

The Architectural Transformation of Makerere University Neighbourhoods during the Period 1990-2010

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a field study of the neighbourhoods of Makerere University Main Campus since the liberalization of the higher education sector in Uganda (1990-2010). The background to the study was the apparent urban transformation that has occurred in the environs of Makerere University campus in areas that were formally informal settlements characterized by shanty-town conditions. The problem under study was the apparent 're-informalisation' (moving from informal to some kind of formalization and yet returning to an informality situation) of the neighbourhoods of Makerere University main campus. The main objective of the study was to explore the link between the liberalization of the higher education sector in Uganda, a policy which allowed private sponsorship of students at public universities, and the rapid transformation of these environs, as well as the urban and architectural character of that transformation. The study was conducted through physical field observations and study of archival documents, including photographic records and maps. Key person interviews were also conducted with technocrats in Kampala City Council, architects and planners. The study revealed a direct connection between the policy of liberalization of the higher education sector in Uganda and the rapid transformation of Makerere's neighbourhoods. The urban and architectural transformation of these neighbourhoods was found to be eclectic in nature and devoid of any consideration of the urban typologies that characterise the City of Kampala.

Key Words: Architectural transformation, environment, liberalization policy, urbanisation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The neighbourhoods of Makerere University have over the past 20 years transformed into what is now popularly referred to internationally as a 'university city', completely changing the character of poor informal settlements of that time. Indeed neighbourhoods like Kivulu, Kikoni and Katanga were popularly known as crime dens, associated with alcohol and drug abuse, murder, rape and other associated crimes (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naakulabye>). The last 20 years have seen these hither-to no-go areas transform into wealthy student townships, with all the characteristics of a fast growing African city. Figure 1 and 2 shows the character of Katanga before and after the transformation respectively. It is generally believed that this transformation has been fuelled by the explosion in student numbers at Makerere University, from an average 10,000 in 1990 to over 35,000 by 2010. This is because most of the new developments in these neighbourhoods are student hostels. The transformation of these neighbourhoods brought along with them new demands to the infrastructure in place, which demands seem not to have been addressed. This has greatly influenced the architectural transformation of the neighbourhoods, making them distinctively different from the conventional college cities found in the West. This unique character was the subject of study.



Figure 1: View of Katanga before transformation

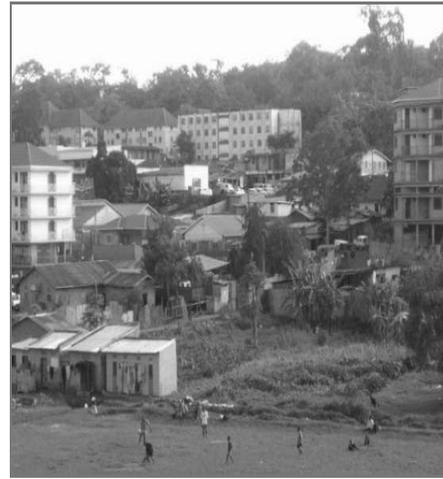


Figure 2: View of same area after transformation

In their article quoted by Russo, van den Berg, & Lavanga (2007), Wynne and O'Connor (1998) state thus: 'To begin with, students are eager consumers of cultural and recreational products (Wynne and O'Connor 1998) and, in many cases, are producers themselves (Griffiths *et al.* 1999). In this way, cities with a large student population sustain a leisure infrastructure that could normally be found only in cities of higher rank, improving the quality of life of the resident population. Allinson, and Richardson and Wilson cited by Russo, van den Berg, & Lavanga (2007), state thus: Furthermore, the informal, bohemian, and extrovert climate of student habitats enhances the attractiveness of cities (Allinson, 2006), with important impacts also in terms of increasing numbers of visitors who value intangible elements of the local identity, like animated public space, trendy lifestyles, and multiculturalism (Richards and Wilson 2004).'

