

# DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING IN AFRICAN CITIES: EXPLORING THEORIES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES FROM SIERRA LEONE

## WEEK 1 Introduction to development and planning

### STEP 1.7 Development and planning (ARTICLE)

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In this course, we are not providing a single definition of ‘development’ and ‘planning’, but rather some observations. However, it is important to first outline the distinction between what Cowen and Shenton (1995) call immanent or intentional development, or what Hart (2001) refers to as ‘small d’ and ‘big D’ development. While (small d) “development” refers to broad and immanent processes of change, particularly under capitalism, (big D) “Development” refers to specific, intentional interventions to achieve improvements or progress.

This intentionality is fundamental to the kinds of Development\* we are engaging with in this course. Critically, it means that ‘big D’ Development is not a neutral or natural process, but a normative one. In other words, it is based on a specific set of values. This makes “Development” a very political process because the way in which it is carried out needs to be established through a negotiation of different values and interests in a society. Sometimes dominant actors portray “Development” as a neutral process to hide the values which underpin a particular definition or direction of Development. This can be done to avoid a public debate on what priorities Development should pursue, and to undertake forms of Development which favour them.

In highlighting intentionality, this concept of Development is closely related to the concept of planning. In other words, both Development and planning involve deciding on a desirable outcome to achieve, and on the processes which are expected to lead to it.

In the simplest terms planning is about deciding in advance what to do, how to do it, when to do it and who is to do it. It is about shaping the development of cities through interventions and regulations to achieve objectives that we intentionally set, such as the wellbeing or mobility of residents.

What is critical to our work here is making explicit who is able to shape such decisions. Planning takes place at different scales: individual, household, community, city, regional, national, continental. Relations between these scales and between different actors at different scales adds an element of

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complexity to the process. While the reality is rarely as clear-cut as this, there are different types of planning approaches:

- top-down processes in which powerful decision-makers decide for the residents;
- processes in which those affected by a planning intervention contribute to specific decisions or actions taken by authorities;
- bottom-up processes where groups of residents organise themselves to plan their area and take action.

At any scale, different actors who have a stake in planning decisions may have competing interests, values, and priorities, and as such, planning decisions can rarely benefit all those who have a stake. Therefore, planning is often about negotiation and conflict over competing claims and ultimately taking decisions which only accommodate some of the interests at play. It is this which makes planning a very political and contentious process, where decisions are rarely just good or bad. In other words, they are good for someone and bad for someone else. Which decisions are adopted, and who benefits, depends on the power relations between the actors at play in a particular location, at a particular time. This course will explore these negotiation processes, and how different actors adopt different strategies to shape the planning of their neighbourhoods and cities.

Planning is a multidimensional process. Social, environmental, economic, health, and political considerations need to be part of planning processes and decisions. Therefore, it requires a profound interdisciplinary approach, where different types of expertise and knowledge are used. But different professionals and residents have different languages, and therefore translation efforts are required in the planning process.

A fundamental element of planning is a focus on the future. To plan our neighbourhoods or cities for the future, we will introduce and emphasise elements of aspiration and imagination which can make planning a creative and empowering process.

To conclude, development and planning are political issues which always involve decisions on who and what you prioritise, and choices which will benefit some people over others. In this course, we will only explore these two concepts of development and planning in urban settings, exploring their relevance for towns and cities in Africa. As one “right” way to go about it does not exist, there is a need to decide criteria and to consult with all actors who may be affected to help inform more equitable decision-making. Fundamental to this course is making explicit the power relations which drive these negotiations.

\*In general, throughout this course we will be referring to ‘big D’ development, that is, development which has intentionality. Nonetheless, for ease of reading, only small letters will be used.

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## References

Cowen, M., and Shenton, R., (1995) "The Invention of Development", Crush, J., (ed), Power of Development, London: Routledge, pp27-43.

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