Urban Challenges in Addis Ababa.
PhD and Master Theses from
Department of Urban Design and Planning, Faculty of
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Rapid urbanization in Ethiopia poses several serious challenges for planning, city
development and living conditions. The paper looks at urban challenges with a focus on
Addis Ababa, how these are expressed through the research undertaken by Ethiopian
students at MSc and PhD level at the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Art at NTNU,
Trondheim, Norway in the period 2000-2008.

The last 10 years, several staff from the Department of Architecture and Urban Design
at Addis Ababa University and a few others have successfully made their Ph.D and
Master studies and delivered their Theses at the Department of Urban Design and
Planning at NTNU. The author has been supervising several of the students.²

The main issue here is to inform about the research themes, some of the important
findings and what this might mean for action and for further research in the field. The
nine reports are the only references used for this article.

I would also invite researchers from other fields and professions; who are studying
urban Ethiopia to present their works and findings.

One goal could be to make the start of an ‘Atlas of Urban Research and Challenges
in Ethiopia’ a Network Project between several institutions, creating an information
pool and a venue for discussion on research strategies and planning policy
proposals/action in the Ethiopian context.

Introduction

The research has had a manifold scope; to gather information about certain aspects of
urban development, through analysis reveal characteristics and problems of relevance
for further research and recommendations for possible actions for improvement of
conditions. The rapid urbanization of Ethiopia calls for solutions which are suitable for
the masses. Although many cities in developing countries are going through similar
processes, it has been of importance for the Ethiopian researchers to deal with the
particularities of urban development in their country. Internationally known phenomena
and theories have to a certain extent been challenged. In the research put forward, the
spatial element has always been of importance. Land, space, buildings and related

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² The bibliography is a list of Ethiopian Master Theses and PhD Theses at the Department of Urban
Design and Planning, NTNU. Only one has studied a city outside Addis Ababa. (Gossaye. 2007
dealing with the city of Adama)
processes are in focus. Most studies have dealt with problems facing the low-income population and the most vulnerable. However, in order to highlight other aspects of urban development, one has to look at research undertaken by other professions and fields. This article considers urban challenges as dealt with in the PhD theses and MSc Dissertations by Ethiopian architects and planners graduating from Department of Urban Design and Planning3, NTNU, deal with such phenomena:

- Uncontrolled city expansion-conversion of rural land
- Uncontrolled urban development and housing for the poor -Informal transformations in housing
- Urban renewal and resettlement, urban upgrading
- Urban policies and the formation of social and spatial patterns in housing.

After a short presentation of the nine Theses, there is a discussion of subjects found in the reports. Finally I invite scholars from different fields dealing with urban issues in Ethiopia to form a Network and information pool.

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3 Only one graduated from Department of Architectural Design (Essayas 2000)
Short characteristics of the PhD. and M.Sc. Theses.
The following section gives a short account of the studies undertaken by the Ethiopian students, looking at the problems considered, the objective and reason of the study, methods used, findings and recommendations. Because of the compressed set up, many elements from the research will not appear here. (See Table for an overview)

The Impact of Urban Expansion on the land Tenure and Livelihood of Rural Households. The Case of Mekanissa III housing project, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (Mekonen Wube. 2002. MSc)

Problem: Urban expansion on rural land which becomes converted. The peasants communities come under pressure and the peasants are evicted. This leads to multifaceted problems, survival of the farmers, what kind of livelihood and so on. Farmers and their families are uprooted.

Objective: Identify the socio-economic problems associated with urban expansion, what are the changes in the land tenure and livelihood situation of displaced households as a result of urban expansion. Example: Mekanissa III urban housing project in Addis Ababa. Assess the consequences of displacement and the resettlement and rehabilitation program. Based on the findings, possible scenarios for improving resettlement planning and the role of planners will be discussed.

Reason: Get a better knowledge and understanding of the processes under urban expansion in the fringe areas in order to improve the planning methods and processes to the benefit of those concerned and urban development in general.

Methods: Case study, one area with almost 300 households, of which only 20 were interviewed. Several informants, planning officials, chairpersons of the affected peasants associations, farmers etc. were interviewed. Site study conducted.

