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Thinking About African Urban Management in an Era of Globalisation

1. Introduction

Africa is becoming an increasingly urban continent, and urbanisation has been taking place at an accelerating speed. Large-size African cities of one million or more are expected to increase their population nearly seven fold between 1990 and 2020, with medium size cities growing by 123 million new inhabitants and small cities by 133 million.¹ This process significantly changes how people are living and what conditions they will face for the future. Africans are also faced with having to develop new institutions and methods to deal with this changed way of life. In the aftermath of the Habitat II Conference on sustainable cities, researchers, community activists, professionals, local and national authorities are trying to forge new partnerships in order to make African cities work. Such renewed efforts at partnership will work only if there is sustained discussion about the changes that are taking place in the social fields of African cities that establish the basis on which these actors must realise new ways of working.

African cities are, at one and the same time, the most underdeveloped and the most contemporary. As they have not coalesced around industrialisation, they lack the productive base to provide formal work or infrastructural support to their growing numbers; but they have also fostered socioeconomic practices and forms of social organisation potentially well adapted to the globalised post-industrial economies. Globalisation has provided a vast new range of opportunities for economic and political actors to operate outside increasingly outmoded laws and regulatory systems which have encumbered conventional Northern cities.

As such, the elaboration of these opportunities requires more than fiscal responsibility, proficient urban management, institutional reform and enhanced urban productivity. Yes, these elements are important. But they must be connected to efforts to enable the albeit diffuse, tentative, and diverse social activism of African human settlements to produce new agendas, administrations and community-building.

The past decade has witnessed a sweeping restructuration of urban life, at least on paper. New municipalities and local authorities have been established, and there has been a greater emphasis on elaborating, up-scaling, and institutionalising local solutions that have been honed through the efforts of citizens more broadly engaged in improving their living environments.² While the general thrust of decentralisation remains of limited efficacy in most African coun-

tries due to the persistence of weak national economies and the conflicts inherent in the intensifying democratisation of national political life, many cities are experiencing a substantiation of working relationships and partnership among diverse sectoral actors and ways of life. Efforts to affect comprehensive changes in the management of urban life, the reform of national political practice and the role of cities in stimulating economic growth have produced an often contentious yet sometimes highly innovative patchwork of incessant revisions in approaches to urban governance.

Perhaps one of the most hopeful occurrences has been the proliferation of new spaces of negotiation among various urban actors. These spaces have been generated on the basis on a widening recognition that addressing urban crises necessitates a more systematic appropriation of the skills usually deployed only for survival into practices of planning, administration and development. Not only are such spaces compelling a more appropriate engagement of local dynamics on the part of urban administrators, but are providing opportunities for neighbourhoods often only focused on their own self-interest to engage city-wide processes and concerns.

While many positive changes have occurred, many challenges remain, and it is the objective of this paper to outline some of those challenges, particularly related to the social and cultural implications of globalisation for African cities. Additionally, rather than pinpointing specific policy frameworks and programmes to be adopted by urban managers, the paper suggests particular mind-sets and ways of thinking about the city that are important precursors to the generation of specific governance practices.

2. Some General Dynamics of Contemporary Urban Governance

Governing cities everywhere presently entails a complex series of institutional arrangements, policy instruments, strategic interventions and the mobilisation of increasingly differentiated populations and resources. The diverse social, economic and cultural spaces constituting the physical entity of the city, and over which government institutions nominally preside, are aspects and nodes of proliferating networks of influence and exchange.³ Within such a configuration, these spaces can also be highly insular embodiments of specialised interests, often operating in relative autonomy from the dynamics and concerns which prevail in the rest of the city.⁴

Additionally, the forces which impact upon the shape of urban economies, politics and cultures are constituted along increasingly distinct trajectories: Grassroots and highly localised constellations of interests, expressions and urban practices are proving progressively resilient in face of the regimens imposed by municipal and national government.⁵ Increasingly, the city is used as a staging area for very particularistic modes of living and experienced as a domain of contestation among them. Urban public spheres, city systems, and national states are increasingly compelled to establish their authority and legiti-

macy through coordinating a wide range of special interests through various partnership arrangements.⁶ The globalisation of economic transactions enjoins cities as components of new urban arrangements which forces cities to consider their prospects in terms of what other cities are doing, rather than in securing their ongoing development through the consolidation of national space.⁷ Connections between physical and social spaces are progressively disjoined, as the critical frameworks for identity formation, belonging and social allegiance are less rooted in specific localities as they are spread across multiple territories, sectors and nations.⁸

Governing the city, thus, cannot be conceptualised as the most appropriate technique or institutional form for managing and influencing urban processes based on some clear understanding of what is taking place. Urban actors at all levels are increasingly compelled to decide and act with a reflective judgement that is unable to depend on an unequivocal set of guidelines, apprehensions or understandings that might provide a clear view of what is going on. But yet, at the same time, that judgement is affected by what is going on and in turn affects the course of events. Consequently, there have been intensified efforts to decentralise governance to the particularities of specific sectors, locales and populations in order to maximise the context-specificity of urban rule. On the other hand, the apparatuses and sites of governance have been multiplied, with different actors and institutions undertaking different responsibilities and tasks. Such a strategic response has in turn intensified and reinforced this sense of the city as increasingly diffuse and disconnected.

These dynamics of urban life and the strategic elaboration of governance forms which seeks to address them combine to make life in cities increasingly a juxtaposition of contradictory modalities of urban occupation and use. Such realities tend to escalate a deep seated African ambivalence to urban life⁹ and emphasise the need to control the city. This emphasis entails how to manage population growth, how to protect the urban environment, how to grow urban economies, how to induce reasonable levels of democratic participation, how to provide more efficient and cost-effective services. All these aspects focus on getting the city to adhere to specific categories and instruments of management, or to be more disciplined in face of an always threatening anarchy which looms over the city.

It is important to amplify the deepening crisis of African cities – the fragmentation, conflicts, overextended informal arrangements, and the increasingly fragile economic underpinning of urban life. Yet, it is crucial, at the same time, to emphasise that the transformations of cities must largely be based on the values, practices, understandings, affiliations and structures which urban communities bring to life. For the crises themselves are in part the result of a truncated urbanisation not attentive and, at times repressive, of Africa's own emergent inclinations about urban life.

The issue of controlling cities is particularly salient in the African context as city life is largely based on an economy of talk – that is, an incessant exchange of information, impressions, experiences and phantasms about what city life is, what is happening within it, how one can survive, and maximise access to opportunities. Talk has become a vital resource in securing and multiplying modes of urban occupation and settlement. African city life absorbs its residents in a seemingly endless process of observing what is going on and of identifying ways to intervene, to be a part of strings of seemingly disconnected initiatives and networks. Such practices promote a sense of inexhaustible opportunism, where there is something that can always be done to solve a problem or to facilitate new actions. But they also promote a preoccupation with often narrow communal or familial interests given the scope of factors to be considered in managing urban survival in cities without strongly demarcated sectors and specialisation. What often feels like a continuous reinvention of the city stems from both the relative absence of strong and appropriate urban institutions and how the particular character of having to incessantly improvise urban life itself defers the consolidation of such institutions.¹⁰ This is not to say that municipal structures, civil institutions and private enterprise have not been present. But most African cities reflect the trappings of urban modernity without the industrial economies to back them up, thus compelling continuous revisions or reinventions of largely rural-informed practices of survival within cities. A long-term hybridity exists which compels an almost incessant sense of negotiability, of re-piecing together a sense of functional coherence to the urban social form.

