, 2019).

Under the autocratic rule of President Nyerere, Tanzania embarked on a large-scale programme of rural villagization, guided by the implementation of Regional Integrated Development Plans (RIDEPs). As part of this programme of so-called ‘decentralization’, local and urban governments were abolished and the responsibility (and concomitant resources) for local development and planning was shifted to the regional and district level. Owing to the abolition of local and urban governments and over-emphasis on rural development, basic services in urban centres deteriorated remarkably (Kombe and Namangaya, 2016). According to Lamberg (2021, p. 703), ‘RIDEPs were expected to provide an extension to Tanzania’s Second Five Year [Development] Plan [for the period 1969–1974] and focused on integrating such economic sectors as agriculture, fisheries, forestry and mining on a regional scale’, thereby representing the country’s first attempt at regional planning. In a further bid to deconcentrate growth, in 1973 the government also decided to create a new capital city in Dodoma, which due to its central location was thought to be better positioned to ‘maintain close and direct links with the rural population’ (Hayuma, 1981, p. 656).

However, this did not stop Dar es Salaam from maintaining its status as the country’s key economic, political and cultural hub, with its population growing at an annual rate of 12.5% between 1968 and 1978 – double the annual rate of growth assumed in the master plan of 1968 (Hayuma, 1983, pp. 256–257). To address this unabated growth, and the consequent expansion of sprawling informal and unserved settlements, a revised version of the 1968 master plan was commissioned by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development. It was completed in 1979 by another Canadian firm and funded with Swedish grant aid. This time the plan was developed with strong involvement of ‘politicians, administrators, and representatives of national and city agencies’, in an effort to avoid earlier failures of implementation (Peter and Yang, 2019, p. 364). The plan identified nearly 50 priority projects in the area of public infrastructures such as water supply and distribution, sewage collection and disposal, solid waste management, electricity distribution, roads and transportation, illustrating the vision that the plan could be a solution to challenges of urban development. As in a growing number of other African cities, in a context of increasing economic crisis, few resources were available for its implementation; the list of projects was accompanied by a warning about the possible delay in the implementation of projects should insufficient foreign assistance be available to make up for declining levels of central government

expenditure on public services (Marshall Macklin Monaghan, 1979).

By 1978, the Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC) had been reinstated. However, it had very limited powers due to a deep-seated reluctance on the part of the central government to concede autonomy to local governments, even after their full and nation-wide reconstitution through a series of reforms that started in 1982 (Liviga, 1992). This meant that the City Council had limited revenue raising powers, making it largely reliant on also limited central government transfers. Continued urban growth eventually led to the devolution of revenue raising powers to ensure that local urban authorities could deliver some basic services and development. However, the power to approve urban plans remained at the level of the central government (with the Ministry of Lands), in line with the 1956 Town and Country Planning Ordinance.

4.3. A master planning 'gap', followed by participatory planning

The period following the adoption of the 1979 master plan has been referred to as a 'master planning gap', during which little happened, either in terms of the implementation or enforcement of the existing master plan or the undertaking of any new physical urban planning interventions (Peter and Yang, 2019, p. 365). Yet, the 1979 master plan continued to be supported by a group of urban planners within the Ministry of Lands, who 'adhering to professional ethics, felt they had to do their statutory duties and tasks rigidly to control the city's development' (Halla, 1997, p. 117). As such, these 'master planners' were committed to implement the 1979 city's master plan and to enforce the 1956 Town and Country Planning Ordinance (Halla, 1997, p. 120). The support for the plan prompted a search in the late 1980s by the Director of Town Planning and Urban Development in the Ministry of Lands for financial resources to commission the revision of the 1979 master plan, which by then was halfway through its twenty-year time frame.

The newly established UN-Habitat office in Nairobi showed interest in supporting such a plan, but only on the condition that it would be developed in line with an Environmental Planning and Management (EPM) approach to urban planning, promoted as part of a joint initiative between UN-Habitat and UNEP to build local capacity for more sustainable cities (UN-Habitat, 2009). They insisted planning should be more participatory and interdisciplinary, as well as more strategic rather than spatial, and extensively involve the DCC and other urban stakeholders. These conditions were rejected by the Ministry of Lands, on the grounds that they would be inconsistent with its responsibility for city planning, understood as the production of spatial land use master plans, as per the 1956 Town and Country Planning Ordinance. This rejection led UN-Habitat to take its offer to 'the more receptive Prime Minister's Office (PMO)⁹ [...] responsible for local government including the DCC', which accepted the idea to revise the city's 1979 master plan along the lines of its suggested strategic and participatory approach (Halla, 1997, pp. 28–29). UN-Habitat funded the creation of the Sustainable Dar es Salaam (SDP) project, which resulted in the preparation of an Environmental Profile for the city in 1992. A city consultation process through stakeholder consultations and the creation of sectoral working groups, including representatives of local civil society, local communities and the private sector, supported the preparation of a Strategic Urban Development Plan (SUDP) for the city. A series of action plans were also produced to address targeted issues, such as informal settlement upgrading and solid waste collection, attracting further international funding and wide global acclaim (Myers, 2005). In 1998, the EPM approach was officially declared as the framework for urban development across the country and rolled out to all of the country's ten municipalities outside of Dar es Salaam under the coordination of the Prime Minister's Urban Authorities Support Unit, which operated out of the DCC building (Myers, 2005, p. 46).