Findings: The peasants are marginalized both economically and socially. Forced to give up agriculture, their future was questioned. This has led to a general impoverishment of the households. All households were subjected to a variety of livelihood stresses.

Recommendations: Mekonen proposes a set of recommendations, which lead to a quite new kind of planning response to the challenges; the planners should be more concerned with the people affected by the plans and involve people in the whole process. The planning should support people to achieve their own livelihood goals. The social dimension in planning should be strengthened and participatory land use planning should be pursued. Resettlement planning should provide the tools for resettlement.

Informal Transformation at the Urban Fringe of Addis Ababa. (Kalkidan Bainesagne. 2001. MSc)

Problem: An increasing number of people try to solve their housing needs by getting land informally at the urban fringe. This may have problematic repercussions for land use and planned urban development. To change the haphazard development of the city, the informal land transformation is the most challenging and needs proper understanding. Simultaneously it seems to ‘solve’ the housing supply for the economic weaker population better than formal planning and housing.

Objective: Get a better understanding of the informal land transformation at the urban fringe, through information on the transaction processes of the informal settlers, who are the actors and the reasons why they have to do this informally. Similarly the project wants to find out the process of physical transformation, from the size of plots to the building process in relation to the settlers’ financial capacity, and how the housing process relates to peoples needs.
Reason: This knowledge can give insights in mechanisms of urban development so the city and the authorities may find better ways of supporting the low-income groups in their struggle for decent shelter. This can give lessons for the formal processes as well as the informal ones; how to get entitlement and access to land and shelter according to ones financial capacity, but also how to improve the process of physical transformation.

Methods: Selection of one large fringe area of Addis Ababa for case study, ‘Kotebe’ district and ‘Yerer Ber’ as study area, with actor oriented approach used as research method.

Findings: Informal land transformation is benefiting the lower income groups in a way the formal system cannot since these groups have been ignored by the formal system. The land transactions are affordable and the step by step investment in shelter and plot improvement is according to financial ability and the needs of the settlers. In addition to the individual efforts to improve their households, they are organized at a community level to improve their settlement. This knowledge can be used to improve both the informal and the formal systems.

Recommendations: The informal system does not only indicate shortcomings of the formal system but also contributes valuable lessons to improve it. It is recommended to use action-planning to make the lessons from the informal systems materialize. The formal process can get insight from the informal land transactions in terms of the easy access it has provided by making people entitled to have access to land, through simple, transparent and short procedures tailored to the socio-economic situation, in the transaction processes. Assure incremental development through traditional ‘Debo’ and ‘Equib’ as means of building houses. There is a need for mutual development: what can the formal system contribute for the improvement of the existing informal settlements, and what can the informal system contribute for the improvement of formal system? There is room for several studies like searching for the best type of tenure for the existing informal systems and how to provide land and shelter to the capacity and needs of the society.

Beyond the Formal Urban System. Learning from Informal Settlements in Adama city, Ethiopia. Mechanisms and Rationale for their emergence, expansion and potential. (Gossaye Bekele.2007. MSc)

Problem: The occurrence and growth of urban informal settlements are context dependent. The issue of informal settlements in Adama reaches at the stage one cannot undermine. Addressing the reality of urban informal settlement as a subject at the micro level is very important. Objective of study: Identify the mechanisms by which land was acquired, developed and transferred in case study sites, assess the major reasons driving the people to informality, and the basic characteristics and trends of these settlements within the selected area of the city; identify the potential of the residents and what they need from formal institutions, suggest strategic actions to be taken to help alleviate the problem.

Reason: The phenomenon is widespread and increasing. The Municipal authorities have not known how to handle informality, and the informal settlers have not found better ways of solving their problem. Such city growth processes are continual and need follow-up. The phenomenon is quite new in Adama, so new knowledge can be instrumental in improving planning procedures.