In the same article, Russo, van den Berg, & Lavanga (2007) affirm that; 'Higher education is not only important as an urban industry; it is also the lever for a stronger, more competitive, and embedded local economy Upgraded human capital available locally influences not only the location decisions and the productivity of the companies but also the magnitude of the impacts that trickle down in the local society. Moreover, it enhances the economic dimension of local markets..... Any lasting contribution of higher education to local development might therefore require some form of intervention from the public sector to bring these relationships into balance wherever they are not (which is likely to be the case in a dynamic urban environment). In this way, a virtuous cycle of development may be undertaken, in which an attractive city works like a magnet for higher education and research, and this fosters an even more attractive environment for citizens, investors, tourists, and so forth. In the end, higher education may truly be a sustained growth factor for the regional economy and society'. Indeed, the rapid transformation of Makerere's neighbourhood clearly confirms this theory. But is everything else true for Makerere as is for the student cities in the West?

Figure 3 demonstrates the inter-relationship between higher education, private sector and local community according to Russo, van den Berg, & Lavanga (2007). This thinking may have some credibility in Makerere's third world setting, but certain other factors come into play and the

situation may change considerably. ‘Studentification, in which a growing student population move in large numbers to traditionally non-student neighbourhoods, may be perceived as a form of invasion or gentrification. The phenomenon has several causes, including university enrolment expanding beyond the capacity of on-campus housing, inadequate zoning enforcement, and student culture. At the same time as neighbourhood associations work to limit conversion of family homes to student rentals, some local residents may oppose the construction of large on-campus dormitories or expansion of fraternity and sorority houses, forcing a growing enrolment to seek housing in town. Moreover, a single-family home can be converted into several smaller rental units, or shared by a number of students whose combined resources exceed those of a typical single-family rental—a strong incentive for absentee landlords to cater to students. While noise, traffic, and other quality of life issues have not been resolved, some advocates of New Urbanism have led the development of neighborhoods in college towns by specifically capitalizing on their proximity to university life. For instance, some universities have developed properties to allow faculty and staff members to walk to work, reducing demand for limited on-campus parking.