The SDP project ran between 1992 and 2000 and was unprecedented in terms of its participatory approach to urban planning and its successes in addressing concrete urban challenges, contributing to the emergence of a group of 'SDP adherents', mainly local urban planners and practitioners within the Department of City Planning of the DCC, who saw the value in such an approach to planning (Halla, 1997, p. 64). For city planners involved in the SDP, it was "very participatory. All user groups were involved: from the communities, to the public sector, public institutions and all individuals" (Former DCC town planner, 22 November 2021). Moreover, for this planner, the success in addressing urgent issues like solid waste management, demonstrated that "we can do participatory management. So it was not like impossible. But more educating the people, opening up their mind on what benefits you get from including other stakeholders in city management". Nevertheless, the SDP faced various challenges and misconceptions. While the country had formally transitioned to multi-party democracy, governance processes continued to be characterized by elitism, distrust, centralized decision making and frequent changes of top leadership and priorities. The aim of limiting the DCC's power and ensuring ruling party control over the city was prominent. A brief experiment with a locally elected council leadership between 1994 and 1996 was quickly reversed and replaced with a centrally appointed City Commission, whose Director proceeded to implement the SDP's action plans 'according to his own vision of them' (Myers, 2005, p. 45). While not without success, this hampered the institutionalization of the SDP within the city, which was further reinforced by the status of the SDP as a semi-autonomous unit, not integrated into the city management or budget system (Kombe, 2001, pp. 201–203).

4.4. National government-led strategic planning

Hence, despite its support among local stakeholders, the SDP approach to planning ended up 'not dominant enough to replace the older one (the master planning) and render it ineffective' (Kasala, 2015, p. 6). According to another town planner who started working with the DCC in 1980 and was involved in the SDP: "Acceptance [of the SDP project] was the major issue. [...] Not just acceptance but taking it as a tool for planning was not so much accepted by various town planners [within the Ministry of Lands] [...] They understood it like that, there is no plan here, and we want a plan, [...] a blueprint" (Former DCC town planner, 16 April 2021). Another DCC town planner echoed these words by stressing the "power" of blue print master plans over participatory planning tools: "in 1990s we had this strategic urban development plan but the plan was not accepted by Ministry of Lands so how can ...the plan be implemented? That is why, it is a 5-year plan targeted on specific issues. But a master plan is a general planning scheme. It accommodates zoning and doing analysis as a road map. In 20 years to come how are we like, how [do] we want our city to look like. [...] so [the] master plan [is] more powerful" (DCC town planner, 20 April 2021). A former Ministry of Lands official confirmed these views by explaining that "the Strategic Planning Approach in the 1990s, [...] it was more to do with, you know, trying to find challenges or issues which are confronting cities and then addressing instantaneously but they [...] lacked the long term perspective in terms of land use growth of cities [...] so we came back to this conventional approach of master plans [...] we came back to our original ideas" (Former senior Ministry of Lands official, 12 March 2021).

The desire among planners in the Ministry of Lands for a return to spatial planning as a tool for guiding future growth led to a push to adopt a new Urban Planning Act in 2007, which required all urban centres in the country to have land use plans (URT, 2007). Local governments gained responsibility for the preparation and implementation of plans and some provisions regarding the need for stakeholder participation were "borrowed from Strategic Planning" and integrated into the Act, suggesting a modification of traditional master planning ideas (Former senior Ministry of Lands official, 12 March 2021). However, the Ministry

⁹ Currently President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG).

of Lands maintained complete control over the approval of master plans, meaning that it remained “the approving authority of all plans we have prepared in this country. Whether they are urban plans or rural based plans, village plans, even the national land use framework plan, it has to be approved by the Ministry of Lands” (Former senior Ministry of Lands official, 19 April 2021). This includes control over most technical and financial resources for planning, thereby reproducing historical attempts to undermine local planning capacity. As explained by a former senior DCC official,

The central government normally are not very comfortable with local authorities. You can have a very good local authority that is a planning authority but normally [with] the mandates and the capacity that is there in the local authorities ...[they are] being seen as ... not competent enough for such a big task like the preparation of a masterplan. So the Ministry of Land, having all the technocrats, all the expertise, all the people with the capacity to look for a better master plan, maybe they thought that ... rather than building the capacity at the local level, they thought that maybe they can do it themselves! And this is happening. [Some] they say we are decentralizing, but all in all the actions are centralizing. (Former senior DCC official, 29 January 2021).

