*HomeSpace Maputo: Meanings and perceptions of the built environment in a rapidly expanding African City*¹

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Illustration 1: Graphic representing Maputo city centre and surrounding areas with *HomeSpace* study area

¹ This document draws on the research programme ‘Home Space in African Cities’, funded by the Danish Research Council for Innovation 2009-2011, under the management of Prof. Jørgen Eskemose Andersen of the School of Architecture, Copenhagen. The programme was based on a conception and research design by Prof. Paul Jenkins of the School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University / Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. It was implemented in partnership between the above institutions (led by Professors Andersen and Jenkins) and the Centre of African Studies at the ISCTE- Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (represented by Dr. Ana Bénard da Costa) and the centre for Development of Habitat Studies in the Faculdad de Arquitectura e Planificação Física, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique (represented by Prof. Julio Carrilho and Dr. Carlos Trindade). The fieldwork was undertaken with participation of students of architecture and anthropology from Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, and had key involvement from architect Silje Sollien and Mozambican academics Adriano Biza and Judite Chipenembe. Generous support from Mozambican Faculty Director Prof. Luis Lage, and time donated by Edinburgh and Lisbon institutions for their academics’ inputs have been a key aspect of the programme’s success.
This paper presents initial information concerning an on-going three year research programme, currently at an early stage of analysing a large amount of fieldwork data collected between December 2009 and June 2010. The paper presents the concept and context of the research, the research structure and some experiences from the fieldwork material collected and indications of some of the general directions in which the project is being developed.

Understanding ‘Home Space’ in the African City

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

Illustration 2: Arial photographs planned and unplanned neighbourhoods in the peri-urban areas of Maputo.

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

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

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

Illustration 3: HomeSpace in Maputo
The research components

The three main research components are as follows:

1. A political economic overview to provide an understanding of urbanisation and urban development trends in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mozambique and specifically Maputo – to identify the structural parameters for emerging urbanism based on home space and provide a wider context for interpreting the findings of the empirical work;

2. A built environment dwelling and household socio-economic study in a representative section of the large peri-urban areas of Maputo city, partly drawing on previous surveys in a longitudinal study and partly following the trends in urban expansion and morphology, using stratified random sampling based on 100 sites, half being included longitudinally – to record what is understood as home space and its role in urban change; and

3. An in-depth ethnographic study of a smaller sample of households vis-à-vis the wider family and social construction of home, identifying perceptions of the past, present and future – to understand what is embedded with, and underpins the development of, home space at the micro-level.

The research components are being developed in conjunction, in order to enhance the inter-disciplinary, as opposed to multi-disciplinary, nature of the study.

The project began in January 2009 and will formally end in December 2011. Fieldwork for the socio-economic and built environment study was conducted in Maputo for three intensive weeks during December 2009, with follow-up in February and March. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in May and June 2010. The first preliminary findings are being discussed at the home institutions of the research collaborators, in Maputo, Lisbon, Copenhagen and Edinburgh during September and October 2010. Final component reports will be published by the second quarter of 2011 and an overall Synthesis Report will conclude the project, on the basis of which it may be possible to produce a documentary film and publish the results in book form.
Fieldwork and survey

The area of research is a *circa* 2.5 km by 20 km area stretching from the edge of the city centre of Maputo towards the north. This area contains many different types of urban typologies, including unplanned dense areas occupied prior to independence, planned areas which can be described as partly having some characteristics of suburban neighbourhoods and areas which are still predominantly rural, but rapidly changing. In the whole study area, 102 cases were selected based on a stratified sampling technique which focuses on the nature of land access as well as periods of occupation. The cases
essentially map the nature of urban space and form, from where the formally planned colonial centre of the city “cidade de cimento” ends, passing beyond the current city administrative boundary, and up to the limits of current urban expansion activities today in the neighbouring provincial District of Marraquene.

Illustration 6: An example of synthesis presentation of one of the study cases, which key socio-economic and physical indicators for the home space.

