

Understanding 'Home Space' in the African city

A research programme 2009-2011
implemented by
Royal Academy School of Architecture, Copenhagen.
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Faculty of Architecture & Physical Planning, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo.
funded by:
Danish Research Council for Innovation

'Home Space' as a concept

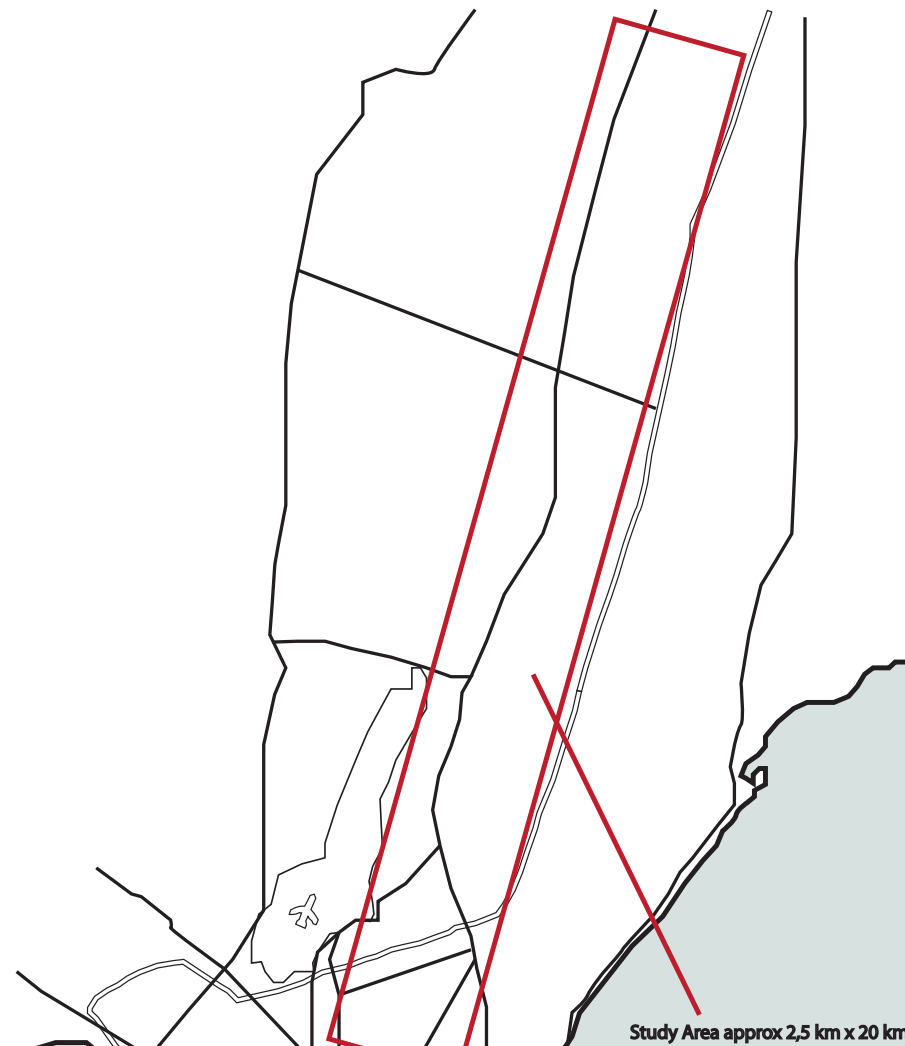
This study seeks to examine the nature of emerging forms of 'urbanism as a way of life' in rapidly urbanising African cities through investigating the nature and impact of 'home space'. This concept, developed by the research team in a speculative sense, refers to the spaces within which the majority of African urban residents dwell - dwelling being both a place and a process. Creating 'home spaces' thus involves spatial and social practices, but conceptually 'home' is above all else a culturally defined concept. Collectively African home spaces create the majority of urban places and are inevitably enacted within political and economic contexts, which establish structural parameters for such agency. Understanding home space thus entails understanding the physical, social, economic, cultural and temporal aspects of urban change.