Following the adoption of the 2007 Urban Planning Act, the Ministry of Lands commissioned a series of new plans, which by 2020 had resulted in the preparation of 20 master plans for cities across Tanzania (Former Ministry of Lands official, 12 March 2021). These included a new land use master plan for Dar es Salaam, as well as plans for several satellite cities, including the construction of a New City of Kigamboni. Much in line with the city’s first post-colonial master plan of 1968, these ‘sub-centres’ are meant to be connected through transport corridors with the purpose of decongesting a city of which is now expected to accommodate over 13 million people by 2036 (MLHSD, 2016). In addition, a range of sectoral master plans were commissioned by other ministries, responsible for areas such as urban transport, water and sanitation. In line with previous master plans, most of these plans were developed by international consultants with external funding. A consortium of Italian and British firms with support of local consultants was financed through a World Bank loan to prepare the Dar es Salaam master plan (Local planning consultant, 30 April, 2021), while Korea provided funding and consultants to prepare the master plan for Kigamboni (MLHSD, 2010) and Japan through its development agency JICA funded the development of an urban transport master plan (JICA, 2018).

Despite the centralization of planning powers in the Ministry of Lands, the Dar es Salaam master plan enjoyed strong political support at the DCC level, particularly from a City Mayor who at its inception was said to be “a champion for this master plan, he really pushed hard for this” (Former senior DCC official, 29 January 2021). According to this same official, this was mainly due to the value that was seen to accrue from a plan as a tool to mobilize investments: “I think they realized that I mean you cannot develop a city without a roadmap and for them this was a very necessary roadmap to show the future investment for the city.” Although public hearings and consultations were held by the consultants for the plan, many observers viewed the development of the plan as a largely technocratic exercise, with a nominal role for local government (Ministry of Local Government official, 8 May 2021). In the words of one planner: “the way I think it has been prepared, for me I will say not very much participatory [...] I will say it is like technical people preparing and asking some questions and coming out with the plan, that’s what I think.” (Former DCC town planner, 16 April 2021).

Contrasting the approach used to prepare the Dar master plan to that of the SDP, another planner explained: “I think the difference between preparation of Dar es Salaam master plan and the SDP was the way the community was involved. For the SDP the involvement of the community was very high compared to the preparation of the Dar es Salaam master plan. Actually, for the SDP it was the community who generated the proposals, of course, they were guided by the experts. [In the case of

the Dar master plan] they didn’t start with the social survey where they can easily reach the community and get their comments. It was done after maybe; it was done when the plan was at a very high level of preparation” (Former Ministry of Lands official, 20 April 2021). This last statement attests to the continued belief in the value of participatory planning practices among ‘SDP adherents’, some of which has continued on a project basis through initiatives such as the World Bank supported Community Infrastructure Upgrading Programme or the subsequent Dar es Salaam Metropolitan Development Project. As such, “The legacy is still there. [...] I would say they’re still using the SDP approach, the participatory approach. And they’re still doing that, at the municipal level. They are calling meetings. They’re discussing and they’re doing that. What they’re lacking is the support which used to be there” (Former DCC town planner, 8 April 2022).

So far, the implementation of most plans has been slow and piecemeal. The Dar master plan was only officially approved by the Ministry of Lands in 2020, nearly ten years after originally having been commissioned, but still requires gazetting (Senior urban planner, 23 November 2021). Written in English, its contents are largely unknown to the mostly Swahili speaking public. Moreover, its final version was not publicly disseminated, not even to municipal planners who had been part of the plan’s consultation process (Municipal planner, 24 November 2021). This lack of dissemination has led observers to question the political will behind the plan (Ministry of Local Government official, 8 May 2021), which included, among others, a proposal to create a new metropolitan authority and the decentralization of city planning functions (MLHSD, 2016). Meanwhile, amid local tensions and contestations against the planned relocation of nearly 100,000 local residents for the implementation of the master plan for the New City of Kigamboni, this plan has been abandoned in its entirety (Lindell et al., 2016; Ondrusek-Roy, 2020) and in hindsight is regarded as having been “too ambitious” (Former senior Ministry of Lands official, 19 April 2021).

