

The evolution and politics of spatial planning in Kenya

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The theory and practice of planning is highly dependent on the prevailing socio-political and economic conditions of where it is produced and practiced. This paper explores the culture, character and legacy of spatial planning emerging over time during the four political leadership regimes in Kenya since independence until now. It does so by identifying the perception and importance attached to planning by each political regime; the role and functions of planning and; the institutional frameworks and structures of planning during the various regimes.

Planning in Kenya has been widely criticized for the mess in urban areas including haphazard development, socio-spatial segregation, the growth and expansion of informal settlements and complex land systems (Loeckx 2004, K'Akumu and Olima 2007, Huchzermeyer 2011, Ngau 2013). Rarely however do such critics analyse planning outcomes in Kenya under the context of existing socio-political and economic conditions. This paper is an effort to close that gap by demonstrating how multiple factors such as prevailing political leadership and economic systems played out over time to produce the current planning practice and systems in Kenya.

The influence of planning by prevailing political and socio-economic conditions such as government action, economic policies and public opinion may produce varying outcomes over time in the same state or city. Different governments and political regimes have distinct policies and thus utilize planning in different ways with varied consequences to planning theory and practice. For instance, Taylor (1998) demonstrates how immediate post-war government in Britain socialized planning to enhance social welfare while the Thatcher regime 'streamlined' planning to support market-led development. He notes that 'Thatcherism altered the whole culture of planning so that, by the end of the 1980s, planners increasingly saw themselves as partners working 'with' the market and private sector developers. They had little choice

to do otherwise, whatever their political views about the role of town planning, for the political context of town planning had changed' (Taylor 1998):139). These observations underscore the need to analyse planning practice and outcome in the context of the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions at any particular point in time and place.

Hence, this paper analyses the evolution of planning in Kenya during four political regimes highlighting elements of continuity and discontinuity. Information used in the paper is obtained from planning legislation and documents in Kenya, newspaper articles as well as relevant academic articles.

References

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