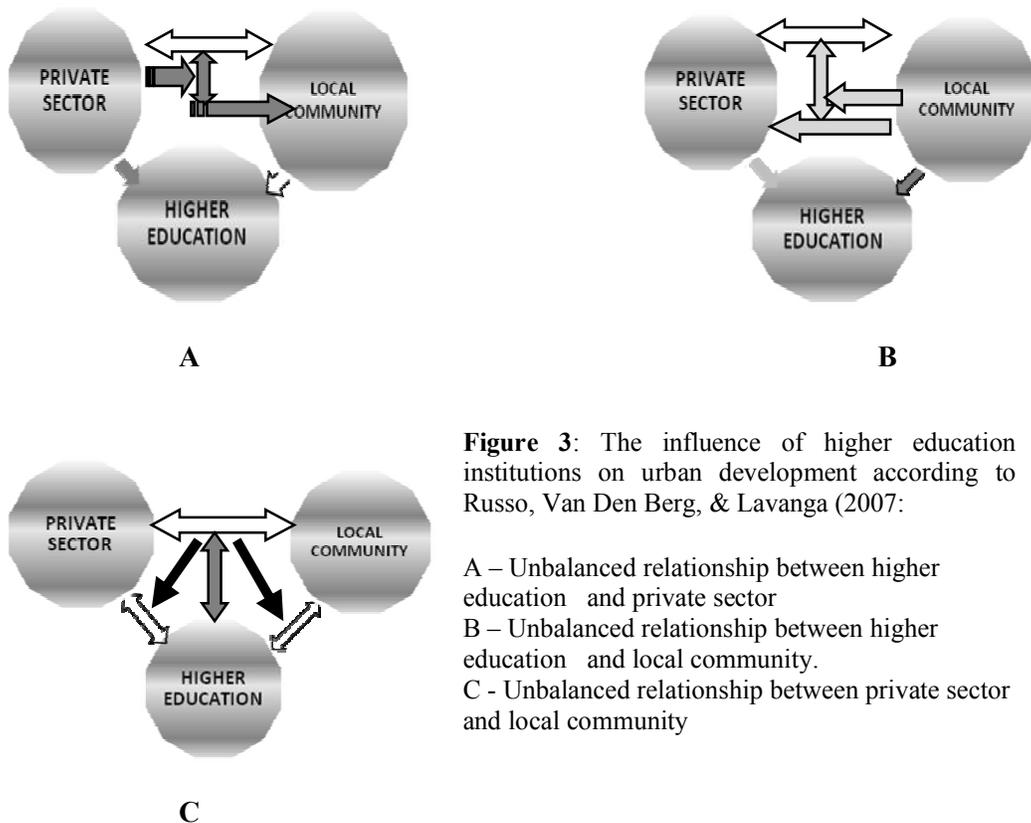


Figure 3: The influence of higher education institutions on urban development according to Russo, Van Den Berg, & Lavanga (2007):

A – Unbalanced relationship between higher education and private sector

B – Unbalanced relationship between higher education and local community.

C - Unbalanced relationship between private sector and local community

Student housing is also an important component of college towns. In the United States most state universities have 50 percent or more of their enrolled students living off-campus. This trend, which began in the 1960s, originally meant the conversion of near campus single-family homes to

student housing, creating "student ghettos." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College_town) There is apparently ample evidence that this may hold true for Makerere's neighbourhoods.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The case study methodology was identified as the most suitable for this kind of study, which requires in-depth observation and analysis of information-rich subject. The methods used for gathering the data included physical observation, photography, expert sketching, study of archival documents and interviews with key persons who include planners, architects and local government officials.

3.0 KEY FINDINGS

Fig.4 shows sections of the neighbourhood of Makerere University campus which have undergone considerable urban transformation. These areas were practically neglected in the past, as it was apparently assumed that they did not have high value. With increase in student enrolment at the University, many developers invested in large hostels in order to profit from the surplus of student numbers that could not be accommodated in the on-campus student hostels.

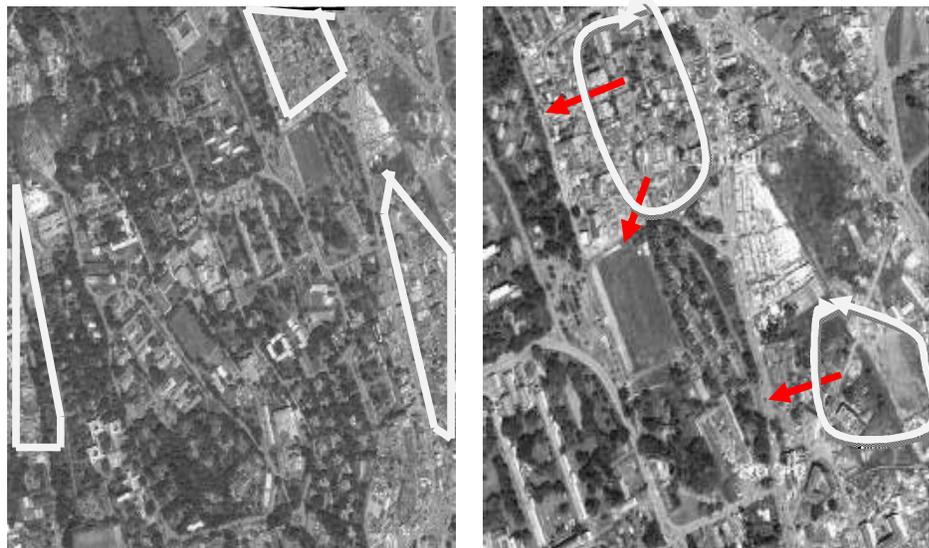


Figure 4: Satellite map of Makerere University campus and neighbourhoods. The area outlined by the white line is occupied mainly by student hostels. Although the student enrolment at the university has stabilized, new hostels are being built, steadily changing the image of the neighbourhood into a real university-city. The red arrows indicate the student transit routes.