Additionally, as the interactions of distinct African societies were largely stalled through colonialism and the nature of post-colonial rule, the configuration of solidarity has largely taken shape through the implicit interweaving of different strands of life. These strands bring together different social positions and identities in ways which force them to deal with each other but not necessarily take responsibility for each other. Reinvented traditional authorities, soldiers, bureaucrats, patrons, clients, households, religious figures, etc. cannot really operate without dealing with each other.¹¹ But the nature of the interaction does not necessarily move them into new institutional identities. For they have little to offer the re-imagination or reconstruction of new forms of subjecthood and citizenship other than their functions as markers in a larger game of fluid transactions in an urban environment which can be both excessively static and provisional.

To de-link religious life from the political, the political from the entrepreneurial, the familial from the public, etc, as a step in the consolidation of effective urban regimes and regulatory environments at all levels, may thus attenuate the very mechanisms through which African societies manage a foothold in a rapidly changing global economy. On the other hand, the proximity of sectors and identities may not create sufficient space for changes within indi-

vidual domains to take hold so as to generate new forms of independent action and innovation that could be brought to the larger public sphere. The interdependencies among religion, governance, politics, family life and business also mean that the stakes are high for any shift in the internal dynamics of any one sector. Again, the locus of independent action is constrained, at the same time as the resolution of any particular difficulty within one sector is potentially availed the influences and resources of another.

With the enormity of urban problems and inadequate institutional and financial resources to deal with them, a critical question is where local authorities and other stakeholders should place their energies and commitments. It is clear that in areas such as infrastructure and service delivery, modest projects at the community level and relying on substantial local participation, are effective – but often within a highly circumscribed sphere. But in some cities a wave of massive impoverishment and insecurity renders even these small efforts highly tenuous. It is clear that some radically sweeping interventions have to be made at the level of cities as a whole.

What is missing, or more precisely, primarily implied in the conceptualisation and implementation of the bulk of major urban development initiatives in Africa is a sense of how African cities can exist as productive and viable entities in the long-term. With the current predominance of focus on the urban environment, too much is made of the possibility that once the city appears normal then there will be a sufficient infusion of both internal and external funds to expand labour-intensive economic growth and expand consumer markets. While there is no definitive evidence which proves this impossible, strategies of intervention persist in not taking full cognisance of the ways urban Africans are actually leading their lives and the intricate, often provisional and compensatory, arrangements and practices through which income is generated and opportunities made accessible.

It is within a more proficient articulation of local and transurban realities that considerations on the relevance of African cities in the global system can be made. Such considerations must also focus on the kinds of opportunities urban Africa presently has within the global arena, and what spaces are either opened up, closed or made problematic by the particular ways in which urban Africa plies such opportunities.

3. Economy and Urbanisation

Globalisation processes have largely been stalled in Africa with corresponding severe consequences for its urban economies. The stalled process of globalisation underpins the limited employment-generative capacity of the formal economy in majority of the continent's cities. In most countries of SSA, regular urban wage employment opportunities constitute only a small fraction of total employment. For the period of the early 1980s, regular employment has

fallen and has elsewhere failed to match the growth of the non-agricultural labour force.

Even though 60% of African countries were able to experience economic growth rates in excess of population growth – and half of these registered growth rates of more than 5% – GDP in the least developed countries declined from 4.9% to 2.4% in 1997.¹² Despite such growth there remains concern as to whether the process of correcting bad macroeconomic policies enables the productive output of a country to bounce back without factor accumulation – a process which yields rapid growth that cannot be sustained over the long term.¹³ Additionally, slightly more than 350 million Africans (more than half the population of Sub-Saharan Africa) continue to live in poverty.¹⁴ Aggregate per capita income, USD 665 per annum, is now three-quarters of what it was in 1980. Assuming stabilised population growth rates, the overall African economy would have to grow at a rate of 10% per annum over the next twenty years just to double the present level of per capita income.¹⁵

Poverty drags urban economies, as populations hedge the deployment of available physical and social capital, making the consolidation of scale and planning necessary to development difficult. In trying to cope with the difficulties of everyday life, households engage in multiple income-generating activities instead of specialising in the development and growth of particular economic activities. Holdings are often fragmented into multiple plots, and many urban households combine subsistence cultivation, petty trade, and wage labour – a hedging of bets against a wide range of risks. In the cities, while the total number of jobs has increased to absorb rural migrants, this has usually resulted in a fragmentation of work and a practice of job sharing rather than a division of labour which could produce complementarity and economic efficiency.¹⁶

Safety and security take precedence over the costs necessary to pursue this strategy of multiple livelihoods or the income gains possible. Poor households are also constrained from engaging in higher return activities even if they are fairly secure simply because they are capital-intensive and because access to credit is highly limited. Land rights have not yet evolved to the point where land is marketable at sufficient levels in order to serve as collateral for credit. Credit provisioning systems are usually not geared to reductions in transaction costs reduced through high levels of observability. The pursuit of multiple livelihoods and consumption smoothing reduce growth by lowering mean income and the maintenance of assets in liquid form.¹⁷

Additionally, the development of legal institutions related to land-use controls, land tenure, registration and allocation are viewed as crucial in terms of a move away from compensatory systems. There is a need for flexible mortgage instruments, fiscal and monetary incentives such as capital gains, land transfer taxes, property taxes and institutional measures to facilitate transactions in land markets. These rationalisations also rest on the technological requirements of

an up-to-date set of cadastral maps, efficient systems for registering title, regular reassessments of property values and collection of taxes, and sufficient central and local political linking for revisions of tax rates and enforcement. Put simply, an adequate system of property rights requires adequate property registration, and property rights are important for the acquisition of working investment capital and also as the basis for taxation in order to pay for the servicing the uses of property.¹⁸

But it is difficult to foresee how this hedging of bets might change in the near future – for even if it operates against growth, such a strategy may ensure a level of equity in terms of people's ability to participate in economies. As Mike Douglas points out from experiences in urban Asia, mainstream models about household functioning and local production systems do not adequately explain how social institutions are developed to labour and everyday economic activities. Mechanisms to determine how labour is recruited, wages are determined, discipline is maintained, and production-consumption conflicts are resolved are coded into and drawn from social, cultural, religious, and historically-developed relations that are eminently local in character, and thus reveal how international economic integration is itself localised.¹⁹

The widespread implementation of structural adjustment programmes has created crippling shortages in imported materials, reduced investment and depressed effective market demand. Firms are forced to hold large inventories to guard against unreliable supply networks, deal only within trusted business relationships, and invest in costly infrastructure to guard against disruptions in power and water supplies. Accordingly, they were often forced to focus on state-contingent contracts as a means of protecting themselves against the risks associated with these costs. But now, structural adjustment has removed much of this protection, even while liberalisation has reduced some of the costs.²⁰

Although large-scale manufacturing enterprises have created an impressive volume of jobs in the newly industrialised countries of Asia and Latin America, they have generated only a small number of employment opportunities in urban Africa. African industrialists confronted by increased market uncertainties, high interest rates, rising import costs, and shortages of raw materials, have adopted new accumulation strategies involving informalisation of many production activities and work relations. Moreover, reductions in the size of the civil service, subsidy cuts, privatisation and deregulation under structural adjustment have eroded the state's capacity to intervene effectively in the economy and in social policy, and have swelled the ranks of the unemployed. The weakened and disarmed state has in many instances been unable to implement the policies of the international financial agencies. The uncertainty in the investment climate is exacerbated and investor confidence plummets. In a sense, uncertainty and high risk become the defining features of the already limited horizon of foreign and domestic investors. As the capacity of the state is steadily whittled away by structural adjustment, the investment climate

becomes more precarious. Weak institutions unable to enforce contracts and maintain law and order are left behind in the scramble for foreign investment. A vicious cycle of weak institutions-poor investment-weaker institutions-poorer investment ensues.

