Track Teaching planning for the transition

# Teaching urban planning through international cooperation project with African cities in very fast transition times

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**Abstract:** The "African question" is increasingly an "urban question", particularly considering the transition phase and the transformation speed that African cities have been experiencing over the last few years. An important question therefore emerges regarding the quality of the training of urban planners, both in European schools – attended more and more by African students – and in the field of international co-operation between European and African universities, also supported by some recent EU Calls. In this context, this paper is an opportunity to discuss the limits and possibilities of teaching urban planning in a phase of rapid changes and, therefore, to define common strategies to reinvigorate the quality of our teaching and practices of future urban planners, inside and outside the European Schools of Planning while obviously being careful not to succumb to the always concealed neo-colonial drifts that would be even more negative for everyone today.

## 1. The environmental and educational context

The environmental crises and pollution rates are growing in tandem with the increase in population and very fast urban development of the major African cities. These processes are very swift and supported by international enterprises (mostly by the Chinese) that are exporting a dissipative model of development without considering mistakes and sometimes disasters we have already had in our own countries. For example, following the construction of the first Senegalese highway tracing the Dakar-Thies Mbour axis and the Blaise Diagne international airport in the village of Ndiass (between Mbour and the capital Dakar), the urbanization rate and economic growth of Mbour underwent significant increases by pushing the populations to continuously migrate towards this center. The spread of informal settlements and the difficulty of managing infrastructures created considerable inconvenience to the territory and to the population. A number of neighborhoods appeared in areas subject to flooding, while the rapid urban speculation has not encouraged any planning activities. In this way, the massive population density and its consolidation allowed for no kind of sustainable urban planning. In addition, to the absence of greenery, environmental ill-health is exacerbated by the widespread presence of outdated means of transport, which become the leading cause of air pollution (considerably exceeding the thresholds allowed by law, especially in constantly congested areas).

All these conditions appear accentuated by the weakness of education in urban planning, strictly connected to the sharp reduction in the urban planning curricula within Architecture and Engineering degrees, in the wider context of the closure/failure of a number of important Schools.

In particular, in Senegal, the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism in Dakar (UAE-Ecole d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme) was founded in 1972 by the then President Léopold Sédar Senghor, who dreamed of excellence in all the arts for Senegal and wanted it to be recognized in Africa and throughout the world. He wanted to be able to form individuals capable of transmitting the values of Negro-African civilization. To translate this vision, based on UNESCO guidelines, the Senegalese State created the UAE within the public university UCAD, with the aim of annually training a hundred professionals able to address the issue of habitat and respond adequately to the needs that arose, dealing with the conception, construction, and management of housing supply.

These architects and town planners were to acquire the skills to intervene in all important decision-making bodies, in order to define an urban context in tune with modernist ideology and canons, adapted to the demographic growth of a

new capital in full expansion. At the time, the SICAP-Société Immobilière du Cap-Vert already been in existence for two decades, and the OHLM-Office des Habitations à loyer modéré had ten years of experience. Senghor had a particular interest in these projects and followed them closely during his presidency. The habitat had to translate spatially – and induce – a new way of life that would be the result of the articulation between various cultures and styles, essentially French (or more generally Western) and African. Complementarity, dialogue, and exchange were the key words of a line of research and approach that simultaneously had to participate in the construction of a new Senegalese and African identity, and in the construction of the "Civilization of the Universal".

Dakar was the place where possible 'compromises' between conservation and recovery of cultural heritage and development were experienced, in a reasoned mix of "Sorbonne et Négritude" (Senghor, 1961). "The Ecole de Dakar", as it was more commonly called, offered a space for dialogue on how to create architecture and think about the city and urban expansion, or even about how to enhance the vernacular and traditional architecture that was systematically defined through at least three important collaborations: UNESCO, BREDA, and IFU-Institut Français d'Urbanisme.

Parallel to the Senegalese initiatives, EAMAU, the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, was opened in Lomé (Togo) in 1975. This was the result of an essentially African initiative with the aim of preparing, through highly selective training, an elite capable of taking on the technical-administrative challenges brought about by the Independence of the new French-speaking states of Africa.

Furthermore, several member countries of the OCAM decided to open regional schools (of administration, veterinary, agricultural, etc.) and the creation of the EAMAU was the response to this decision: today it embraces 14 French-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Its main objective was and still is to produce expert local architects, urban planners, and technicians specialized in urban management who would then occupy key positions in this field. By combining different disciplinary approaches, the aim was to relaunch research into urban planning across the continent and enrich knowledge of the construction of urban spaces, taking into account the cultural, economic, social, and spatial realities specific to the African world (cf. Coralli, Aholou, 2010).

The closure of the UAE in 1991 due to economic problems – students regularly omitted to pay university fees – left a significant gap with respect to the weight that the city had had and still has within the countries of West Africa as the former capital of the organization of the French-speaking states of the West (AOF). Thus for some twenty years only the Ecole de Lomé (EAMAU) remained active, before other schools were established in the different capitals of the West African countries.