The resultant effect has been a general improvement in the urban conditions in these formally slum settlements. Narrow footpaths have been replaced by wider roads. This can be seen from older maps of the area. Large buildings on sizeable plots of land have replaced the tiny and congested rental shacks. But the apparent improvement in infrastructure has not been without problems. The large hostel blocks, accommodating large number of students are not provided with adequate services, particularly foul and waste water disposal facilities. These areas are not

connected to the city's public sewer, and the large hostel blocks must depend on septic tanks for foul water drainage. This causes potential health problems as the ground water is subject to contamination in case of leaks from the numerous septic tanks. The streets are characterized by heaps of solid waste that is poorly managed. Apparently, no plans were made for proper disposal of waste as there is no evidence of area specifically demarcated for this purpose. Interviews with Kampala City Council officials and some hotel owners confirmed this.

In stark contrast to many university cities in the west, the Makerere university-city has no open spaces. Due to the speculative nature of land acquisition (all land is *mailo* and privately owned), every plot of land is used for construction. This leaves no open space for recreation for the large numbers of students. Moreover, the obvious need for other recreational facilities that are so important in a residential district dominated by young people has not been addressed.

Figure 2 shows the typical situation in these neighbourhoods, where large hostel blocks tower over small shacks and bungalows. This is a clear reflection of lack of zoning and building controls characteristic of most Uganda city neighbourhoods. The proliferation of these large hostel blocks has also worsened the storm water drainage problem. Not only are some buildings built across natural drainage pathways, but the vegetation that previously absorbed much of the rainwater is no more. The few drainage channels found in the study area are narrow and poorly maintained. This leads to frequent flooding and damage to the road pavements. A triangulation of the data from the various methods used in the study provided the information summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of developments around Makerere University before 1990 and in 2010

CHARACTERISTIC	BEFORE 1990	CURRENT SITUATION
General Layout of neighbourhood	Small shacks in congested setting, with very narrow pedestrian paths	Predominantly large student hostel blocks. Motorable roads have been opened, although most are still earth roads with poor drainage systems.
Open spaces	No open spaces, but neighbourhood relatively small scale character	No open spaces, large blocks predominate the landscape, giving the appearance of a concrete jungle.
Recreation facilities	Small verandah bars, no organized out-door recreational facilities	No organized out-door recreational facilities. The verandah bars disappeared with the small houses.
Nursery schools	None	None
Health facilities	None	Some small day clinics.
Storm water drainage	Poor, no planned drainage system	Poor, no planned drainage system
Foul water and solid waste management	No provision	Dependent on septic tanks, but not system for solid waste management

Wynne and O'Connor (1998)'s inter-relationships theory may be true for student cities in the West. But the local situation has shown that the student city, representing higher education is very much dependent on the private sector and the local community as demonstrated in figure 5. The university does not have enough resources to construct accommodation for the large number of students, the private sector needs the large number of students to make profit and the local community benefits from the presence of the students through employment opportunities and offering of services to them.

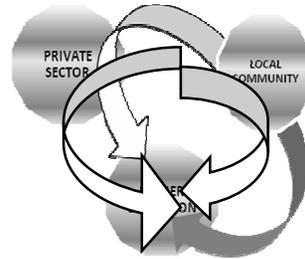


Figure 5: Diagram showing close inter-dependent relationship between university, private sector and local community in Makerere University neighbourhoods

4.0 CONCLUSION

The large number of students in the student city around Makerere has led to a major transformation of the neighbourhood, with some positive developments including wider roads, provision of utilities such as water and electricity and a generally cleaner environment. But the positive developments have also come with major challenges, including loss of the 'small town' identity, inadequate recreational facilities for students, unhealthy and unhygienic conditions, inconvenient areas (storm water and garbage) especially in the rainy season). It is clear that economic prosperity for this neighbourhood has not translated into improvement in infrastructure; indeed it has put a heavier burden on the rudimentary infrastructure available. Major planning interventions will be required to translate the economic prosperity of this neighbourhood undergoing transformation, with a lot of challenges that must be met, into a liveable neighbourhood. There is need for further research in this phenomenon, which is still new in poor countries in order to come up with recommendations for policy and design.

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