Taken together, the case of Dar es Salaam shows how wider political conflict shapes master planning. Technocratic and prescriptive ‘blueprint’ master plans have historically been seen as necessary planning tools to guide long-term urban investment and development. This view continues to hold sway, particularly among politicians and planners within the Ministry of Lands, which remains the principal authority with the power to commission, develop and approve the development of urban plans. Positive experiences with participatory and strategic urban planning as part of the Sustainable Dar es Salaam (SDP) project have not been sufficient to fundamentally alter such views, although they continue to be valued and practiced by city planners as well as some individuals within central government Ministries. Ultimately, national-level ministries have played a strong role in securing funding for the preparation and implementation of urban plans, but this continues to be mostly externally sourced. Local planning consultants and experts have been important partners in master planning development but while local government actors are able to contribute knowledge and expertise, their capacity to initiate and implement plans is limited. As a result, neither type of planning has been able to fully thrive.

5. Lilongwe: proliferation of plans through local-transnational interactions

5.1. Late colonial influences

The case of Lilongwe, a city with a population of about 1 million in 2018 and an estimated annual population growth rate of 4.4% until 2030 (UNDESA, 2018), represents another example of the ambivalent role of master planning in African urban contexts. Colonial era planning in Malawi, similar to that in Accra and Dar es Salaam, was governed by UK influenced planning legislation which allowed for the designation of specific planning areas for which statutory plans could be prepared and enforced. This functioned to address the public health concerns of white settlers in the designated areas, and through onerous penalties

(including £500 fines) to prevent contraventions and enforce racial segregation (Mwathunga, 2014). Planned as a new national capital in the late 1960s, Lilongwe's development was a product of (authoritarian) nationalist post-independence ambitions, strongly inflected with a divisive and inequalitarian politics shaped by colonial-era imaginations.

5.2. Independence and apartheid urban planning

A new post-independence capital city for Malawi at Lilongwe was announced on the dawn of independence in 1964. Designed in the late 1960s, building commenced in 1969 and the capital was designated in 1975. Like many capital cities built from scratch, Lilongwe's origins are closely bound up with international planning circuits, with the construction of a self-conscious Garden City with the strongest possible role for master planning, and extensive infrastructure investment. The circuits of its design and development were linked to planning ideas indebted to the former colonial power (UK). However, the British did not support the location of the new capital in the central region of Malawi, preferring the already established southern commercial town of Blantyre where colonial-era interests were concentrated (Potts, 1985). So, the Malawian government turned to the sub-imperial networks associated with South Africa, from where loan financing of ZAR8 million (£4.66 million) was secured and tied to "maximum use of South African contractors" (Pachai, 1971, p. 53). The initial plan, published in 1968, was drawn up by South African based planners, Gerke and Viljoen, for a site 3.5 miles north of the existing Lilongwe town centre (Pachai, 1971, p. 51). Thus, in both its physical form and its planning history, Lilongwe represents most clearly the complex ambivalence of colonial inheritances. Although tied closely to the ambitions of post-colonial nation-building and urbanism, paradoxically, as Myers notes, "the case of Lilongwe demonstrates an apparent application of colonial urban enframing even more thorough than that applied to the old colonial capitals" (2003, p. 136).

The Garden City idea resonated strongly with the apartheid vision of a multi-centred urban form. Characteristically, in apartheid planning "neighbourhoods" were "group areas" designated for different racial groups; in post-independence Lilongwe these were allocated to different income groups, indicating the ways in which a nascent African elite and middle class fitted into the role previously carved out by white and expat residents (Myers, 2003). The national and ceremonial city left large areas for monumental buildings, and extensive open and green spaces in sprawling car-dependent high-income areas - the South African designers envisaged nearly every family in Lilongwe eventually owning a car (Potts, 1985, p. 192). This shaped a city that displaced and excluded poor residents, literally removing former rural residents from the land where it was built and offering no option for poorer residents and in-migrants but to concentrate on areas of traditional authority land on the outskirts of the city (including beyond the administrative area) and around the "old town" in the south (Englund, 2002; Mwathunga and Donaldson, 2018).

5.3. A proliferation of plans

Lilongwe's spatially divided and unequal urban form, with modernist ambitions strongly enforced by an authoritarian post-independence regime, starkly poses the question as to whether master planning still has a positive role to play in highly informalised and severely resource-constrained contexts (Mwathunga and Donaldson, 2018). Who is motivated to develop and seek to implement formal master plans when they operationalise stark divisions and can be used to serve the interests of the elite (Riley, 2014)? In 2009–10, several international development actors became involved simultaneously in the terrain of urban planning in Lilongwe. This flurry of interest was not a particular product of local circumstances, but of separate initiatives undertaken by transnational institutions for their own reasons. Nonetheless, local actors played a significant role in all of them. By 2009,

Lilongwe had been without a valid plan since 1985, as the Outline Zoning Scheme of that year had not been updated as anticipated on a five yearly basis, and the Integrated Development Plan, published in 1990, had been abandoned with regime change. A lead planner from that time noted, "we had been struggling with challenges from having an outdated master plan for a long time... and a lot of things had happened on the ground, a lot of changes, including economically, socially, in terms of infrastructure, politically, even governance, the whole governance system had also changed so ... review of the master plan was just necessary at that point in time." (Lilongwe planner, 12 April 2021).