The situation is compounded by low rates of domestic savings and investment. Compared to the 1975-1984 period, gross domestic savings on the continent declined by 34% during the first half of the present decade. Yet savings are difficult to register given the nature of external obligations. As Africa moves toward a positive trade balance, current account deficits continue to increase (USD 8.6 billion in 1996 to USD 9.5 billion in 1997) largely due to interest payments on external debt and trade related services. The overall external debt has risen from USD 340 billion in 1996 to USD 349 billion in 1997, with debt servicing absorbing 21.3% of export earnings.²¹

As urbanisation is associated with progressive levels of industrialisation, and industrialisation increasingly oriented toward export, an assessment of African urban futures seems inextricably linked to understanding the constraints on the continent's capacity to export. Real trade as a share of GDP declined by an average of 0.35% annually between 1980 and 1983.²² Africa's openness to the world has been much more constrained than other continents. During the 1970s and 1980s the practice was that, as long as inflation remained manageable, SSA governments tried to avoid adjusting exchange rates, thus effectively limiting their participation in international trade. A wide range of protective barriers simply took the allocation of foreign exchange and other productive resources away from the market and placed it in the hands of the state.²³ Unlike the Asian situation, protection was neither time-bound nor performance-linked and, thus, could not be used to guide newly-developed domestic industries to larger scales and competitiveness. With an extremely narrow tax-base and limited tax-collecting capacity, African governments became overly dependent upon taxing international trade transactions in order to generate revenue. Thus state management of the overall economy came to centre on trade policy instruments as a means of both compressing imports and increasing revenue.²⁴

When governments have been forced to liberalise trade policies, losing important sources of revenue, they have increasingly borrowed on treasury bills and at often very high real interest rates. So liberalisation has not necessarily channelled resources to the private sector, given the squeeze on credit.²⁵

While sixteen stock markets have emerged, which in the long run will increase the liquidity of the continent's capital stock, their present total is quite small and little money is actually availed to firms. While in the future African governments are likely to find a more conducive credit environment at world markets, present commercial borrowings – highly influenced by political volatility and export price shocks – are subject to a substantial risk premium.²⁶ Additionally, levels of capital flight are completely deleterious, especially

those affected through the once standard practice of under-invoicing exports and over-invoicing of imports. The stock of capital flight at the end of 1991 represented more than 85% of the region's GDP.²⁷ The owners of African wealth have located some 39% of their portfolios outside the continent.²⁸

In general, manufacturing activities are curtailed in situations where access to cheap and abundant land is articulated to low levels of skill acquisition.²⁹ But given the diversity of shares of manufactures in exports, average education of adult populations, and land area per acre among distinct African countries, such conclusions remain only a rough generalisation. Under-performance seems to be more a function of inadequate infrastructure and poor economic management which generates a feedback loop where depressed manufactures marginalise African producers further from participating in the networks of business and economic contacts increasingly necessary to consolidate success and advantage.³⁰

Manufacturing is also limited by high sunk costs, limited absorption in resales for both physical capital and business institutions, excessive inventories due to inefficient supply networks, the preponderance of firm-specific tax regimes, weak social enforcement mechanisms, limited embeddedness in entrepreneurial networks, and poor public services.³¹

Investment in African manufacturing is also a high risk proposition - given the high average rates of return across most countries. In 1996, the average rate of return of US FDI projects in Africa was 31% compared to 12% in Latin America and 13% in the Asia-Pacific Region.³² Such rates indicate the high cost of investment capital, some 60% higher than in other developing countries. High return rates do not produce high rates of investment, as, excluding South Africa, investment in Africa constitutes less than 2% of all flows to developing countries, and less than half that to the Middle East, the next lowest region.³³ Because of debt overhang and the fact that macroeconomic reforms have not yet established firm credibility, investment rates are 9% lower than in pre-crisis Asia even while the rates of growth are basically the same.³⁴

In the absence of effective coordination between trade, industrial and technological policies, manufacturing in SSA has lacked coherence - a situation made all the more problematic by the use of rents as instruments of political favouritism.³⁵ Large traders with good political connections could thrive by accessing goods in short supply and parallel markets, and thus there was little incentive to make long-term investments in industrial production.³⁶

Industrialisation of scale is also constrained in that the pursuit of agglomeration and clustering of small domestic firms is not in itself developmental. Most such clustering in Africa has emerged from market towns and is characterised by limited vertical specialisation and diversification which tends to result in clusters of petty commodity producers rather than industrial zones.³⁷ Local networks of production usually serve more to reduce levels of uncertainty for entrepreneurs in marginal and traditional industries. But besides an enabling

regulatory environment, predictability and good infrastructure, entrepreneurs who want to invest or operate at scale need ideas and information about opportunities and markets, investment finance and working capital, sources of inputs and technology. Participation in more global networks provides larger, more modern enterprises with information they need about technologies, markets, and the external world.³⁸

Despite these constraints, there are strong internal and external moves toward the clustering of enterprises, including the clustering of diverse industrial or petty commodity activities, and similar activities which divide subcontracting opportunities.³⁹ Such clustering aims at attaining collective efficiency, in terms of the exchange of information, shared use of equipment and orders, enhanced access to suppliers and markets, and the improvement of knowledge stock.⁴⁰ Despite the depressions in demand and the limited absorption capacity of African markets, most African firms operate at excessively small scales which limit rates of return. Here, clustering is attempting to introduce greater levels of specialisation and labour division increasing efficiency and output. Additionally, clustering introduces greater scope in production systems operating with limited capital and within limited market capacities. Greater flexibility is possible in terms of producing multiple products from the same materials and with the same machinery, or using the same labour and machinery to produce different products at different times and cycles.⁴¹

Clustering is also beginning to solidify relationships of trust and collaboration in urban environments where firms have little faith in the prevailing legal system, where contractual obligations are often not met given rampant uncertainties and risk, and where there is a lack of mechanisms for sharing information regarding defaulters.⁴²

While clustering has often clearly promoted important external economies – facilitating access to inputs, technical know-how and markets – more important is the extent to which they act as platforms for joint action among diverse firms and economic activities. To what extent do firms cooperate in terms of participating in distinct stages of the production of specific goods or services? What kinds of collaboration exist among competitors in the same activity? Such capacity for joint action is the incisive marker of emergent industrialisation, i.e., of whether urban informal sectors can actually act as a locus for engendering new economies of scale.⁴³

But such cooperation always requires a platform on which it can take place, including the availability of natural resources, public fixed collective capital, private capital and institutional and regulatory forms.⁴⁴ In a precarious environment, small entrepreneurs tend to oscillate between the tendency to deal with a lot of different actors, and with a great deal of provisionality and turnover, or to lay their cards (keep what they do) close to their chest. This constant hedging of bets fixes these actors either to a narrow series of relationships or a continuous *ad hoc* process of dealing wherever and with whomever they can.