Methods: Case study, using three areas for investigation, beside archives and interview with planning authorities.
Findings: Many factors contributed to the emergence and expansion of such settlements in the city, like: 1) the land ownership structure, 2) different housing policies associated with land ownership including an inappropriate overall housing approach, high standards of formal requirements, inaccessible and unaffordable by the majority; 3) Failure of the 1994 and 1996 eviction of informal settlements and ignorance from formal institutions encouraged people to follow their own ways; 4) Poor land management system and unattractive compensation for farmlands while the land is demanded for urban development; 5) Expectation of Addama as a regional capital; 6) Land speculation by some people assuming the land price will escalate in the future; 7) Conflicts and drought in the countryside as a factor that pushes people to migrate to the city (permanently or temporarily), 8) High population pressure almost doubling within 12 years. Mechanisms of land acquisition, gifts, inheritance, invasion (rare) and through informal land markets.4

Recommendations: A set of recommendations are proposed, like designing suitable strategies for interventions and transformation of informal settlements, get assistance from Federal and Regional government as well as NGO’s and volunteer professionals, secure tenure and make employment accessible in these areas or the vicinity. Further studies are recommended on several aspects.

Low Rent Public Housing in Addis Ababa. Renter-initiated transformation of Kebele6 housing. (Yonas Alemayehu. 2003. MSc)

Problem: There is housing shortage for low-income groups and low technical and space standard. Need for improvement and maintenance of the existing houses.

Objective of study: Examine the process of residents initiated transformations in low rent public informal housing in AA. Why do renters of Kebele housing change their houses? How do renters transform their dwellings and what are the factors influencing the renter’s transformation?

Reasons: 75 per cent of the low-rent public houses are in need of serious maintenance and the newly constructed public houses for rental purpose are not at prices even remotely within the reach of the majority of the population.

Methods: Three selected areas using the case study method revealed that the renters maximize the livable space even under the most unfavorable conditions for transformation, with little or no financial or technical involvement of the owner, Kebele – government.

Findings: Four major forms of transformation have been found: Change of material (upgrading), subdivision, extension and change of function of the unit. The residents have become producers of housing through Renter-initiated transformation without cost for the government. The trend has a potential that could be used as an alternative way of addressing the challenge of affordable shelter for the low income.

Recommendations: Renter-initiated transformation can be used as a pathway for the enablement of citizens to participate in development by becoming housing producers. Local or federal government can play the role of a ‘facilitator’ by providing material and skill resources for a more appropriate and planned approach for urban upgrading and house transformation.

4 Informal land markets are illegal in Ethiopia.
5 Kebele – Urban Dwellers Association is the smallest local administration about 2000 households. Kebele housing are public housing units under the Kebele administration.

**Problem:** Rapid population growth and increasing poverty, shortage of formal housing supply which is not fit for the demand of the dwellers. “KITIYA”, self-initiated extensions/alterations/in formal housing is customary. This has advantages, but also problems like deteriorating conditions due to high density and overcrowding, sub-letting, pollution and health risk.

**Objective:** Find the potentials and problems of transformation of low-income formal housing, and lay the basis for appropriate and sustainable housing provision. How do dwellers make changes in their dwellings and why are they motivated to make these changes.

**Method:** Case study method, three cases.

**Findings:** KITIYA-(transformation) gives access to housing for low-income population – where the formal system fails. KITIYA- shows a mismatch between the demands and priorities of the low-income group and the formally provided houses. KITIYA – give the poor some opportunity for income generation by having some production, sale or subletting from the house. Self-help transformations do what the formal system by it self, do not manage. Reasons for transformation:

- Economic demands: Low level of household income - home based economic activities- renting - characteristics of the dwelling
- Social Demands: Change in household size- social structure – extended family formation – space for relatives
- Cultural Demands: Identity expression– privacy and security– hierarchy of family and space etc.
- Environmental Demands: Using and protecting the physical and natural environment and its resources-use of renewable resources.

**Recommendations:** The phenomenon of KITIYA can be utilized as one of economic, social and cultural system that had not been addressed in settlement planning, however it requires realism to be included in regulations and standards. The study further recommends research on the magnitude of home-based economic activities so such activities can be included in housing development. Similarly studies of the private rental market should be undertaken to assess the potentials and problems of rental accommodation.