Three different kinds of planning processes were initiated by international actors, respectively JICA (a comprehensive spatial master plan); Johannesburg City Council, UCLG and the Cities Alliance (a City Development Strategy, CDS); UN-Habitat, GTZ, the EU (an Urban Profile to advocate for slum upgrading). The different initiatives reflected different priorities and approaches to planning. A senior Lilongwe consultant and former planner noted of the formal JICA-led Masterplan, that "within the UNCHS Habitat, they have little respect for documents like this, a straightjacket type of policy not addressing day to day requirements", and that in turn "the Japanese felt that the document which was being done as a city development strategy was not going to help Lilongwe city and they decided to ignore it" (Lilongwe consultant, 8 October 2021). Nonetheless, for the UCLG and Johannesburg team engaging in the city-to-city partnership with Lilongwe, "the idea of the strategy was to strengthen the position of the city - their position for better argument, for better negotiations and it was not to necessarily develop everything. It was a super ineffective apparatus and ... I think the strategy worked a little bit on changing this." (UCLG officials, 21 May 2021). This partnership identified corruption and poor management as a major limitation on governance, and initiated a stabilization strategy which "national government acted on very swiftly" (Johannesburg official and consultant, 21 May 2011; UCLG, 2012). The Lilongwe CEO at the time observed, "The City Assembly demonstrated a low level of performance, little or no intervention and no proactive development initiatives. In order for the CDS to enjoy any level of success, the organization needed to demonstrate a level of stability and commitment to change." (UCLG, 2012, 1). In the face of these challenges, UCLG officials considered that formal master planning had significant limitations. They noted, JICA "are really experts on land use and regulations and all this. Of course, master plan(ning) is their skill and it is not too easy for them to react to these political difficulties, to the difficulties in the system." (UCLG officials, 21 May 2021).

Despite their different approaches, all three planning processes were to some extent initiated by local and national state actors, including a dynamic CEO of Lilongwe City Council who eagerly embraced the partnership with Johannesburg (Johannesburg consultant, 21 May 2011). All three also relied on the same Malawian consultant who worked closely with city officials, and drew in wide networks of government actors, professionals and community-based organisations to shape and inform the plans (Lilongwe consultant, 8 October 2021). Local planning actors contributed to all these initiatives, coming forward to participate. Informants explained that this was because they valued planning as an essential and desired practice, which can sustain developmental outcomes over time and help to determine where new developments should be located (Lilongwe consultant, 8 October 2021; Lilongwe planner, 12 April 2021).

Illustrative of the complex inter-relations amongst the motivations, concerns and practices of transnational, national and local institutions is the initiation of the Lilongwe JICA master Plan (2010). This came about when, in the normal way of counterpart government relations, Lilongwe asked the central government to seek funding to assist with relocating and developing a bus terminal. However, on being approached, JICA probed this initial request:

the government of Japan wanted to know whether the area where they wanted to transfer it to was in line with the planning of the city,

the right place for the city, whether there are any blueprints which indicated that the ideal place for the bus terminal was where they wanted it to be. ... Of course, the master plan that the city of Lilongwe had by then had expired 15 years before, so over 15 years, the Lilongwe city council was doing development without any master plan. So, it became a bother [barrier] to the government of Japan, to support the project, which was not aligned to any planning framework of the city. But when it was suggested that why don't we start with the preparation of a city master plan and then the government of Malawi took advantage of that, and that is how the development of the master plan came into being. So, they had to submit a fresh proposal, abandoning the one for transferring of the bus terminal, instead, they now submitted a proposal for the development of a master plan to be carried out.

(Lilongwe JICA official, 15 April 2021)

JICA appointed Japanese technical consultants to prepare the master plan in collaboration with local planning officials, as in all their master plan initiatives in Africa and Asia (Croese and Miyauchi, 2022). JICA's long-term engagement in Malawi meant that they had invested in a permanent office in Lilongwe; a local Malawian employee was closely involved in overseeing the project and a local consultant, who had already been involved in the city strategy background research, was hired to work with the Japanese team (Lilongwe JICA official, 15 April 2021). The local planner of the city council, the key counterpart for this relationship, noted the dedication of the Japanese planners that went far beyond the plan itself to also develop detailed up to date standards for housing, sanitation, and development control. She too contributed extensively to the master plan: "as the key counterpart providing information on policy issues, guidance where necessary and also participating in almost each and every activity, meetings and what have you...", and especially played a role in enabling wider community and stakeholder participation in the planning process (Lilongwe planner, 12 April 2021).