The makeshift quality to most African entrepreneurial clusters and commercial districts – their exposure to political and economic uncertainties and lack of access to a wide variety of resources – imbues much of informal sector activity with a debilitating sense of seeming temporary. This sense of being temporary makes trust something that can be accomplished only within a small circle of kin or other associates. The question becomes, then, who can exert a force of socialisation that provides a frame for various social actors to think and deal with each other in different ways, so as to promote a sustained process of collaboration across a sufficient number of different actors, neither too small or too large.

In one of the most detailed studies of clustering in Africa, Dorothy McCormick has found that there is a long way to go before existent clusters can even approximate the dynamism and reach of industrial districts elsewhere.⁴⁵ Surveying distinct garment, metal-working and car-repair clusters in Kenya and Ghana, she found that operations were hampered by sporadic power, cramped facilities, negative impacts of trade liberalisation, and a continued reliance upon basic technology. Horizontal linkages were often limited to the lending and borrowing of tools, although such linkages are more developed in the vehicle repair sector where subcontracting relationships are often well-elaborated according to various specialisations among mechanics, welders, straighteners, upholsterers, electricians, and sprayers. Fabricated metal shops may be extending their production lines, but the available market may actually be shrinking, forcing lower wages and product quality.⁴⁶ While trade liberalisation has opened up opportunities in the trade of second-hand cars, and thus expanded the car repair business, this sector has become intensely competitive with, for example, at least 3,000 vehicle repair workshops in Kumasi already by the late 1980s.⁴⁷

Associations are formed for most clusters so as to protect the interests of enterprises. But they often focus primarily on welfare provision and the mediation of disputes, rather than on quality control, price-setting, or on securing improved infrastructure, although these later functions have taken place in some sectors. Often associations face difficulties from more powerful interests, especially when they attempt to make direct bulk purchases from large companies, thus threatening the position of intermediate retailers. In many instances, associations are umbrella organisations made up of enterprises from various sectors, and thus find it difficult to represent the interests of a specific grouping of enterprises.⁴⁸ While clusters have often developed in relation to government spatial policies, they usually were pre-existing clusters that were relocated to different sites and to which new enterprises joined. But the internal dynamics of the re-formed clusters were often shaped and constrained by prior allegiances.⁴⁹

A form of clustering also increasingly takes place across spatial domains, particularly in the coordinated efforts of migrant networks. There continue to

be the situations where households invest in one of their members finding job opportunities away from home, often in Europe or the US, from which remittances are sent that have taken on greater significance for household sustenance. Additionally, long-distance trade has been a major part of supplying needed inputs to many African cities, now plying well-travelled routes, e.g. Johannesburg-Brazzaville-Lagos; Banjul-Dakar-Nouakchott; Addis Ababa (or Nairobi)-Dubai; Kano-Njemeni-Khartoum; Mombasa-Nairobi-Kampala-Juba; as well as links to Europe, Southeast Asia and the US.

Even with the substantial urbanisation that has occurred during the past two decades, only 22% of the African population lives in the urbanised coastal regions. Yet it is in coastal economies where the bulk of success stories in manufacturing export-led growth has taken place internationally. While Africa has scores of port cities, these cities play almost no role as export manufacturing centres. Almost all the pre-requisites necessary to successfully play such a role – such as efficient customs administration, infrastructure, communication systems, secure warehousing, tax concessions and limited protection on the flow of goods – are not operative within African cities. Yet increased urbanisation is at least allowing private entrepreneurs to benefit from greater economies of scale and thus consolidate the resources necessary to permit the financing of major infrastructural development.⁵⁰ During the last thirty years there has been some USD 300 billion of investment in public infrastructure and private housing.⁵¹ What is now key in terms of ongoing urbanisation is a concerted effort to consolidate and up-scale a substantial range of dynamic economic activities usually deployed to reproduce survival or to facilitate engagement with global economies on the basis of small and medium-scale trade in terms of new modalities of urban production. How can cities begin to register increases in urban productivity, yet bring with it human development gains for urban citizens remains the fundamental challenge.

4. The Particular Challenges for African Urban Governance

As governing the city as whole is no longer the purview of clearly identifiable processes and institutions – and as the public sector abdicates responsibilities associated with ensuring a collective sense of well-being – individuals and groups increasingly fall back on the reassertion or reinvention of traditional identities and practices. In Africa, this process largely centres around religion or ethnic practice. This occurs both as a means of providing some measure of coherence to complicated and fragmented urban lives and as a common language through which to evolve functional instruments of association capable of forging legitimacy and efficacy.

As the city is reasserted as a collection of parochial identities and lifestyles, often marked with extreme disparities in terms of access to opportunities and resources, there is an intensifying sense of the cosmopolitan throughout all cities. In a globalised world interpenetrations of all kinds across economic, cul-

tural and political territories throw into question the essential integrity of any identity. Any effort to achieve an unequivocal clarity to identities of race, religion, gender, nation, and ethnicity finds itself interrupted and intersected with influences, pollution, and exceptions beyond its control. In a world of incessant mobility, travel, communication, and exposure, what any culture or grouping becomes has little choice but to take a vast range of others into consideration. By so doing, that culture or group implicitly becomes some of what those others are.

The former function of boundaries as dividing lines representing clear demarcations in forms of life disappear, while at the same time they become more rigidly drawn. As a result, the city becomes a place where there are at one and the same time more and more places where particular identities can go, and more and more places where particular identities cannot go. In other words, the city becomes simultaneously more open-ended and more narrow.

Accordingly, an urban space which is more abstracted and insulated from the prevailing social dynamics of residence and livelihood is institutionalised in cities throughout the world, including Africa. Even in the most volatile and dangerous of cities, such as Bogota, Manila, Lagos, Caracas, Karachi and Johannesburg, a tightly secured urban space is constituted which almost exclusively functions to mediate relationships between national, regional and global economies as they apply to the dominant social actors of the countries in which these cities are located. At the same time, these functions and zones have less and less to do with the rest of the city of which they are nominally a part. Yet, an inordinate share of budgetary, material and symbolic resources are deployed to make sure these zones operate with security, efficiency and comfort.

In the majority of African cities, various degrees of breakdown or transition in formal metropolitan governance, accompanied by the sheer population growth of the city, are combining to produce a highly dangerous security situation for residents. In both poor and wealthy neighbourhoods, this is contributing to a substantial narrowing of what people do and where they do it, as well as a greater parochialism of interest.⁵²

Residents concentrate on protecting their compounds, blocks or immediate neighbourhoods and develop increasingly singular strategies to consolidate social ties and their related opportunities. These strategies often clash or, at least, are not easily connectable to the strategies pursued by other blocks or neighbourhoods, even among physically contiguous quarters. In African cities, new churches, associations and entrepreneurial groupings are cropping up all the time, but without substantial connections among them. Rather than embodying collections of groups and households, these associations act like households themselves, providing a sense of stability that fragmented family and extended family households in many neighbourhoods have lost.