**Problem:** The complex nature of Inner-city renewal is a challenge everywhere. In developing countries the low-income population, living in central areas are vulnerable. Lack of research on this subject in the local context, creates the need for a study with focus on the low-income segment.

**Objective:** By means of empirical and theoretical studies, to identify and discuss the likely impacts of inner-city renewal and its consequences; To what extent does inner-city renewal and relocation, as practiced in Addis Ababa, affect the socio-economic and housing condition of the inner-city’s low-income population?

**Reason:** There is a need to investigate the renewal processes from the bottom-up as the planning procedures and authorities actions rarely have focus on the local inhabitants and the poor.
Method: Case study, two cases are selected after review of theoretical and empirical research and a background study of urban-and housing policies and so forth in the Ethiopian situation in Addis Ababa. Two centrally located areas were investigated, the one was already demolished and the inhabitants relocated in the outskirts due to the building of Sheraton hotel. The other neighborhood exists and the conditions are very similar to the one that was relocated.

Findings: The studied example of resettlement showed some strengths; The new accommodation was in general better than the old, but there were several weaknesses: lack of community participation, lack of well-defined improvement policies and lack of coordination and lack of concern for socio-economic issues. Longer distances to place of work opportunity is problematic for people with restrained resources.

Recommendations: For renewal to be implemented in a more integrated way, a great concern for social issues and for the protection of the existing communities must be developed. Citizen participation at all levels of the process is an important factor for a successful renewal program, at the same time to secure a balance between residential and commercial activities. The Thesis suggests several items for further investigation and research. One of these is: How can political support be generated and maintained so that the urban poor, who generally comprise a majority of those living in the old inner-city residential areas, can participate effectively in the formulation and execution of inner-city improvement programs?


Problem: About 50% of the population of Addis, most of whom are low-income, live in ‘non-planned’ and physically deteriorated areas of the inner city. The houses are mostly publicly owned (Kebele) rental housing. The tenure situation is a challenge for the possibility of urban upgrading.

Objective: Where land is owned by the state and housing tenure is dominated by public rental and there is constant tension between market forces, political power and the inhabitants, there is a need to get more insight into the interaction between upgrading programs, actors involved and housing tenure. How do upgrading processes affect socio-spatial transformations in tenant dominated inner city settlements of Addis Ababa? In the context of government ownership of land and housing, to what extent, how and why do tenants respond to upgrading processes? The objectives are primarily to understand 1) a transformation process set in motion through the intervention of upgrading projects and 2) the socio-spatial implications.

Reason: To get a proper, updated knowledge of the processes going on and be able to build on experiences in order to develop better tools for the transformation and development of a city that will give increased opportunity for the low-income groups and less advantaged.

Method: Case study, selecting 3-4 areas where different modes of upgrading incentives are being tried through interviews, archive studies, mapping and life stories.

Findings: There seems to be many interesting ‘discoveries’, some of which may be further developed; Urban upgrading and housing where micro-credit is utilized creatively, other examples of traditional customs Iddir\(^6\), being applied in the urban upgrading process, where this in turn can become a Community Based Organization to

\(^6\) A community way of helping each other to carry out funerals
interact with NGO’s and others. The study revealed that for tenants to be involved beyond the transformation of their individual houses an agency that mobilizes them must exist. Small steps of change to a better future for those with fewer resources may make life livable and future seems brighter.

**Recommendations:** Urban upgrading is a way of managing small changes so those with low income may be able to improve living conditions. The findings give hope for further development of approaches already introduced. Based on the study, further research and action in this important field is recommended. Elias Yitbarek presented a section from his study at the ICES conference in Trondheim 2007.


**Problem:** There is a pressure on land in central city areas by different economic interests. The existing open-air market in the centre, Merkato, mainly for the low-income population, exists due to traditional low valued land, and is vulnerable to these forces in the development and transformation process.

**Objective:** The objective of this thesis is to investigate the physical transformation of centrally located market places and the mode of reaction to proposed plans by the merchants and the rest of the business community. To what extent were the users’ reactions influencing the changes?

**Reason:** The traditional market is an important element in life for large segments of the population. Disruptive interventions will most likely be harmful for many. Knowledge of the processes and the physical outcome, as well as the effect of the user’s reactions will be important for the future dispositions in the market area.