In 2010, a UN-Habitat and EU project promoting participatory slum upgrading, led to an Urban Profile of Lilongwe being produced, based on their "rapid participatory urban profiling" methodology. A Malawian planner then working for UN-Habitat led on this process and saw it as a way to identify the key issues facing cities, come up with a workplan, and mobilise resources for implementation, especially for slum upgrading (Lilongwe government official, 16 May 2021). Again, hiring the same planner-consultant as for the JICA study, and relying on officials and planners from different municipalities, this initiative drew significantly on the City Strategy report as well as the JICA study/master plan (Lilongwe City Council, 2009; JICA, 2010), allowing the author to suggest that an appropriate "regulatory framework" was in place for upgrading investment. National planning legislation allows for planning authorities to develop detailed plans for their areas, so the JICA plan could be considered within that framework. Detailed studies of informal settlements were prepared - but a lack of any Malawian government contribution to funding the proposed projects saw it lapse. In his foreword to the UN-Habitat document (2011), the then CEO of Lilongwe City Assembly lamented the lack of development attention to the informal settlements where more than half the city's population lived, noting that these had previously not been very high on the city's agenda. Rather, he noted that these areas had "seen a high level of various forms of interventions by local and international non-governmental organizations with little coordination thereby resulting in duplications and wastage of resources". This would be an appropriate commentary on the overlapping and poorly integrated planning initiatives themselves.

For example, participatory processes and stakeholder workshops were initiated in all three of these planning processes within the space of two years. For the UCLG and Johannesburg city partnership, a task force and extended task force were constituted - with a JICA representative a member of the City Strategy task force. This Task Force comprised a large group of interested parties; the JICA steering committee was even

more bloated: "In the JICA one, people outside the city council were like relevant stakeholders who have a stake in the master plan in the development activity of the city. These were like Ministries of the government like the Ministry of transport, Ministry of land and urban development and so many other ministries [and] including NGOs, Civil society, political and traditional leaders, public utility companies, like those dealing with electricity, water supply, telecommunication and what have you. There were so many of them, too numerous to mention..." (Lilongwe planner, 12 April, 2021; LCA, 2009, p. 14). This speaks not simply to a positive investment in co-ordination and buy-in but testifies to overlapping responsibilities between central and local government for urban development. It also reflects a debilitating insistence on the part of officials from all levels of government to be included, perhaps with a view to yielding personal benefits through generous per diem travel allowances and networking opportunities (UCLG, 2012; Anders, 2002; Johannesburg official and consultant, 21 May 2011).

Notwithstanding the hopes invested in these planning processes, implementation has been limited, and also compromised by the strong role of the national government in unilaterally imposing large-scale investments in the central areas of Lilongwe in concert with sovereign donors (Lilongwe planner, 12 April 2021). In a context where neither national nor local government had resources to realise the JICA master plan, it was seen by JICA as more of a marketing tool to secure investment from other donors and development agencies. There was quite some disappointment expressed at the fact that JICA did not see implementation as part of their role: "So, I think some of the feelings among some of the Malawi officials was that the Japanese would come back and implement their plan so I think everybody just sat down and hoped that the Japanese would come, but I think that really didn't happen. And up to now we are saddled with this plan which has not been implemented" (Lilongwe planner, 12 April 2021). On the other hand, as the JICA officer noted, "the idea of coming up with a master plan was to use it as maybe a marketing tool for the city council or the government of Malawi to other donors who are interested towards various infrastructure projects in the city" (Lilongwe JICA, 15 April 2021). Despite divergent hopes and expectations as to who was to implement the master plan, there was consensus that little had flowed from the master plan.

Nonetheless, some implementation did take place. In the wake of the city strategy and in line with the slum upgrading strategy, funding for a substantial project of informal settlement upgrading was secured, with support from Cities Alliance, UCLG and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This NGO-led initiative (by C-CODE) achieved construction of a market and a savings project, as well as some drainage infrastructure and sought to encourage the Lilongwe planning department to adopt a new participatory approach to urban development (Lilongwe CDS officer, 1 July 2021; Community based activists, 12 May 2022). But impact was reduced by conflicting goals and practices between collaborating parties; lack of municipal capacity; and community resistance in one of the areas. Consequently, the initiative was terminated after two years of a four year project with no housing interventions achieved (Lilongwe CDS officer, 1 July 2021; Lilongwe consultant, 8 October 2021; Community based activists, 12 May, 2022). Some road improvements were implemented by the Japanese in a pilot project, with the Lilongwe Department of Roads leading on project implementation, soon after the plan was published but this was not taken further as JICA felt the Lilongwe counterparts did not fulfil their obligations (Lilongwe JICA, 15 April 2021). This stalled further investment from JICA until 2022 when they became involved in a new bridge development.