People may live in dense relationships with each other in overcrowded quarters, but increasingly without strong social ties capable of coordinating and

cohering their behaviour. Survival becomes more individuated and spaces increasingly privatised as the grounds for sustaining social solidarity – either through shared labour, national identification, or religious affiliation – find themselves attenuated in most places. Rather, urban residents, living in such close proximity, use their knowledge of each other – their comings and goings, domestic intrigues, acquisitions, and tendencies – as knowledge with which to eke out some kind of advantage. What is there to steal, who is available to abuse or manipulate, whose coattails can be ridden? Just as knowledge has been elevated to the primary object of production at the highest levels of global capitalism, so too with the poor, does the appropriation of knowledge – whether it be impressions, rumours, or observations about those with whom they share residential and operating space – take precedence.

Yet, at the same time, the profound fissuring tendencies in urban Africa may reflect a dissolution of conventional solidarity and integration but do not lessen either the necessity or operation of larger assemblages cutting across various social divides. The difficulty in reading the urban social field is that the very real social disintegration taking place, and the rise of ethno-nationalism and parochial conflicts, also acts to mask practices which connect communities to a wide network of interdependencies and groups. The visible wholeness or intactness of neighbourhoods, ethnic and religious groups is simply a point of reference, a means of establishing nodal points in larger networks.⁵³

Religious brotherhoods and fraternities, ethnically-based trading regimes, syndicates, and even community-based, multi-association operations are functioning with increasing scope. Urban localities are not only serving as platforms for popular locus initiatives – for example waste management, micro-enterprise development and shelter provision – but readapt local modalities of cohesion and sociality to more regional and global frameworks.⁵⁴ Some localities, such as Nima (Accra), Obalende (Lagos), Texas-Adjame (Abidjan), Grand Yoff (Dakar) reflect a strong relationship between the elaboration of local associations and the generation of new economic activities and resources. Here, associations become important in configuring a division of labour that is increasingly coordinating the cross-border, small and medium-scale trade of individual entrepreneurs and working out conjoint mechanisms to pool and reinvest proceeds to access larger quantities of tradable goods, diversify collective holdings and reach new markets. The mechanisms of local expansion in scale are often murky and problematic. They can entail highly tenuous and frequently clandestine articulations among, for example, religious and fraternal networks (particularly, Masonic lodges or Islamic Sufi brotherhoods, like the Mouriddiyah and Tejaniyyah), public officials operating in private capacities, clientelist networks mobilising very cheap labour, foreign political parties, and large transnational corporations operating outside of conventional procedures.

These networks often demonstrate substantial capacities to bring together very different actors, identities, and processes in ways that converge highly

localised and internationalised scales. They avail opportunities for actors with wide varying capacities and backgrounds to participate in translocal networks and to use that participation as a means of affecting the disposition of land, status, capital and opportunities in local situations. While, these may be highly informalised and fluid configurations, there are often very formalised rules and procedures involved.

These larger networks or cross-community ties do not imply any essential stability, as the eventual structures of networks are fluid and ever-changing. As a result, urban communities must increase their exposure to being 'buffeted' and fragmented by the competing demands and influences they are exposed to while seeking to connect themselves to different stories and to larger networks of production and exchange. At the same time, they must continuously re-piece together provisional mechanisms for maintaining a coherent sense of who they are and stabilising the interactions of residents, workers, and affiliates that collectively participate in thousands of different connections.

On an individual level, there exists little space to make the wrong moves or decisions. Urban life is littered with the rapid downfalls and marginalisation of those whose provisionality or independence did not coincide with the prevailing norms – even though those norms often prevail with, at most, a short-lived consensus.⁵⁵ When urban life increasingly becomes one of incessant improvisation, it is difficult to operate with any conviction as to the implications of one's behaviour and, as such, the performance of citizenry is much like playing the jackpot where the stakes for both right and wrong guessing are high.

The implications of this politics on the shaping and use of urban knowledge move in several directions: There is a hedging of bets, where the deployment of various types of knowledge coincide, and where none takes precedence – so that sorcery, religious knowledge, personal memory, family and kinship narratives, ethnic myths, academic structures and bureaucratic procedures are all played like cards whose value changes depending on the audience.⁵⁶ As a result, it often becomes difficult to clearly determine the distinctions between what are aspirations and compensations, cynicism and strongly-held values, corruption and moral integrity.⁵⁷ For in an environment of improvisation, to convey clear commitments to points of view and identities tend to impede the flexibility necessary to multiply potential entrances and exits amongst the different spaces and experiences making up the city.

Yet, under the prevailing economic liberalisation geared toward the opening of borders and the fluidity of economic transactions, the very instruments and arrangements deployed by local urban populations to generate more extensive and fluid transactions face greater difficulties. These difficulties tend to centre on stretching limited capacities to cover more territory, to go farther afield or, conversely, to narrow the scope of the activities or persons involved in the transactions with which one is engaged.

It is not economically possible for many people to stay put, to stay at home. African neighbourhoods often become a stage on which people do everything to leave. The leaving becomes increasingly complicated. For the nature of the economic crisis, the increased demands for emigration, and the scope which small and medium scale trade of all varieties must now assume in order to be successful means that access to work opportunities outside one's city, for example, in Europe or the US, as well as the movements of bodies and goods, rely upon intricate social arrangements, increasingly transnational in nature and ruthless in operation.

Additionally, an important informalised sector of service provision, light manufacturing, and craft work is elaborated within major cities across the world. This sector acts as an important vehicle for incorporating African entrepreneurs into a more globalised economic system, albeit one with great inequalities in the kinds of urban residency it enables.⁵⁸

Providing for the increasingly particular, often idiosyncratic consumption styles of the varied white collar workers with expendable incomes is now often accomplished through vibrant informal and /or small formal business sectors. These are forms of entrepreneurship able to occupy and utilise the vestiges of former industrial zones and convert various manifestations of urban decline into low-cost production sites, or able to produce from homes.

These sectors and practices of production frequently become the domain of immigrants who convert networks of social relations and the need to deliver specialised products and services to an immigrant community into an ability to provide for newly emergent niche markets. Servicing the lifestyles of the rich and famous or the new breed of young financial whiz-kids and entrepreneurs is now often done by African immigrants crafting clothes and furniture, for example, in conditions that do not vary greatly from those back home. This form of cottage industry is an opportunity opened up by the tendencies to capitalise on networks of dense social relations that, in the restructuring of European and American cities, are forced to operate over wider and more peripheral territories across the city. Immigrant communities may hold onto small pieces of territory within the central city, but are increasingly forced out to the periphery. While solidarity is broken up, new forms of cooperation must emerge. These new forms, in some ways, have the advantage enhancing the maneuverability of immigrant communities as they are forced to take place over larger portions of the city.

A critical question is whether such African spaces – located in the major urban centres of Europe and the US – can institutionalise themselves away from the incessant vulnerability in which they presently exist. For this vulnerability points to a progressive dissociation of space within cities and across cities. Not only are distinct neighbourhoods and quarters in cities tending to pull away from each other, but the very distinctiveness of neighbourhoods themselves is dissipating as the sense of what it means to be a neighbourhood is

reformulated. For to be a neighbourhood – a grouping of related people, activities, identities, cultural practices, etc – increasingly cannot take place within a continuous or contiguous space, but on trajectories, relations and sites that cut across different geographic territories. While such developments draw African cities closer to the dynamism of global urban centres, they also potentially subsume them to the primacy of non-local dynamics or further marginalise them from the global system altogether.