**Method:** Case study method of five areas, which have undergone substantial physical change within the Merkato area, one of Africa’s largest markets.

**Findings:** High- and growing land prices have lead not to displacement of small-scale activities by large businesses, but to a process of intensification of land use for the small-scale activities themselves. Through the user reactions and participation in the processes, the small-scale economic activities take part in the market development jointly with other stakeholders.

**Recommendations:** The joint transformation should be facilitated, coordinating city center and market place developments and increasing participation of stakeholders in planning. Further research on spatial transformation of secondary markets in Addis Ababa is proposed as well as the physical transformation and the publicness of open-air markets. Problems and potentials of “counter-plan” as a mode of participation in planning need further study.


**Problem:** The increasing intensity of urban growth in countries like Ethiopia is not matched with appropriate understanding of how urban policies affect the formation of social and spatial patterns.

**Objective:** Examine the effects of spatial policies (land and housing) on the formation and transformation of urban patterns and the composition of socio-economic groups in residential areas in a framework of government ownership of land.

**Reason:** This knowledge will provide better basis for understanding the urban development – land delivery and housing policies. This may again give better foundation for discussion on future urban policies
**Method:** 10 case areas of different types were studied using quantitative and qualitative methods. Selection of case areas was based on purposeful sampling of information-rich cases. The criteria for the selection of specific neighborhoods was based on the type of land delivery and the mode of housing development that was applied, taking into account the three distinct periods, pre 1974 freehold, 1975-1993 government ownership of land, and post 1993 government ownership of land and delivery on leasehold basis, both formal and informal housing areas were investigated. Urban development policies, institutional arrangements for planning and implementing policies and outcomes were investigated.

**Findings:** Government ownership of land by itself does not promote access to land for low-income groups nor improve the performance of planning and implementation agencies. However, it could be used differently in order to improve land supply for low-income groups. There is also lack of coherence of policies, limited capacity and lack of integrity of urban managers and inappropriateness of institutional frameworks. Findings from this research is expected to contribute to the link between spatial policies at different levels, the implementation process and actual results in the form of social and spatial organizations.

**Recommendations** are grouped under two broad themes:
- Policy environment for urban land management, like coordination of development of residences for all income groups and a variety of tenure forms.
- Institutional and financial resources for land and housing developments
  These will be too detailed to go into at this occasion; however the study reveals great potential of improvement. Directions for socio-spatial aspects of urban research, is also proposed.

**Discussion**
The above nine studies (four MSc.s & five PhD.s) have added substantial knowledge about urban development and urban transformation, with emphasis on Addis Ababa, the ‘Hydrocephalos’ and Capital of Ethiopia. The researchers have been architects and urban planners, thus attention has always been on material matters, land and space, buildings, housing, informal and formal processes related to urban development as well as the people involved. In most of the studies the situation for low-income population has been in focus, because these are the most vulnerable and less provided for in formal urban development. The lower income groups also represent a major part of the urban population and the greatest challenges.

Urban sprawl and uncontrolled city expansion in Addis Ababa is a significant challenge with several types of problems. Acknowledging the fact that this is a global phenomenon does not relieve the Ethiopian capital from finding more sustainable solutions. A few characteristics of the situation in the city’s fringe areas are described and studied by Mekonen (2003) and Kalkidan (2001). Mekonen deals with the phenomenon as seen from the ones who are intruded upon, the farmers who are losing their livelihood. Whereas Kalkidan goes into the transaction process mainly from the other side, those who are in need for livable space, buy agricultural land for the purpose of transforming it to informal settlement and housing. How do politics and planning cater for the circumstances in the urban fringe areas? How can farmers become a part of the process and become a part of the solution?

