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Assembling Accra through new city imaginary: Land ownership, agency, and relational complexity

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ABSTRACT

Land ownership is given little attention in scholarly accounts of how and why new city visions are mobilised and implemented in Africa. In this paper we examine the evolution of Accra City Extension Project (ACEP) — an urban strategy to modernise and respond to urbanisation pressures in the Greater Accra Region, Ghana. We trace the origins and rationale of the ACEP, the actors involved, resources, institutional capacities and their relations. Drawing on the concept of relational complexity and urban policy mobilities literature, we argue that the emergence of ACEP can be explained in two ways: as a consequence of the desire to improve the qualities of an urban area at the local level and as a product of multiple interactions and relations, which produce knowledge, specific interests, resources and constraints. The findings suggest that contemporary urban policymaking in specific places is a complex and emergent socio-political process that draws on both local and learned ideas from ‘elsewhere’. Therefore, we submit that it is more helpful to transcend the focus on what is circulating (a policy and the networks through which it is set in motion) and instead, examine how policymakers in specific contexts ‘arrive at’ their ideas through multiple influences. The project brings together diverse actors such as local and central governments, international planning consultants, UN Habitat and traditional authorities, with varying degrees of expertise, power and agendas. We find that issues around land ownership significantly structured and limited the range of visions that could be implemented.

1. Introduction

Significant shifts in planning practice have been observed in Africa in recent times (Carmody & Owusu, 2016; Watson, 2014). These have involved a gradual transition from traditional planning (e.g., aimed at regulating land use through zoning for the public good) towards strategic projects that enable and amplify the competitiveness of cities (Harvey, 1989; Newman & Thornley, 2005). New constellations of actors, including private investors and international consultants with the support of local and central governments, are engaged in ‘entrepreneurial urbanism’, the promotion of market-led urban re/development ostensibly for purposes of economic growth and competitiveness while disregarding social and welfare services such as housing for the poor (Grant; Oteng-Ababio, & Sivilien, 2019; Ward, 2003; Waterhout, Othengrafen, & Sykes, 2013, p. 154). Until recently, many of Africa’s urban plans were static and under utilised, with visions bearing little resemblance to what transpired on the ground (Andersen, Jenkins, & Nielsen, 2015; Korah, Cobbinah, Nunbogu, & Gyogluu, 2017). Today, proposed

new comprehensive spatial designs for some cities in Africa are co-developed and implemented by international property investment companies, architects, and planners (Watson, 2014). There are presently over 200 new city plans across the African continent, with some 20% completed or under construction (International New Town Institute, 2017). As the ‘last development frontier’ (Watson, 2014, p. 216), local and foreign property developers are heavily investing in Africa’s new cities (Grant, 2015; Herbert & Murray, 2015; Murray, 2015; van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018). There seems to be an urban revolution from above — one that is influenced by both colonial and post-colonial models of urban development — occurring in Africa, characterised by visions of modern, smart, and world-class cities (Carmody & Owusu, 2016; Moser, 2015; Sheppard et al., 2015) that reflect little of the wider urban conditions such as poverty and slums.

We analyse Accra City Extension Project (ACEP), a new urban vision for guiding urban transformation in Ghana’s capital city. ACEP was conceived in 2015 in response to urbanisation and unplanned urban sprawl in Ningo-Prampram and adjoining districts. While the project

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originated from the local government — Ningo-Prampram District Assembly in Ghana's Greater Accra Region — it eventually attained regional, national and international significance. The project seeks to capitalise on land availability, the prospect of a new international airport and the West-African transnational highway to create a modern city district that is “economically vibrant and internationally and locally connected” (NiPDA, 2019, p. 1). ACEP will cover a land area of approximately 100 km². Unlike previous land use plans that were often designed and implemented by local governments with the sole aim of regulating development to ensure public health (Korah, Cobbinah, & Nunbogu, 2017), ACEP is unique in diverse ways. First, it involves an array of actors ranging from local and central governments, traditional authorities, to international consultants and organisations such as UN Habitat. Also, like other new city projects in Accra such as Hope City, Airport City, and Appolonia City, it represents recent neoliberalisation of spatial planning with a focus on developing economically attractive and internationally competitive cities (Carmody & Owusu, 2016).