Rapid urbanisation in the African City

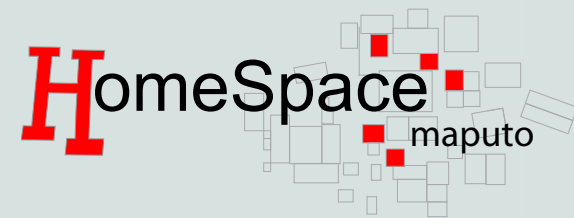
Rapid urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa is now taking place. The region is the last major part of the world going through this process whereby the majority of the population lives in urban areas. This is initially through migration from rural areas, but rapidly becomes natural increase of urban populations due to high birth rates combined with falling death rates. In Sub-Saharan Africa the political and economic context is arguably uniquely weak. Early African socio-political structures were deeply affected by European mercantile engagement, which was followed by colonial dominance and arbitrary nation-state creation. After Independence, global political and economic subordination re-surfaced (e.g. through foreign aid) and in the past decades has been marked by rapid economic disengagement from dominant capitalist economies. Today African governments and the 'formal' private sectors are relatively weak and have limited capacity for action. Added to this is an anti-urban bias in development policies, and the majority of transformations actually taking place is driven by households and not the state or private sector.

Emerging forms of urbanism

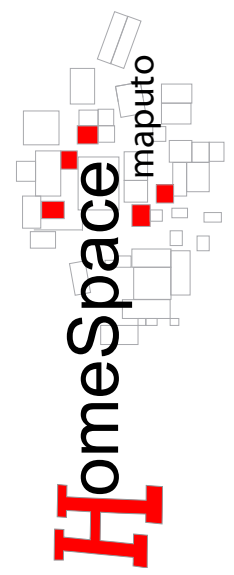
New forms of urbanism are emerging and challenging conventional values of what is 'urban'. These forms are based on much more spatially mobile populations with many engaging with multiple economic activities based on social structures and which often use living space for economic production. There is a very limited capacity of government to record and service urban space in Africa. In addition, the relative poverty of the majority (and hence lack of profit opportunity for wider formal private sector urban action in this respect) means that the extent of what is typically called 'informal' urbanism is much more prevalent in both spatial and temporal senses than anywhere else. In other words, this form of making a living and hence reproducing the city, is widespread, has already existed for decades and will most likely continue to exist for many more decades.



Study Area approx 2,5 km x 20 km



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Understanding change in the city

Studies of longer term urban change and 'urbanism as a way of life' date from the early 20th century in the North (i.e. 'Chicago School'), with some focus on Sub-Saharan African cities from middle of the century (i.e. 'Manchester School') – largely trying to understand change and transformation in the African city vis-à-vis the understanding of Northern urbanism. However in the second half of 20th century such studies of longer term urban change became overtaken by the dominant 'development' studies approach with much shorter time horizons and normative interest in transformation. Both of these traditions have been critiqued in the late 20th century as being 'North-centric' – both of the nature of assumptions underpinning 'development' and of the way urbanism is conceptualised based on Northern experience.

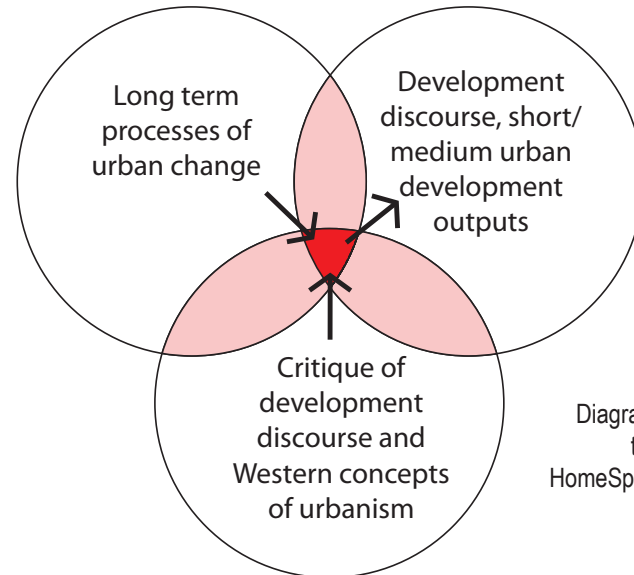


Figure 1: Diagram of the research intention in relation to three approaches to urban development. HomeSpace is rooted in the study of longer term changes in the city and a critique of the 'development' discourse.