In this framework, an interesting aspect is the fact that the French imprint on the teaching of architecture has had a long-term effect on the separation between architecture, urban planning, and territorial planning/management, leading to the progressive weakening of the competent figures who deal with the city and its territory, the consequences of which are still being paid, today more than ever. This separation is now challenged only by the geographers who, however, have less interest and fewer skills for sustainable urban design and transformative addresses, focused as they primarily are on the descriptive/interpretative dimension. Although this latter is undoubtedly necessary, it is obviously not sufficient when there are stronger and more defined market- and economy-driven directions for urban transformation and hasty development.

Visions and competencies seem lost, while the worst effects of mistaken development choices are showing their environmental and social costs all around the world. The increase in inequalities and the lack of awareness about environmental issues require more appropriate knowledge and tools to extend also to the management of waste, the control of landfills, and the significant problem of soil and air pollution.

Nonetheless, in the last 20 years west African cities have never produced design plans with a duration of more than 15 years, while detailed plans are included with priority action programs of 5-7 or 10 years. Nowadays the focus is only on the (economic opportunities of) "the building dimension" and therefore limited to the single lot linked purely with the logic of real estate speculation. This means that construction design is totally uncoupled from the context, both in terms

of understanding the relevant issues and with regard to the objectives of transformation and the effects of improvement of the context itself.

A sustainable development perspective must, however, be imagined within a broader horizon even if, at present, only the Plan Senegal Emergent (PSE) 2014-2018 follows the Documents de Stratégie de Réduction de la Pauvreté (DSRP), and the Stratégie Nationale de Développement Economique et Social (SNDES) provides some initial guidelines for managing environmental issues. However, these tools appear insufficient and sharply at odds with the technical apparatuses and local population awareness with a very low level of information and attention as regards these issues.

## 2. Our "capacity building" project

According to this larger picture, we believe that Universities (schools of Architecture and Planning) have to play a stronger role in the near future in promoting a different culture of urban and regional development through a thorough and widespread involvement of the population.

But considering the weakness of the Universities and through a small international cooperation project funded by the Sapienza University, we started to define strategies to strengthen the scope of urban planning within the Architecture section of the IPP-Institute Polytechnique Panafricain in Dakar. With the IPP as a partner university, we are targeting actions for developing training capacities suited to the needs of local institutions, the city government, and the citizens.

First of all, this international cooperation project funded by the Sapienza has allowed greater awareness of the difficult conditions of western African cities' urban development with regard to the priorities, in particular, of Sdg's 11 goals. And since this collaboration is obviously insufficient to conduct experiments on the field which might bring about concrete urban transformation in terms of sustainable development, we have already submitted proposals for further EU Funds to create real opportunities for exchanging the different experiences of the various Italian and African cities in terms of urban and territorial planning for sustainable development in order to act cohesively in the urban environment.

Our international cooperation project, however, aims to carry out extensive-capacity building action to lay the foundations for a competent and active institutional subject in urban research and specialized training, connected to local and national networks. The expected results of the project concern:
- strengthening research and training capacities through exchange practices;
- consolidation of training structures (possibly with the reopening of the urban planning department) through a closer relationship with the demand from local institutions and third sector organizations;
- creation of a solid cooperation network interacting between training institutions, local, and third sector associations;
- creation of a research laboratory with école doctorale and a second level Master's course.

Moreover, the collaboration among different Departments of public and private Universities will help them to absorb the deficit in research and professional training in complex urban phenomena and the management of territorial transformation in terms of sustainable development. Thus, by simultaneously structuring actions aimed at research and training in the field of urban studies we aim to analyze plans, policies, programs and their results also in relation to the demand for innovation of the social actors and professional bodies involved.

### 2.1. The hidden challenge (or the trap) of the professional orders' role

While working we understood that the targeted strengthening of the planning disciplines has to include an on-going debate among professional orders as to the training contents for the recognition of an adequate role of professions. This means that university education depends, in some way, on the professional orders that decree their quality and role, with obvious implications for the fortunes (and survival...) of the different schools.

Not surprisingly, in Ivory Coast the two founders of the new school of architecture (2016) are members of the Steering Committee of the national professional orders by showing the level of proximity between schools and professional

profiles, and revealing some overlap that perhaps does not allow the training programs to be defined within a broader and more adequate scope.

As a result, technical aspects prevailed over every pedagogical dimension, forcing schools towards professional-only training. In some cases, given that a number of academics teach in their private professional offices, it also merged the work of Atelier and teaching.