Previous studies have examined Africa's new city imagining trends, including the discourses, consequences, fantasies, and the national and international actors that enable them. Studies have emphasised the role of global or international actors including property developers, planners, and consultants in financing and advancing ideas/plans for the development of Africa's new cities (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018; Watson, 2014). Scholarly discussions examine the ‘seductive construction’ and circulation through the power of ‘seductive rhetoric’ about modernity (Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019) and country's ambitions to create world-class cities (Abubakar & Doan, 2017; Grant, 2015; Myers, 2015). Evidence suggests master-planned cities tend to be fast-tracked through permitting and approval process if the state is directly involved in development (Goldman, 2011). This often leads to less participation and consultation (Watson, 2014) and displacement of the poor from land and livelihoods resources (Van Noorloos, Avianto, & Opiyo, 2019). Other studies have focused on unravelling the local dynamics that influence new city visions, particularly the role played by local actors, i.e. residents (Wragg & Lim, 2015) and the financialisation of national resources such as oil (Cardoso, 2016). These studies have improved our understanding of how, why and with what implications Africa's new city imaginings emerge, however the role of land in structuring the strategies, actions and interest of actors in new city making is given little attention. This paper contributes to literature seeking to unravel the processes underlying new cities in Africa (Cardoso, 2016; Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019; Wragg & Lim, 2015) and makes a case for more attention to be given to *land ownership* as a structuring element in the emergence of new cities in Ghana and other African countries with similar conditions. We draw on a relational complexity view of policymaking which does not take as its starting point globally circulating urban policies or ideas, but unpacks the various associations between ACEP on one hand, and policy consultants and ideas from elsewhere on the other. Specifically, we highlight the need for tracing the nature of land ownership and its relationship with new urban visions and the mode of regulations and institutional capacities/expertise that are deployed. Doing this, we argue will add to the range of determinations that underlie and constitute new city making. Moreover it will bring *agency* to the fore, increasing the limited attention paid to the concept to date by scholarship on Africa's new city imaginings and urban policy mobilities generally (see McCann & Ward, 2012b, p. 328 for emphasis on agency in policy making). Agency here means the capacity of individuals to determine the use of urban land with or without statutory planning regulations (see Boamah & Amoako, 2019).

The remaining sections of the paper are structured as follows: First, the article reviews land ownership and its relationship with spatial planning in Ghana. The next section introduces the conceptual framing, which draws on concepts of *relational complexity* in urban development, to develop a relational understanding of the evolution of new city visions in terms of unravelling the multiple dynamic associations and interactions that enable them. Section three is about the research

approach and methods. The fourth section analyses the evolution of ACEP and the role of land ownership in the process. The article concludes by highlighting the need for urban scholarship to pay greater attention to land ownership as a structuring element in new city imaginings.