However, as with the other contexts we studied, long after the plan was prepared, it continued to have significant influence. As a Lilongwe official noted in 2021, "So, at the moment we have developed a strategic plan for the city for the next five years and some of the provisions of that strategic plan are basically to bring into implementation some of the provisions of the Lilongwe master plan that was done in 2010, for a 20-

year period up to 2030" (Lilongwe city official, 11 May 2022). Again, responding opportunistically to available funding and agendas and guided by the JICA plan, a new development initiative in 2021 sought to capitalise on the extensive open spaces which were the legacy of the sprawling formal spatial structure of the Garden City, to promote green corridors and eco-tourism (Lilongwe government official, 16 May 2021; Lilongwe City Council, 2021).

The deep and ongoing crisis in local government operation, however, affects the scope for their involvement in the implementation of strategic and master plans, and reflects an important feature of the politics of master planning in many African contexts. Centralised political power and ad hoc politically motivated developments have been debilitating for planning continuity. These processes have undermined initiatives for institutional reform at the local government level – the dynamic reforming Lilongwe City Council CEOs of 2010 and 2022 who provided scope for planning innovations, were both fired by incoming national political leaders. Nonetheless, current developments (2023) initiated by central government ministries are still bringing forward plans identified in the 2010 JICA Masterplan, notably major new road developments and a new city centre; and reforming leaders remain alert to the 2009 efforts at institutional stabilisation of local government (Lilongwe government official, 16 May 2021). However, the proliferating plans of that time are indicative of ongoing wider challenges of managing numerous international actors, whose diverse motives and approaches press at both central and local government agendas to shape plans as well as the built form of the city.

6. Conclusion

The three cities we have considered in this paper each have their own particular planning histories. They share a common British colonial influence on planning, which was relatively limited in relation to master planning as such, but which established the dominance of national government actors in spatial planning. While colonial era planning legislation focused on specific designated areas, largely omitting African residential areas, there was a strong interest in city-wide and comprehensive master planning in the early post-independence years of the 1960s and 1970s, which led to a flurry of master plans for both existing and new capital cities (Home, 2013). In the Lilongwe case, a late version of colonial and apartheid planning was powerfully influential in the design of this new capital city, and in the implementation of planning laws. More generally, ambitious master planning efforts in post-independence years have been closely bound up with transnational actors closely linked to international planning ideas and circuits, including (but not only) those of former colonial powers and have also been associated with international developmental ambitions and practices. Nonetheless, we have shown how distinct local political and economic actors and events have shaped the way in which planning trajectories have unfolded over time. Notably, the tensions between national ministries and local government actors determined the trajectory of planning in all three contexts, and the rigours of structural adjustment and economic crisis have both motivated and interrupted formal planning processes, creating 'silent periods' in master planning. Deep institutional corruption and informality have also meant that implementation can be sporadic and preemptory.

Thus, all three cities demonstrate the important roles of the local actors, interests and ideas driving master planning, illustrating the value of detailed case based and comparative research for exploring the local embeddedness of contemporary urban planning in African cities. The results of our comparative analysis therefore indicate that far from being externally imposed and irrelevant to the challenges of African urbanisation, contemporary urban master planning in Africa can better be characterised as persistent, pragmatic and prolific.

First, all three cities illustrate how interest in and capacities for undertaking master planning, as well as the influence of specific plans, persist, even after prolonged periods of planning 'silence', and with

planning efforts waxing and waning over time. Local practitioners continue to be guided by plans long after their expiry, which can shape the direction of urban development. Also, even as transnational development actors and agencies such as UN-Habitat, JICA or Cities Alliance initiate and finance new rounds of planning, they can enable the pragmatic revival of long dormant plans and planning efforts.

All three cases indicate that transnational circulations of master planning are articulated through strong local agency and often long-standing visions of urban development in each context. Local planning actors in many ways quite carefully, pragmatically and at times opportunistically mediate and negotiate external support for master plans, in accordance with local needs and interests. Indeed, the strong reliance of external actors on local information sources, expertise and participation, has meant that often the *de facto* drivers of master planning have been local planners and shared ideas about city form and future development, at times deriving from previous plans. This calls for a more nuanced view of the factors that explain the persisting production of spatial master plans and their extended lifespans, even when implementation is haphazard and uneven (Ahmed, 2020).

