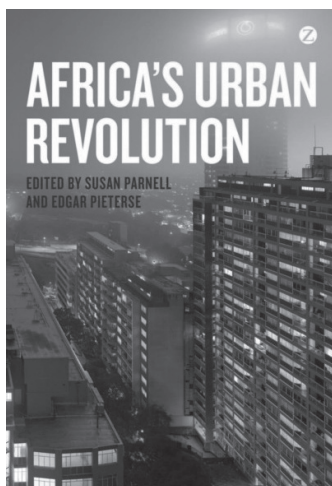# AFRICA'S URBAN REVOLUTION

TARRÓSY ISTVÁN

Urban geographer Susan Parnell and urban policy expert Edgar Pieterse edited a substantial volume about the ever so expanding urban revolution in the African context that has been embracing basically all walks of life – and not just in the cities of the continent. Although still more people inhabit the rural African lands, tendencies show that in the course of the coming decades, but probably by 2050 more people are predicted in the growing network of cities and towns – and not just along the coastal areas. As the editors point out right away in Chapter 1, "Africa already has more city dwellers than Europe, Australasia, North or South America" (p. 1). The trajectory reveals that urban settings have been expanding, resulting that cities become mega cities – such as Lagos, Kinshasa, Luanda, Dar es Salaam, or Cairo –, formerly smaller towns situated more within the countryside of the given countries, far away from the larger coastal rims, which used to be functioning in a number of cases as capitals of the colonial powers become more important settlements – such as Abuja, Nairobi, or Dodoma. New destinations have been born for those on the move: intra-continental migration patterns are closely connected with the new (or enlarging) urban entities. "Africa displays the fastest rate of urban growth in the world, albeit from a low base level" (p. 15). The urban revolution is a multi-faceted process, however, as, in addition to abundant opportunities, it contains numerous hardships and challenges – as the editors explain, "most African countries are [still] not able to capitalize on [the ongoing] demographic shift, because urban residents are structurally trapped in profoundly unhealthy conditions that impact negatively on productivity, economic efficiencies and market expansion" (Ibid).

The volume contains fourteen chapters and a Postscript, each discussing significant aspects of urbanization and urban development. Chapter 1 sets the scene and puts this 'urban revolution' into context. The editors talk about the distinctive features of African cities, ranging from their integral connectivity with the rural areas, the daily informalities, which are hard to manage by any city government, to the manifestations of slum life and the questions of urban planning and management.

In Chapter 2, Jo Beall and Tom Goodfellow discuss conflict and post-war transition in African cities. "Some of the most spectacular rates of urban growth worldwide in recent times have come in the wake of civil war" (p. 25). And they provide the case of Rwanda after the 1994 genocide with Kigali demonstrating an

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exceptional growth "due to massive refugee return and people's desire to head to the city for both economic opportunity and relative anonymity" (Ibid). New identities can be built up in the framework of aspirations for lasting peace.

In Chapter 3, Sub-Saharan African urbanization and global environmental change (GEC) are analysed by Susan Parnell and Ruwami Walawege. The African continent is one of the most vulnerable regions of the world in terms of climate change, which has many implications for all its inhabitants. The authors underscore that if we assess the migration impact of GEC, we realise that "urbanisation is not linear and Africa has a long tradition of return migration, oscillating migration and circular migration, which makes it very difficult to detect and measure patterns of population settlement change over time" (p. 46).

Ivan Turok then deals with the linkage of urbanisation and development in Africa's economic revival in Chapter 4, and he draws attention to his main proposition that "there is no necessary or inherent connection between these phenomena" (p. 61), as a lot depends on the urbanisation context and the form of growth. Carole Rakodi in Chapter 5 addresses religion and social life in African cities and reveals recent trends and changing beliefs and practices among urban populations. "Congregations and other types of religious organisations have traditionally provided day-to-day welfare and continue to do so in contemporary cities" (p. 97), and more research is needed to learn about their significant contributions to social change. While in Chapter 6 Jonathan Crush and Bruce Frayne investigate the growing challenge of urban food insecurity, in Chapter 7 Gordon Pirie offers the reader an insight into the practices, policies and perspectives of transport pressures across African cities. Chapter 8

Fontos elkerülőút építése Kigaliban (Tarrósy István, 2016)

is devoted to decentralisation and institutional reconfiguration, both of which are attached to the urban development crisis, according to authors Warren Smith and Edgar Pieterse. Talking about the participation of the various stakeholders, even more discussion can be expected over the issue of urban planning, and how and in which ways to involve all the actors proper. Chapter 9 then tackles this topic from the perspective of law reforms. Stephen Berrisford states that: "Urban legal reform has to emerge from an understanding of the role of law in perpetuating unequal access to urban resources and in the weakening the prospects of the poor and marginalised. […] with the blame conveniently allocated to the state, characterised as incapable of leading what should be a straightforward law-making process" (p. 181). For the sake of better urban planning (as well), educating urban planning professionals is inevitable. In Chapter 10 James Duminy, Nancy Odendaal and Vanessa Watson argue that contemporary urban planners require a number of features, such as "more and better data and knowledge to assist planning practice and policy development; [… or] teaching methods that promote the development of [needed] skills and ethical positions through experiential learning" (p. 185).

In the last four chapters, first, Edgar Pieterse provides a fine overview of drivers of urban failure and focuses on how to take action. He offers seven dimensions to "reimagining and rebuilding the African urban agenda" including, for instance, "open-source infrastructures; infrastructure-led actions and urban reforms to simultaneously address economic, social and environmental challenges that coalesce in cities; appropriate land use and land value policies and regulation; [and again] effective data collection and analysis" (p. 207). Second, in Chapter 12, AbdouMaliq

Simone deals with infrastructure, real economies and social transformation, then, third, Susan Parnell and David Simon with national urban policies and strategies, and they list the imperatives for a new generation of these. Fourth, in Chapter 14, Sean Fox proposes and "alternative, historically grounded theory of urbanisation", arguing that "urbanisation should be understood as a global historical process driven by population dynamics associated with technological and institutional change" (pp. 257-8). Finally, in the Postcript, Thomas Melin clearly explains that, "Africa needs an African 'urbanisation of excellence' that recognises its own drivers of urbanisation, shepherds its urban transitions, and respects its policy imperatives" (p. 292). This is much in line with the ongoing development of the 'African agency', which does not only cover governments, but also involves all local and national actors.

Africa's Urban Revolution is a fine academic compilation of skilful papers, which can help a larger audience to understand more and better the complexity of rapid urbanisation and development challenges in African cities. ☀

Helyi hídépítők Darban - a nagyváros első felüljáróján dolgoznak (Tarrósy István, 2017)