2. Literature review

2.1. Land ownership, spatial planning and urban development in Ghana

Land in Ghana can be classed under three main categories of ownership, i.e., public lands, vested lands, and customary lands. The former two are managed under statutory land laws while the later is administered based on customary land tenure systems. Public lands belong to the state and are managed on the principle that the market may not always be effective in terms of safeguarding public interest. Thus, the government possesses the power of ‘eminent domain’ to expropriate private lands for public use (Larbi, 2008). Where the state exercises its right to acquire individual or communal lands for the broader public good (e.g., road construction, urban planning, military installation, health facilities, schools), it is expected that appropriate compensation is paid (Deininger, 2003). In many cases this does not happen, thereby undermining equity and fairness and tenure security for those affected (Obeng-Odoom, 2016). It also leads to bold encroachment of state lands (Gillespie, 2017), and questioning the state's legitimacy to exercise control over acquired lands (Yeboah, 2008). State lands constitute about 18% of all lands in Ghana (Kasanga & Kotey, 2001) and include areas in Accra such as Airport Residential Area, Airport City and Roman Ridge. Contrary to state lands, customary lands encompass all the various interests and rights held under the traditional system involving skin lands, stool lands, clan lands, and family lands (Larbi, 2008). Customary lands are communally owned and are vested in Chiefs and family heads who act as custodians on behalf of their subjects including the living, the dead, and unborn. However, evidence suggest customary system of land management in Ghana has evolved resulting in inter/generational inequities where the traditional elites disproportionately benefit from land commodification owing to urbanisation and globalisation pressures (Obeng-Odoom, 2016). Consequently, various conflicts, the menace of land guards, deaths, and litigations have emerged in relation to customary lands (Barry & Danso, 2014), thus undermining developers' confidence in such lands (Ehwi, Morrison, & Tyler, 2019). Yet customary lands account for about 80% of all lands in Ghana (for a detailed exploration of customary land tenure system in Ghana, please see Ubink, 2008) and constitute the main source of land release for development in Accra (Larbi, Antwi, & Olomolaiye, 2003). Last but not the least, vested lands which constitute about 2% of land in Ghana are a hybrid of state and customary lands. Vested lands occur when customary lands are held by the state in trust for the land-owning family or community (Kasanga & Kotey, 2001). While the state manages such lands, the family or community retain their interest in the land and enjoy the proceeds that may accrue in the form of rent or lease.

The nature of land ownership in Ghana has undoubtedly influenced spatial planning and development outcomes in Accra and other urban areas. Planning is a complex process involving competing interests, ideas, diverse stakeholders and power struggles (Albrechts, 2004; Oteng-Ababio & Grant, 2019). The complexity of the planning process necessitates greater collaboration in order to design common futures, develop joint understanding and agreements regarding spatial interventions (Innes & Booher, 1999). Land and its use are for instance central to the realisation of planning visions of creating orderly and desired development. Meanwhile, the plural and complex nature of land tenure in Ghana discussed above means that most spatial plans prepared by metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies are expected to be implemented on customary lands which are administered by chiefs and family heads (Kleemann et al., 2017; Yeboah & Shaw, 2013). Here in lies relational complexity when it comes to interventions in Ghana's built

environment.

The divergence of land use planning and land ownership in Ghana creates enforcement challenges such that many plans become outdated even before implementation, producing fragmented and unsustainable urban development patterns (Agyemang, Silva, & Poku-Boansi, 2019; Asabere et al., 2020; Korah, Matthews, & Tomerini, 2019). Yeboah and Shaw (2013) studied customary land ownership and its relationship with land use planning in Ghana argued that the growth of Ghanaian cities is rarely shaped by formal planning. This is because some chiefs lease out plots of land to developers without appropriate planning schemes. Further, Larbi (1996, p. 213) observed that effective spatial planning and development management was limited to state and vested land (representing less than 13%) of residential Accra while grossly disregarding customary lands which constitute over 80% of the land in Accra. Numerous studies have examined Ghana's dual land tenure structure (i.e., statutory and customary) and spatial planning outcomes including among others, the disconnect between spatial plans and local land use decisions (Amoateng, Cobbinah, & Owusu-Adade, 2013; Korah, Cobbinah, & Nunbogu, 2017; Yeboah & Shaw, 2013). Also examined is the weakened capacity of the state to shape urban development as it is undermined by developers due to customary rights over land (Boamah, Gyimah, & Nelson, 2012) and the (mis)rule of customary and statutory planning and land regulations (Boamah & Amoako, 2019). Boamah and Amoako (2019) drew on Ananya Roy's work on the 'idiom of urbanisation and planning' to suggest that spatial planning in Ghana was largely unsuccessful because on one hand, state authorities work within and without statutory planning regulations to compulsorily acquire lands for the public good and inappropriately lease such lands to private developers. On the other hand, traditional authorities position themselves within and without customary land laws to transfer land to prospective developers, lease state acquired lands to individual buyers and engage in 'elite capture of majority interests' (see also Alden Wily & Hammond, 2001, p. 13).