Back home, the expansion of informal economies within and between African cities has various effects on the nature of social organisation. Increasingly available urban-based surplus is placed into non-monetised assets in reaction to the uncertainties of the formal financial system; especially during the recent period of structural reform. Accumulation based on non-liquid holdings – land, housing, goods, etc – may curtail the mobility and independent actions of household and associational members who may own or be dependent on them.⁵⁹ The constraint on mobility reinforces the need to invest time and attention to the politics of social connection.

Also, access to liquid capital remains highly dependent on one's position in a known network of social connections, as those who deploy such assets do so in ways aimed at keeping transaction costs low. The amounts available are usually low, most often applicable for the financing of a single purchase or deal, rather than establishing the borrower in a position of greater financial independence over the long run. New entrepreneurial groups are also formed as the costs of both travel and distributive trade increase. Individual traders may form small, short-term consortiums to make bulk purchases, share transportation and importing costs. As these arrangements become more common, the traditional marketing networks become more fluid as well. Where once the disposition of goods was largely tied to a steady network of retailers and hawkers, the growth of distributive and cross-border trade – that has only increased under market liberalisation – means that traders are not assured of buyers for their goods.

What ensues in some cities is a widening divergence between distinct marketing practices which generates an additional source of conflict within neighbourhoods. Where once a tolerance born out of the conviction, what goes around, comes around, enabled individuals and groups to ply the same trade, goods and customers, as well as share orders and opportunities, a more marked *laissez-faire*, sometimes renegade, approach to entrepreneurship introduces new tensions in addition to new opportunities.

The combination of a narrowing of scope and social composition, with a broader diffusion of activities over larger territories has its correlates elsewhere as well. The most obvious are the constraints on movement generated by increased levels of insecurity and crime, and intensification of the territorial claims of political clientelism which in some cities have made certain quarters

no go areas for any group not affiliated with a particular political party or grouping.

In both Lagos and Kinshasa, a cat and mouse game prevails as the elite who drive from their enclaves to their offices vary their routes to circumvent the shakedowns and attacks organised by criminal gangs on the roads. In Johannesburg, security companies offer satellite tracking systems for automobiles given the fact that one car is high-jacked every thirty minutes. In protected estates, such as Maryland or Anthony in Lagos, where access in and out is severely limited even for residents, gangs still find ways to penetrate and inform residents to prepare themselves for handing over money within a day or two. While for many African cities, high levels of everyday insecurity may be a relatively recent phenomenon, it is, of course not specific to Africa and neither are the variety of responses undertaken by various groups of residents.

While well organised neighbourhood patrols, with residents positioned at every intersection throughout the night, are the norm in thousands of localities across the continent, a generalised disillusionment with anybody's ability to control escalating criminality leads, in many circumstances, to an immediate dispensation of justice. Sheer claims that someone has stolen or raped quickly translate into immediate beatings or killing of the accused. In many cities, if a suspect is brought to the police, the aggrieved party is expected to pay the costs of maintenance in prison until the case is adjudicated. In some cities, the prison systems are so overwhelmed that all institutions prefer the application of local solutions. Though neighbourhoods may feel they have little choice but to take matters into their own hands, their responses can act to undermine any overall sense of justice, and further contribute to the problems they are attempting to solve. What prevails is then a sense that no element in the society has the ability or legitimacy to control a situation which, for both rich and poor, severely curtails their movement and use of the city.

To address vulnerability also introduces other vulnerabilities. For example, the tolerance of sex work in African cities is placing new strains on the social fabric, as energies have to be spent absorbing intense contradictions. In some quarters of Khartoum where overt support for the Islamic movement has been very strong, young girls order shopkeepers on certain streets to close their gates at a certain hour at night because the street now belongs to them and their business. The emphasis on the control of women's bodies in some urban contexts becomes simply a compensation for a dependency on the use of those bodies as a household's chief source of income.

It is common sense that city life based on fear tends to simply produce more fear. The enclosures and segregation which exist as signals of vulnerability only persuade those who have little to use that vulnerability as a potential resource – even though it is the poor who most usually prey on the poor. The pervasive sense of vulnerability has, however, many products. While it tends to engineer greater social divides as a move to better control the risks, for many

poor communities, those divides are not sustainable or only sustainable if actions are taken which would seem to directly contradict the symbolic integrity of the particular groups which are divided.

For example, in the last decade there has been an apparent hardening of the ethnic and religious identities operative in Khartoum, as well as a tightening of the borders which separate distinct enclaves and quarters that at times are barely discernible as ethnically differentiated territories. Nevertheless, a certain psychological stratification tended to prevail. The ascendancy of political Islam, the enormous growth of Khartoum and the persistence of civil war complicated everyday relationships in the public spaces which different groups had to cross. Although remaining outside the possibility of overt recognition, what was equally significant were the many ways apparent antagonists collaborated with others. Based on the relative advantages of their respective positions, and their differentiated access to various networks, sworn enemies worked together.⁶⁰ While no one could speak to these collaborations, and they would not probably work if they were spoken to, new or reinvigorated forms of urban sociality are emerging where one least expects to find them. That they may be occasioned by intense, implicitly shared feelings of collective vulnerability and may exist as highly vulnerable social instruments themselves does not change the fact that a small glimmer of the cosmopolitan is being generated by the parochial.

What we learn from these dynamics is that it is important to go beyond rudimentary divisions of formal and informal, the cosmopolitan and the parochial. Rather, it is crucial to look at the interweaving of potentials and constraints which activate and delimit specific initiatives of local communities to maintain a sense of social cohesion, exceed how such cohesion is put together at anyone time, take advantage of unforeseen opportunities, and mitigate the negative effects of being as opportunistic as possible.⁶¹ The norm for urban citizens is to operate somewhere between increasing tendencies toward and internationalisation – to find a sense of roots in incessant mobility, and to find opportunities to move when one's marginalisation appears to box one in a dysfunctional corner.

5. Pathways to Action

A large proportion of the resource inputs of the international community into urban development centres on capacity building. The main idea is how all stakeholders can achieve a better grasp of processes of urbanisation and work together to bring a measure of coherence to the governing of cities. As reconfirmed and made a priority by the Habitat II process, there must be the creation of an enabling and participatory approach to management, emphasising the broad participation of civil society in decision-making, flexibility and creativity in the administration of decisions and allocation of resources. As there is a progressive devolution of power to the municipal level in Africa, effective gov-

ernance also simultaneously requires an expansion of networking and an exchange of expertise and experiences among municipalities. There must be a continuous monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the impact of policies, programs and actions at global, regional, national and local levels by national governments, local authorities, and all other parties in order to achieve sustainable cities. The viability of exchanges necessitates the elaboration of a common language through which comparisons can be made – thus the emphasis on urban indicators and best practices.