Informal Housing transformation is a frequent way of making the houses better fit for the residents needs. Insight in the processes may add important knowledge about the
housing situation and dwelling conditions and thus help to understand the overall housing situation. Essayas (2000) and Yonas (2003) have investigated the phenomenon with different types of housing. Essayas has studied self-made transformations kitiya in formal housing, analysed the reasons for the changes, the demands and the effect of the activity. Yonas has made a similar investigation of renter-initiated transformation in low-rent public (Kebele) housing and found that this kind of experience can be used as a pathway to enable citizens to participate in development and improve the housing situation. In both instances the formal system of housing should take lessons from popular informal ways of problem solving. Similar explanations and experience can be drawn from (Gossaye. 2007) in his study of informal settlements within the city of Adama. To improve housing production and the environment, formal planning has to be influenced by informal experiences and vice versa. So far the formal system has no good solutions for housing the very poor.

Urban renewal, resettlement and urban upgrading are a pressing problem, especially in central city areas. The two studies of Ashenafi (2001) and Elias (2008) are investigating transformation forces in central city areas where space is attractive and competed for, with many stakeholders involved. The first study concentrates on urban renewal and resettlement of people being expelled from their previous home. If such renewal should become an accepted part of city development, integrated planning and peoples participation is needed. Renewal will, if applied, not manage to accommodate the number of houses needed and will not reach the target group of the Millennium Development Goals, the low and very low income groups. Elias investigation of urban upgrading 'projects' in publicly owned tenant dominated inner city settlements in Addis Ababa uncover several attempts to improve life condition. His study reaches some of the very low-income areas and people. Several processes are going on to improve the living conditions in these areas. Urban upgrading may reach the lower income groups, and might thus be effective instrument to improve urban areas and living condition for many people.

Heyaw (2005) has studied transformation processes at the central market. The pressure on land in central city areas is dominated by several economic interests. Also in such areas, many of the traditional stakeholders are vulnerable. Is there any option for these merchants to influence the changes occurring because of other economic interests? How can the intensification of land use also cater for the small-scale activities? There is a need to get further insight in several aspects of spatial transformation of markets in Ethiopia in general and the publicness of open-air markets.

Urban policies and the formation of social and spatial patterns – housing: The study of Wubshet (2002) is a large, urban development and urban policy investigation into the housing sector in Addis Ababa. It was structured in four stages: understanding the existing situation and the historic evolution, understanding policies and urban management institutions, understanding the production of social and spatial patterns, understanding the formation and transformations of social and spatial patterns of housing areas. The research focused mainly on expansion areas because these areas were expected to show the full impact of spatial policies. The co-existence of formal and informal settlements in these areas provide 'ways to check the impact of policies not only from within but also from outside the official line; both housing types were studied.'(ibid, 2002:10). The research has shown that land policy on its own may not resolve the housing problems; the overall policy environment for urban development determines the outcome. (ibid, 2002:273) The study confirmed that government
ownership of land has facilitated the ability to implement development plans, but not necessarily to the benefit of the poor. Urban policies are basic for the final outcome, but in constant relation with several actors, policy-implementing agencies, building professions, local communities, the inhabitants of the adjoining areas as well as the newcomers, producers and non-producers. For a more sustainable urban development in the future, several aspects found in the research presented in these papers have to be considered.

**Further Research and Action**

Recommendations in the above studies have been on further research as well as proposals for action or change of planning processes. The research has been problem-oriented. Each new study is adding information and knowledge of the problems, challenges and qualities of urban development. In our studies the academic aspiration is in focus (primarily in the PhD Theses), at the same time as the information and knowledge produced is aiming at finding solutions or recommendations to problems and challenges in urban development of policy- and professional character.

Knowing that other institutes, departments, faculties and universities also have been and are doing studies of similar kind concerning Ethiopia, it would have been a good idea to make some kind of network or pool of these works, and persons involved.

I would therefore invite researchers from other fields and professions; (Transport, Geography, Economy, Social Sciences etc.) who are studying urban Ethiopia (ongoing and completed studies) to present their works and findings.

One goal could be to make the start of an ‘*Atlas of Urban Research and Challenges in Ethiopia*’ a Network Project between several institutions, creating an information pool and a venue for discussion on research strategies and planning policy proposals/action in the Ethiopian context.

**Bibliography**


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7 The bibliography contains only Ethiopian Master Dissertations and PhD Theses at the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Art, NTNU, Trondheim, Norway.