The foregoing studies highlight the distributed agency among state and non-state entities in Ghana in relation to decisions regarding the use of land, especially spatial planning and implementation. There is a gap and an opportunity to add to this scholarship by exploring the relations between land ownership and the institutional capacities and rules that are mobilised to imagine new cities. This echoes the call from Boamah and Amoako (2019, p. 111) for further examination of how Ghana's land ownership structures intersect with current municipal planning practices and strategies. Just as is happening in other major African cities, plans for new cities have proliferated in Accra in recent times. Urban scholars are contending with the conceptual and empirical aspects of the new city making phenomenon. To contribute to the discussion on new city building, the central question guiding this paper is: what constitutes and informs the creation of Accra's City Extension Project (ACEP) — a new urban vision for guiding the transformation of Ningo-Prampram?

2.2. Relational complexity in new city imagining

Since the 1980s, under the influence of globalisation and neoliberalism, planning practice across many countries has been undergoing a transition (Newman & Thornley, 2005) in which policymakers seek to implement strategic plans and grand ideas that would make their cities competitive within the international network of capital flows (Moser, Swain, & Alkhabbaz, 2015; Myers, 2015). Greater global integration and capital mobility birthed strategic urban projects in the form of new cities across the continent of Africa as policymakers seek to create modern and world class cities (Grant, 2015; International New Town Institute, 2017; van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018). Beyond new cities linkage with 'entrepreneurial urbanism', they can also be associated with colonial urbanism. Moser (2015, p. 31) argues that the (re)emergence of new cities could be read as "descendants of and heirs to colonial imperial city building" that reproduce power asymmetries. Despite the promise of 'smart', 'inclusive' and 'sustainability' put forth by new cities enablers,

they tend to perpetuate socio-spatial inequalities, land-based dispossession and social exclusions (see also Carmody & Owusu, 2016, p. 69; Goldman, 2011; Moser, 2020; Van Noorloos et al., 2019; Watson, 2014). As new city visions are proliferating in various African countries, it is important for urban scholarship to understand the context-specific processes and determinants that shape these visions (Guma & Monstadt, 2020, pp. 1–22).

On the surface, new urban imaginings in Ghana could appear to be international, corporate-driven visions of 'modern' and 'world-class city' (Watson, 2014; Wragg & Lim, 2015, p. 260) targeted at the middle and high income classes (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018). A consequence of neoliberal hegemony (Sheppard et al., 2015) or a continuation of colonial city building ideals (Moser, 2015). It would seem new city visions are 'copied' from elsewhere and 'pasted' on the Ghanaian context with little reference to local conditions or structures such as land ownership (Korah, 2020). Yet the urban policy mobilities literature (McCann & Ward, 2012a; 2012b) – which this paper seeks to add to – suggests that ideas mutate as they travel across cities and are dis/assembled through various influences and agendas of stakeholders at a particular destination (Wragg & Lim, 2015). In her work 'relational complexity and the imaginative power of spatial planning', Healey (2006) adopts a relational approach to emphasise how urban development involves a multiplicity of social relations that crisscross a territory and the "complex interactions and disjunctions" that emerge among them (see also Grant et al., 2019). From this perspective, physical places such as neighbourhoods, urban areas or cities which planners often seek to imagine could be conceived as 'nodes' that link several actors both near and far, resources, expertise, interest and governance capacities (Jessop, 2016). Accordingly, recent urban studies literature underscores the need for understanding urban policymaking as emergent, relational, and multi-scaled practice (see, for example Bunnell, 2015; McCann & Ward, 2012b; McGuirk, Mee, & Ruming, 2016). As explained by McCann and Ward (2012b, p. 328), urban policies are composed of elements that are near and distant, "fixed and mobile pieces of expertise, regulations, institutional capacities," etc. which are assembled through specific processes and for specific purposes and motivations. Meanwhile Robinson (2015, p. 831) calls for more attentiveness to how policymakers generate plans for their cities "amidst myriad influences from elsewhere".