As the conventional functions of government must be opened up to elaborate new modalities of public action and governance, much remains to be done in terms of thinking about how participation, partnership, and continuous monitoring are to be operationalised. Much work is necessary in order to conceptualise the terms on which different actors with different positions and interests can act in complementary ways under an institutionalised framework which specifies rights, obligations and responsibilities. This emphasis on partnership and exchange is an acknowledgement of the vast complexities inherent in understanding and managing the city. But it is one thing to understand complexity, and another to know what to do about it.

For government is intrinsically a limited endeavour. While it might aspire to systematically reduce the full range of social concerns and demands to a manageable set of official problem spaces, it is inevitable that many interests will remain unrepresented, and hence effectively ungoverned. Governments daily struggle is to adjust what it thinks it is about in the fervent hope of fully capturing dynamics it thinks it understands, but which it is constantly forced to admit that it does not. While most involved in municipal government would aspire to impose some kind of rational order over complex processes, it seems increasingly evident that government can only use its authority to configure provisional ways of engaging complex realities so as to steer them in the service of possible and consensual agendas.

While the extraordinary attention on urban governance is not unwarranted, municipalities must yet deliberate on what exactly can be governed and how. Given the widening diversities in the activities, compositions, interests, infrastructural and social spaces of African cities, how can a functional consensus over developing the city as a whole be generated? Where does government intervene, or for that matter any institutionalised vehicle, such as NGOs, and where does it not? How can a more proficient understanding of the complexities of urban life can be translated into reasonably effective modalities of public action? How can strategic orientations be developed that resist tendencies to over-control, yet which are sufficiently engaging, authoritative and proactive to foster more productive and complementary intersections between different dynamics and actors?

What institutional forms, after all, will be effective as municipalities must negotiate in between increasingly globalised and localised dynamics? As local

authorities now work under an international consensus which permits them to seek development financing in international financial markets, new sets of prudential lending and capital adequacy guidelines are put into operation. Effective partnerships will have to both incorporate the perspectives and initiatives of localities within policy-making and offer the private sector the standards and guarantees necessary for investment. These processes are not readily compatible or easily negotiable. It is clear that effective forms of urban governance require a critical ability for municipal authorities to fully understand, and thus engage, local social economies on the neighbourhood level, so that administrative mechanisms, forms of taxation, regulation, democratisation, and service provision have a direct bearing on the ways people are actually living. But the question is how do these understandings affect the evolution of policy-making relevant to the urban system as a whole. This raises the question as to what kinds of coordination are possible between different levels of decision-making, delivery and management.

Such coordination has become a significant issue in terms of the wide-spread introduction of market mechanisms and privatisation to manage the resource base of cities. Privatisation does not, in and of itself, alter the structures of provisioning systems or their monopolistic attributes since firms have inherited the specific networks and physical infrastructures built under a nationalistic approach to resource management. Enormous costs and time would be involved to radically restructure them. Additionally, it is unclear whether the regulatory environments being instituted in Africa can deter the privileged access to strategic assets that seems to increasingly fall to especially large corporations through an implicit under-pricing of yields.

A corollary to privatisation is subsidiarity and the localisation of infrastructure management through various forms of intersectoral partnership and community involvement. This trend encompasses several distinct approaches, from enlisting community support and management of particular functions elaborated at municipal or national levels, decentralisation of delivering processes, to encouraging the development of context-specific management and technological systems which are integrated into overall provisioning systems. Involving local communities in the provisioning of essential resources introduces certain improvements in efficiency and cultivates more responsible consumption behaviours. But such decentralisation and community involvement does not address, and often masks, the need to manage resources at much larger levels of territorial encompassment. In other words, the present overemphasis on the salience and effectiveness of local level planning, servicing and development can obscure thinking about just exactly what territorial referents are most useful in terms of managing specific resources.⁶²

Additionally, local level participation is primarily construed on the level of actors as consumers, rather than as citizens who have rights to ensure that the disposition of assets and livelihood is judiciously governed. Perhaps the most

important consideration here is that the implications of subsidiarity, local participation, privatisation and large-scale restructuring of resource management are rarely linked. For in devolving authority and responsibilities to the level of consumers, as embodied by neighbourhood districts or even municipalities, what also takes place is more arbitrary relationships between yield providers and the larger consumers, and a more particularistic process of distributing critical resources.

The issue of territorial reference becomes critical in terms of thinking about local economic development, and the increased importance given to strengthening the competitiveness of cities through maximising their comparative advantage. Certainly cities can take charge of improving efficiencies and local conditions. But they will find they have a limited scope within which to operate since local capabilities to generate competitive advantages are restricted to operating on the resources contained within local boundaries.

Cities play little or no role regulating macroeconomic functions. They can harbour the activities of international firms operating within their purview or generate a range of development initiatives on their own. As such, they configure the organisational basis of territorial competition but do not themselves manage such competition on their own.⁶³ Cities are positioned in a range of overlapping functions – a process which is historically not at all new.⁶⁴ Some are beneficiaries of recentralisation which emerges from the consolidation of command functions exercised over globalised production processes.⁶⁵ Others harbour activities crowded out of core cities due to the costs of space and congestion, labour and real estate – providing an adequate, lower-cost infrastructure and human capital base.⁶⁶ Some cities coalesce regional economies, while the participation of others in global networks is so substantial as to effectively de-link them from their regional surrounds.⁶⁷

For a city to assess its opportunities on the basis of knowing its position is more than either consolidating a specific and externally defined function within an international hierarchy of urban areas or simply building on local strengths to generate expanded local economic activity. Rather, the task for cities is to develop specific leading edge strategies, based on interacting local resources with a systematic understanding of who one is in terms of who one could plausibly be. The reference that enables this understanding is not some abstract global moderator but concrete relationships to an increasingly wider net of cities, markets and spaces.

Local participation is also not sufficient to guarantee an effectively democratic decision-making process in what concerns extra-local policies, such as the supply of water and electricity. The only way to effectively enable greater citizen participation in such extra-local matters is to open up social control over the disposition of major natural and economic resources through open and articulated institutions. These institutions would be flexibly shaped according to the functional contributions specific localities and urban systems make

within larger networks, jurisdictions and economies. If the shedding of many aspects of service delivery by public institutions is not to result in the abnegation of social responsibility, new forms of public action and accountability must ensue. These new forms must be capable of monitoring the activities of all key institutions and supporting viable forms of citizen participation in institutions charged with the management and/or provision of resources and services.

Critical to such participation is the enrichment of place, i.e., the overall substantiation and increase of public and social spaces, of arenas for public action and interaction. Here, the initiative and actions of urban residents to undertake solutions to their problems and opportunities for their potentials is given sufficient and unencumbered space. Initiatives undertaken to earn income, provide shelter, socialise, and work in concert with others are allowed to find their own criteria of efficacy, so that residents are not dissuaded from various forms of self-help and do not spend most of their energies compensating for intrusions by the regulatory instruments of the state or other institutions. Neither are residents simply left to their own devices, but are part of an ongoing dialogue or engagement with various tiers of the state or key intermediaries. For this dialogue is necessary in order for all initiatives to critically examine the efficacy of what they do.