In recent years, a renewed interest among both transnational and local planning actors has produced a proliferation of multiple and at times overlapping plans. In some cases, this has resulted in a hybridization of planning practices, illustrative of Africa's urban planning palimpsest, 'in which parts of older ideas, plans and even built forms remain, but are overwritten and never fully erased' (Parnell, 2017: 295). As a result, master plans and associated planning frameworks have come to incorporate norms of participatory planning discourse, alongside more technical and data-driven exercises. This renewed planning interest has often resulted in a quick succession of planning exercises supported by different development actors in one location, at times in parallel to each other, at times intersecting.

The rapid proliferation of plans may illustrate the astuteness of local planning actors in negotiating and maximizing opportunities to support short-term interventions to address concrete issues of urban management, as well as long-term visions to guide spatial city growth through much-needed infrastructure investment and transport planning. Yet, they are also illustrative of wider contestations over urban space, particularly between central and local governments, and can expose a lack of coordination between the multiple actors and visions involved in governing and driving development.

Taken together, and in contrast with narratives which dismiss the relevance of master planning in an African context, our cases foreground the need for a careful consideration of the intricate politics that drive practices of urban master planning from an African-centric perspective, placing it as an active part of African urbanization. This has a series of policy implications. Instead of taking a position for or against master planning, there is a need to recognize that there are different types of planning, which serve different types of purposes and respond to different political interests. If the plan is, for example, intended to refocus government ministries on strategic developmental priorities, then a CDS-type approach would be appropriate. If, however, there is a need for a plan which gives strong spatial guidance to proposed infrastructural investment and future spatial growth trajectories then a plan with a stronger physical orientation – visually more like a master plan – may be helpful. Considering the complexity and scale of urban development across Africa, plans of different types and for different purposes may well be required, or single plans which hybridise different purposes. In this context, positioning one approach against another may not be helpful. Notably, widespread support for participatory, incremental, and sustainable planning approaches which respond to the realities of informality was hard won. Our cases show that such approaches are often accommodated within revised forms of master planning, through hybrid forms of planning which bring strategic, multi-sectoral and physical planning together.

We note from our cases that multiple interests are invariably at stake in developing masterplans. Certainly, planning processes are funded by

international agencies, managed by national ministries, and undertaken by consulting consortia where international firms are dominant. But we have also observed that local actors and institutions, as well as members of broader embedded communities of planning knowledge have played an important role in contributing expertise to plan preparation – data gathering, overseeing participation, preparing background reports, or leading on different aspects of plan-making. Although local governments as such may be weakly capacitated in plan making and implementation, more attention could therefore be given to building these wider communities of planning practice to manage and partner in city-wide planning process. The terms of reference in tender documents for plan preparation may be a starting point in appropriately recognising and progressively strengthening the role of local actors.

Finally, the link between plan and implementation could be considered further. This is never a straightforward relationship but our analysis has indicated that the impact of city-wide planning is often evident, especially over the longer term. The often informal capacity for the intelligent, adaptive implementation of plans over the long term could be progressively strengthened through attending to existing valued plans (as noted especially in Accra, where the 1993 Strategic Plan provided a reference point for 2023 plan making), and exploring more nuanced approaches to institution building, partnership creation, and skills development. Given the range of political and economic interests which determine the timing and content of plans, further plan-making could be better attuned to real-existing institutional, economic and fiscal capacities, and to the configuration of interests that surround the plan. Our cases reveal that planning and urban development are often subject to preemptory forms of political power. Despite this, informants and experts in the three case study cities reported that the persistent and pragmatic use of masterplans can have a lasting and beneficial effect.

Taken together, then, our research points to the potential for identifying what strategic planning theorist Patsy Healey (2009, p. 448) has referred to as ‘communities of enquiry’, or communities of practice. This reflects the relationships forged amongst actors (local, national and transnational, governmental and non-governmental) that have been involved in the process of plan formation and therefore have a stake in particular plans, leading them to actively work to keep such plans alive. The hope might be expressed that preparation of a new master plan could be guided by the combination of attention to historical plans, technical expertise, data gathering and community engagement that we noted informed city-wide planning in all our cases. It could offer scope to involve different actors in shaping urban futures, and to guide disparate and diverse investment and development decisions. Thereby, master plans could constitute a shared asset for imagining the future of the city (Healey, 2007). However, in contested urban landscapes, especially those characterised by preemptory power relations, fragmented institutions and a proliferation of external actors, there is nothing certain about the outcomes of planning.

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Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Data Availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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