The location of 52 of the plots was selected based on previous studies by Paul Jenkins (UNDP/UNCHS 1991; Jenkins 2001). Most of the cases from the first study fall in a neighbourhood formally planned by the government, as the objective of this study was to examine the impact of peri-urban expansion planning in the 1980s. The cases in the second study – which focussed on emerging urban land markets – were more varied in nature and location, including planned and unplanned areas. As a result, and in order to reflect the reality of planning in Maputo today, the case study has been expanded with 50 more cases, reflecting areas which are unplanned, reordered or planned ‘unofficially’ and without official government recognition. The total targeted 102 cases form the basis for the socio-economic and built environment study. Out of these, 19 ethnographic cases were selected, reflecting families with different geographical, socio-economic and planning
modalities within the study area for more in-depth investigation. The study is quite unique in African cities, partly because of its longitudinal nature and partly due to its comprehensive and inter-disciplinary objectives. Previous longitudinal studies of African cities are limited to Schylter (1991) and Hansen (1997), both concerning Lusaka, Zambia.

The fieldwork of the socio-economic and built environment study was conducted together with students of architecture and anthropology at Eduardo Mondlane University, divided into three teams led by a senior anthropologist and supervised by the study coordinator. To date the project has complete information for 95 cases, including plans of land use and built form on the plots, location in the neighbourhoods, photographs of exterior, interior and relation to the street, plus interviews covering the subjects of family composition, origins, human, legal, economic and social resources, access to services, access to land and well-being in the home space and in the neighbourhood.

Developing the Built Environment Study

Illustration 7: Plans of the same plot drawn in 2000 and 2009. (Partly from Jenkins, 2001)

At the time of writing, the first part of the built environment and socio-economic study is approaching completion, which is the physical analysis of the 102 plots and houses in their neighbourhood contexts. The socio-economic analysis has just been started. These analyses will be correlated, and further change analyses developed with the 2000 and
1990 data in the case of the physical analysis, with the 2000 study in the case of the socio-economic study; and the correlations between physical environment and socio-economic data from 2000. A small number of the various themes being covered by the research programme, and currently developed for the analysis of the built environment, are now introduced to conclude this paper.

The analysis of the physical structures includes the infrastructure on the plot, uses of the house and courtyard, furnishings and ideal types inherent in the house building and decoration process. There is a development in typologies over time, and the analysis will examine these processes. This is being conducted in conjunction with the analysis of the ethnographic data, and leads to more understanding of how the houses, which generally are evolving over time, have been transformed, extended and appended during the last 10 or 20 years – i.e. the process of ‘dwelling’ and ‘home making’. Some of the physical developments noted are typological and some are structural, and they inevitably reflect socio-cultural and economic as well as physical aspects.

The Faculdade da Arquitectura e Planeamento Físico (FAPF) at Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, has conducted prior research on typologies in the peri-urban areas of Maputo (Carrilho, Lage et al, 2004; 2005), and the current project is studying how the ventoinha type, meaning ‘windmill’ and seen in illustration 8 below, described and analysed in this work is representative of the new, significantly larger, study area. Key research questions in this part of the analysis include: to what extent are there very clear shared ideal types of dwellings, decoration and neighbourhood organisation, and how are the ideal types reflected in the built structures and through which processes? The project is also examining how physical forms are linked with socio-economic realities, actual organisation of building construction and aspirations towards the ‘good house’ among the house builders and home makers.

Illustration 8: The ventoinha type, as presented by Luís Lage is Lage, Carrilho et al, 2005.
The study of the houses and households will be analysed in the context of planning practices of previous periods as well as today, including the phenomena of informal urban land access parallel with the work conducted by the official agencies. There appears to be processes at work where typological ideals of formal house development and street patterns are appropriated by house builders and other actors in informally planned settlements ‘imitating the state’, but with alternative mechanisms of land occupation (Nielsen, 2009; Jenkins 2010). This has interested the HomeSpace researchers, as it seems to be a phenomenon found in some recently developed areas, and this form of planning practice will be investigated further, with others, in the current project. In this, the reality of the occupation of peri-urban space is compared with the official planning practices taking place and the perceptions underlying current plans.

From conducting the fieldwork, it is striking to what extent there are great contrasts between home spaces next to each other in the same neighbourhood, both in terms of socio-economic reality and in terms of physical environment. A plot with a very poor person growing vegetables and a house with no furniture except three chairs and a table, may be found next to a two storey house with satellite dish and kids being driven to school by a chauffeur. However, there also seems to be an emerging trend towards homogenization of neighbourhoods as some areas become inhabited by an emerging middle class.

During 2011, research results concerning the topics mentioned above and many others, will be published by Maputo HomeSpace, giving a very comprehensive picture of planning, house building and home making in Maputo. At this initial stage, we can conclude that there is significant depth in the new fieldwork material as well as the initial interdisciplinary and international analytical discussions.
References:

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