A relational complexity perspective has the potential to not only contribute to our understanding of how and why new cities are imagined but also agency in new city making. First a relational complexity orientation implies that new cities could be explained as emerging from collective agency of policymakers and politicians at the local level to improve the qualities of urban areas and simultaneously as a product of multiple interactions and relations which produce knowledge, resources and constraints (Healey, 2006, p. 526). In this paper we focus on land ownership and its relations with the evolution of an urban extension plan highlighting specifically how the state navigates the complex terrain of land tenure structure to fashion a governance arrangement for a new city vision.

3. Approach and methods

To operationalise the relational complexity of new city making, this paper draws on Assemblage Thinking (AT) as a methodology (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). AT as a methodological framework helps to explain the urban via "mapping encounters and practices" in which the diverse components that form the city are brought together (McGuirk et al., 2016, p. 130). From AT perspective, urban policymaking is all about *cofunctioning* — the relations that bind disparate elements together (McFarlane, 2011, p. 653). Disparate elements here refer to the various actors (the state, international companies, investors, expertise, local government, traditional authorities, etc.), interests, objects, and resources. Assemblage orientation encourages "methodological openness and flexibility" (McCann & Ward, 2012a, p. 43) in which the researcher

tries to understand, reveal, interpret and represent the “spatially, socially, and materially diverse” (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 429) mechanisms of new city making. To understand what constitutes and informs the creation of ACEP, this study adopts a case study method which enables a detailed analysis of a phenomenon within a given physical, social, economic and political context (Yin, 2013). In order to follow through the actors, discourses, sites and relational situation (McCann & Ward, 2012a; 2012b, p. 330) of assembling ACEP, a pragmatic approach to qualitative data gathering (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 434) was adopted. The pragmatic qualitative approach entails a combination of different data gathering techniques such as field observations, interviews and policy document reviews.

Twenty in-depth key informant interviews were conducted with Planners, Project Manager, Consultants and Local Politicians who were directly involved in the design of ACEP (Table 1). The experts involved in ACEP were purposely selected for interview because of their deep knowledge of the project (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009). The interviews were conducted between January and April 2019. After initial contact with the Head Office of Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority (LUSPA) – the body responsible for spatial planning across Ghana, contact details of the key informants and experts who participated in the creation of ACEP were obtained. The interviews sought to understand the discourses that led to ACEP, resources, expertise, the actors involved, and their relations. Focusing on the experts meant that a smaller number of people were interviewed, and their biases may impact the results. Another challenge relates to the reluctance of officialdom to make available unpublished documents such as minutes of meetings relating to the project. Therefore, beyond the interviews, newspaper articles, the project documents, i.e., reports and presentation slides were consulted for further information about the project and for triangulation. Other useful sources of information were the websites of UN Habitat and MLA+, an international consulting firm who have published detailed information about the project. A video documentary on the project was downloaded from MLA + website.¹ To understand the institutional and political contexts that facilitate ACEP, Ghana’s Urban Policy (MLGRD, 2012), National Policy on Public Private Partnerships (PPP) (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2011) and National Spatial Development Framework (Government of Ghana, 2015), were reviewed.

The recorded interviews and excerpts of the video documentary on

Table 1
Research participants and affiliations.