Then, as in the worst Italian tradition, the school becomes a place for the direct co-optation of professionals rather than a University that prepares for life, research, and a profession.
In this context, our international co-operation project should help to:
- enter into the debate since the technique and practices have been painstakingly reconnected to research (De Leo, Forester, 2018, Coralli forthcoming);
- support the increasingly evident and sometimes hasty route towards an African States autonomy desiring to rethink and rewrite its own history by being a different interlocutor with respect to the traditional dependence on the French scene;
- share important knowledge with respect to the foundation of Italian urbanism within the faculties of architecture but also in the most recent history of planning courses both inside and outside the faculties of architecture;
- develop the spirit of shared work among different institutions that is different from the support coming from NGOs.

In our sense co-operation has therefore become a tool for:

a) **giving legitimacy** to small universities motivated within a system that cannot be said to ease the survival of quality university education that navigates between the blackmail of the financiers/investors and that of the single evaluators directed towards professionalization. What we are trying to create is a recognized network of professional orders and faculties of urban planning and architecture to check and define possible guidelines for a more adequate training of students and future professionals.

b) **facilitating interaction** with the many stakeholders who today define guidelines and minimum standards for the evaluation of structures in relation to training programs on the basis of a collaboration that introduces competence into the field and reinstates the link between architecture and urban planning. We ourselves are trying to contribute to the debate by putting together as many interlocutors as possible, some of whom are particularly relevant in also being either evaluators or financiers[1]. The aim is to stimulate a different debate and introduce new directions by trying to obtain a reframing of last year's statements on the fear of the multiplication of sometimes inadequate private schools, as a response to which they threatened that the diplomas would not be recognized for enrollment in the order and therefore for the exercising of the profession. Then return to the evidence that there would be few architects to carry out the many activities 'provided for (with reference to the regulatory framework) without entering into the merit of questions more' related to merit and the correct response to the new and urgent urban issues

c) **experimenting with innovative teaching** investigating how to leave the lot and include the context; developing a detailed description of urban fabrics; defining a design oriented to the transformation and improvement of the context in terms of sustainability and inclusiveness, and refining the arguments supporting the project. The experimentation will be completed by the third year, and can be proposed as a semi-intensive workshop of two weeks, connecting it with the design course in the first half of 2019-20, in the first two weeks of November, preceded by a part on the reading of the model workshop already experimented.

## 3. Some conclusions and future perspectives

[1] For example, the Eamau-Ecole Africain des Metiere dell'Architecture e de l'Urbanisme requests is funded by each member state and by the UEMOA for courses. The occasion is the UEMOA-Economic and Monetary Union of West African countries (there are eight) that have an important role given the economic support given to university education, since the states participate with reference to what is required by the Eamau.

The collaboration between the Sapienza and IPP offered valid support to define the specific needs of each territory in order to better share the priorities of an action for sustainability: a) networking and enhancing the experience gained in the various Italian cities; b) accompanying the interaction between the different parts; c) promoting open and inclusive participation processes.

The adopted scheme of SHARING > EXPERIENCING > PRACTISING used among Italian and Senegalese university partners is oriented towards sustainable development objectives through the sharing of experience and reflections on the importance and implications that sustainability effected on the quality of life on an urban scale, strengthening and, by "doing together", further validating plans and rules for the sustainability and inclusiveness of western African cities. Pursuing sustainable development objectives is indispensable for the survival and development of European as well as African cities. However, we also need to cooperate to fill the culture and knowledge gap as regards sustainable development by exchanging knowledge with African universities and cities, thereby supporting them on the urban planning design issue and experimentation at the local level for strengthening urban governance and contributing to the achievement of SDG 11.

The project is trying to bring together the different experience and knowledge of the Sapienza and IPP by trying to promote directions for long-term sustainable development plans for the sustainability and inclusiveness of western African cities based on a larger network of universities. It is therefore a working hypothesis that converges the pragmatism and skills of those who work on these issues – theoretically as universities and practically as local authorities – in order to intervene on a concrete reality while aiming to deduce directions also useful for those African cities that, due to political and administrative instability, cannot at this moment set themselves the urgent goals of sustainable development.
For the future, more exhaustive experiment objectives should include: - sharing sustainable inclusive development by bringing together Italian urban experience and practices and those of African cities (starting from Dakar), the better to reach jointly the 11 goals through plans and a regulatory framework;
- experiencing sustainable inclusive development by selecting areas for demonstrating at a practical level how urban resilience could be experimented on the urban scale;
- carrying out sustainable inclusive development to strength urban governance by involving the population in the process.
We feel sure this will have positive effects on:
- incentivizing. Technicians and professionals of all local authorities will be better stimulated to do their job. Adequate incentives for local authority technicians and professionals are generally sadly lacking, while playing a very important role in developing new competencies and skills for urban resilience and sustainability, starting from public institutions;
- Best practice. Researchers and academics in the field of urban planning, environmental engineering, and administrative law are considerably interested in comparing practices for defining plans and new and more adequate rules for pursuing sustainable development goals in the different contexts;
- Public involvement of inhabitants, local associations, school and university students of all the cities involved, particularly the citizens themselves.

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