In this global context, there is a need for viable decision-support systems for cities, especially in the developing world. An assessment process is needed which identifies the criteria, the modalities of analysis and the urban knowledge required to define the capacities, potentials and conceivable trajectories of specific economic and institutional development interventions within given neighbourhoods, as well as the urban system as a whole. There must be a more solid basis on which decisions regarding cities are taken, which, in general, should include tools for making comprehensive diagnoses and specific action plans based on them. What this means is to find ways of substantiating micro-urban knowledge on local social economies, governance practices, institutional orderings and behaviours and articulating a macro-level diagnosis of institutions and neighbourhoods to micro-urban knowledge.

In the end, urban governance must then not only consist of well-defined, transparent and accountable institutional processes. It must also try to bring together incompatible worlds to create urban economies based on the dynamic tensions between prevailing international notions of the well-functioning city and the aspirations and practices of local citizens. It must continuously develop new instruments oriented toward identifying and enhancing local opportunities resulting from global macro-economic changes. These opportunities must not only centre on increasing market efficiency, but on the construction of the social city, as has been advocated by the Forum of Professionals and Researchers during the Habitat II process (Report of the UN Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II, 7 August 1996). Here, there is a responsibility

for researchers to envision the operations of a city against segregation and exclusion.

The promotion of the social city also entails a willingness to consider a wide range of possible methodologies for substantiating social capital that can supplement a sometimes limiting over-reliance on mechanisms of redistribution. Instead of curtailing migratory movement, how can it be capacitated? Instead of policing unconventional entrepreneurial activity, how can it be appropriated as the incipient form of new productive, legal and taxable corporate units? Instead of trying to enforce the stability of conventional households, how can the changes underway in household and family life, usually in response to economic hardship, be strengthened as new forms of social capital?

The features of urban places are likewise excessive, more than the infrastructures, codes and inputs necessary to manage population sizes and built environments. They are full of unanticipated associations, visions, confluence, noise, and things to consume – all not easily used or useful. At the same time, there remain the necessary orders, rules, habits, habitats, and institutions. So that what is dynamic about this configuration is the space in-between these excessive expenditures and the widening proficiency of power to engineer stability and stasis.

What does all of this mean for urban decision-makers, politicians and local authorities? What do these perspectives on urban place have to say about the allocation of shrinking public resources, negotiating the demands of the private sector, generating greater levels of civic action, developing effective decision support systems or reducing urban inequalities? In part the response has something to do with how much the public realm has conceded to the private, how elaborated and open private realms actually are. Perhaps more importantly, they raise the question whether there are ways to at least provisionally consolidate actions which cut across different sectors but which are not, at the same time, bureaucratised or made sedentary by contractual notions of partnerships. That is, the way to get concrete things done may be itself excessive of any thing we presently are institutionally willing to know and excessive either of the kinds of capacities or desires which presently exist within individual sectors or their sum total.

The easy response usually centres on a melange of reformist programming: the clarion call for policy-makers to take to the streets, for there to be increasingly direct linkages between the administration of government; that information technologies be deployed to promote elaborated interchanges among constituencies and departments so as to promote greater interaction among social and administrative compartments. Alternately, there have been proposals for the establishment of small global observatories and one-stop city halls in different districts to feel and address the particular pulses of sub-communities.

But often these policy thrusts ignore what is happening on urban streets. It is in the street that urban theorists such as Bayat see the unplanned, unstructured

and instantaneous group action and the coalescing of networks of the poor which has become crucial to urban survival in the South, and where the city has become a popular city.⁶⁸ Accordingly, policies and programs must also be complemented with practices of responding to the street *within* urban managerial apparatuses.

In others words, what are the processes which occur within institutions of policy making and planning which exceed the practices specified by policies and bureaucratic norms, and, more importantly, how can these processes be engaged as a means of effecting the disposition of decisions and resources? How do institutions understand the urban context in which they are embedded, their articulations with other institutions, the domain of their work, and the processes by which they construct continuous assessments of their relative efficacy? How do institutions construct knowledge of their constraints and possibilities; what kinds of internal dynamics are institutionalised which shape the attitudes and behaviours of local actors? What are the range of internal informalities and cross-institutional collaborations possible within circumscribed sets of institutional norms and rules? What degrees of consonance and disparity exist between formalised operating procedures and actual practices? How adaptable are institutional processes to the increasingly fluid dynamics in the social formations of urban communities and global circuits? The reality is that many management and governance institutions are winging it, improvising as they go along at the same time as they are more convinced of the salience of the technological instruments of urban management cited earlier.

It is within this line of enriching place which we must think about the urbanisation of Africa. It is within this line that we might think about just what to make of the apparent limitations and ambiguity of African urban places in terms of the kinds of agencies they pursue in the global arena. Also required is some sense of the place of African cities within present and future waves of urbanisation, and how African cities are managing to stay in place as cities in their own right, and the extent to which they are displaced in a growing fascination for other places. To what extent is the African city a consumer of trends toward urbanisation, in that increasingly cities everywhere are expected to be shaped and managed in accordance with their roles as neighbourhoods in global conurbation? What space is possible within the African cities own singularities, potentials and failings to act on the logic and powers through which such conurbation is assembled? How can the boundaries that enclose divides be opened? Whatever is assumed, the damage is immediate if we see Africans as outside looking in, or that Africa has to play catch-up.

Lastly, urbanisation does not simply mean the population growth of individual towns and cities. It also entails a process where various localities, be they rural or urban, engage in more intensified exchanges and dependencies. The spatial frameworks which once permitted a sense of separation and autonomy are significantly altered, and peoples, institutions, economic processes and cul-

tural formations are drawn into each others orbit. In Africa, the corridor running from Accra to Ibadan, containing some 60 million people, has once again become a highly salient domain of multifaceted linkages. Gauteng Province, incorporating Johannesburg, Midrand and Pretoria, is increasingly banking its economic future as a hub in an economic corridor running from Maputo to Gabarone, Windhoek and eventually Luanda.

Given the importance that regionalisation plays as a re-pooling or re-coalescing of local specificity and autonomy in face of globalisation,⁶⁹ in what ways is it possible to conceptualise the continuously emergent process of urbanisation in Africa as a transurban one? In other words, it is increasingly important to view the particular characteristics of urbanisation within discretely defined urban centres as progressively influenced by the dynamics of urbanisation within others, either near or far.

While it may seem that Africa has a hard enough time getting its act together remaking its own urban spaces, what is being argued here is that by thinking of urban development frameworks as minimally a sub-regional phenomenon and task, a more manageable analytical and operational unit is established in which to exercise the kind of intentional trans-urban networking necessary for the capacitation of individual urban spaces. While effective regionalisation requires a substantial rationalisation of existing disparities and boundaries across sectors and national domains, the sense of disparity – in background, culture, urban history, boundaries, and regulatory frameworks – can serve as an important resource in terms of beginning to concretely map out and act out trans-urban networks of collaboration and exchange.

The consolidation of diversities within – so as to promote a more integrated individual African city – is largely contingent upon the extent to which that city can consolidate functional interactions, exchanges, production networks, development collaborations, conjoint advocacy, and conjoint investment strategies based on ways of complementing the activities of other cities. For cities to successfully manage the cohabitation of diverse populations increasingly means moving beyond establishing consensual frameworks and rules to which all citizens agree. Cities must also providing opportunities for citizens to get out, to engage and interact with the larger outside world as the condition for being able to build up a tolerance and adaptive capacity to deal with whatever takes place within the city called home.

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