Understanding 'Home Space' in the African City

This research programme seeks to understand 'Home Space' in the African city of Maputo. as a way to challenge these assumptions and inductively – through empirical and socially constructed perceptions – seek new understanding which can be the basis for reflection for other more normative activity such as urban policy and development practice. Such innovative research requires speculative as well as open inductive approaches, and understanding complex phenomena such as 'home space' and its wider urban impact needs inter-disciplinary study. Researching change also depends on longitudinal investigation, of which very little has been undertaken in Africa cities.

The research structure

The original research concept was created by Professor Paul Jenkins of the schools of Architecture and Built Environment in Edinburgh – who has worked in African cities since 1973 and in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, since 1980 (including as city planner 1980-85) – and developed with Professor Jorgen Eskemose Andersen of the School of Architecture in Copenhagen – who has worked in African cities since 1975 and Maputo since 1984. This collaboration has led to 3 years funding from the Danish Research Council for Innovation, with School of Architecture in Copenhagen as coordinating institution. There are three research components which are being implemented in partnership with Dr Ana Bernard da Costa of the Centre of African Studies in Lisbon and a local research team at the Faculty of Architecture and Physical Planning in Maputo led by Professor Julio Carrilho, previously Minister of Public Works and Housing. A project reference group in Copenhagen consisting of social scientists and planning specialists, is following the team with intellectual guidance and embedding the project within relevant Danish institutions. A steering group in Mozambique is ensuring dialogue with relevant planning institutions in Maputo.

The research programme

The three main research projects are as follows:

1. A political economic overview to provide an understanding of urbanisation and urban development trends in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mozambique and specifically Maputo – to identify the structural parameters for emerging urbanism based on home space and provide a wider context for interpreting the findings of the empirical work;
2. A built environment dwelling and household socio-economic study in a representative section of the large peri-urban areas of Maputo city, partly drawing on previous surveys in a longitudinal study and partly following the trends in urban expansion and morphology, using stratified random sampling based on 100 sites, half being included longitudinally – to record what is understood as home space and its role in urban change; and
3. An in-depth ethnographic study of a smaller sample of households vis-à-vis the wider family and social construction of home, identifying perceptions of the past, present and future– to understand what is embedded with, and underpins the development of, home space at the micro-level.

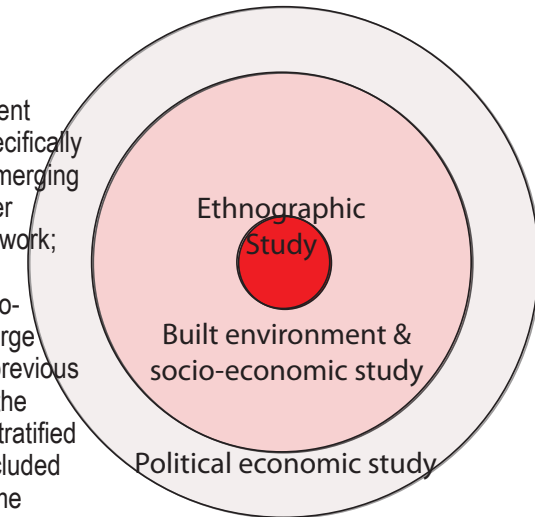


Figure 2: Diagram showing the interlocking areas of the research programme.

Figure 3 and 4: Examples of sample houses for the study.



The research components are being developed in conjunction, in order to enhance the inter-disciplinary, as opposed to multi-disciplinary, nature of the study. Although they will result in discrete research outputs (i.e. reports and academic papers), the major findings will be synthesised in a single final report which will be the basis for a separate publication in book form (subject to publisher acceptance). The synthesis report is also intended to be used as the basis for a documentary on 'Home Space in Africa'. The findings will initially be discussed with a Project Steering Group, composed of relevant institutions in Mozambique and at wider workshops/seminars in Maputo, Lisbon and Copenhagen, as well as at various conferences.

The project began formally in January 2009 and will formally end December 2011. After preparatory work in the first half of this year, fieldwork starts in September and will run through to around March 2010, with initial findings being discussed in Copenhagen, Maputo and Lisbon September of that year. Final component reports will be prepared by Jan 2011, and Synthesis Report by mid 2011, to permit other forms of dissemination (academic papers, book proposal, documentary work) prior to the end of the project.