Group	Number	Institutional/community affiliation
Local Government	4	Tema Metropolitan Assembly, Ningo-Prampram Municipal Assembly, Kpone Katamanso Municipal Assembly
Central Government	3	National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), Environmental Protection Agency, Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority
Estate Developers and Property Managers	4	Lakeside Estate Company Limited, Appolonia City, Silva Star Tower, Airport City, Accra’s City Extension Project
Independent Associations	1	Ghana Real Estate Developers Association
Academics	3	University of Ghana
Urban Development Consultants	1	World Bank, NDPC
Community-level interviews	4	Ningo-Prampram
Total	20	

Source: Authors

the project were transcribed. Interviews and video transcripts, project and policy documents were coded and categorised using Nvivo 12, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The dominant themes/categories were: actors/stakeholders in ACEP, land, motivations, resources, planning principles and implementation framework. These themes correspond with the article’s aim of understanding the evolution of ACEP. Queries such as ‘word frequency’ and ‘text search’ were performed on the data to give a fair idea of the themes that were likely to emerge. Since this research is largely qualitative, it was important for the data to adequately reflect participants views about the subject of enquiry. Therefore, during the analysis, verbatim quotes from the data were included and juxtaposed with the researcher’s interpretation; this process, according to Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002, p. 730), helps the reader to evaluate the authenticity of the researcher’s claims about the data. The next section turns to the evolution of ACEP.

4. Findings and discussion: Relationality complexity in assembling the Accra City Extension Project (ACEP)

4.1. Tracing the origin and rationale of ACEP: generating an urban policy amid influences from near and far

The Accra City Extension Project (ACEP) originates from the Ningo-Prampram District Assembly (NiPDA), the local government in charge of physical planning and development of Ningo and Prampram localities. UN Habitat Urban Labs Department provided technical support for the design of the project’s concept plan. According to the interviews, Honourable S.A. Rhack Nartey, the past District Chief Executive of NiPDA, gave a presentation at the United Nations (UN) Habitat seventh World Urban Forum in Medellin in April 2014 concerning the urban challenges that confront Ningo-Prampram. In the urban policy mobilities scholarship, such conferences are conceived as nodes where contemporary discourses on urban sustainability and modernity are circulated (see Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019). At the end of this conference, the about 22,000 attendees highlighted the need for a *new urban agenda* that can respond to the challenges facing cities such as rapid and unguided physical expansion, inequality and exclusion, and unsustainable growth.² Thus, national governments are encouraged to adopt urban policies and plans that will guarantee inclusive, safe and sustainable human settlements (UN Habitat, 2016).

ACEP aims to transform Ningo-Prampram into a dense, sustainable and smart city. In doing so, ACEP seeks to become an “international example of sustainable urban development in West Africa, positioning Ghana as a national champion in addressing fast urbanisation challenges” (NiPDA, 2019). The concept plan (Fig. 1) shows various land uses: mixed uses, irrigation lands, light industrial areas, solar farm (for renewable energy supply) and transportation infrastructure. The hope is that these proposed land uses will create “a self-sustaining city or urban enclave which will withstand the test of time, protect environmental sensitive areas, and minimise encroachment on major proposals like industrial zones ...” (Senior Planner, Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority). Further, the project represents official efforts to regulate and service urban growth (Cardoso, 2016, p. 101) and showcases “how to address rapid urbanisation and to accommodate growth” (Rogier Van Den Berg, UN-Habitat Urban Labs Project Manager). Ningo-Prampram like most fast-growing towns and cities in Ghana (Acheampong, Agyemang, & Abdul-Fatawu, 2017; Agyemang et al., 2019; Korah et al., 2019) is evolving into a disjointed continuum of urban patches of low-rise buildings without adequate provision for electricity, water, open spaces, and other facilities and services (NiPDA, 2019). This inadequacy of spatial planning is often blamed on the lack of requisite expertise, inadequate budgetary support, political interference, and a

¹ <https://www.mlaplus.com/home-3/work/ningofilm/> (accessed on 27/06/2019).

² <https://unhabitat.org/7th-world-urban-forum-medellin-declaration/>.

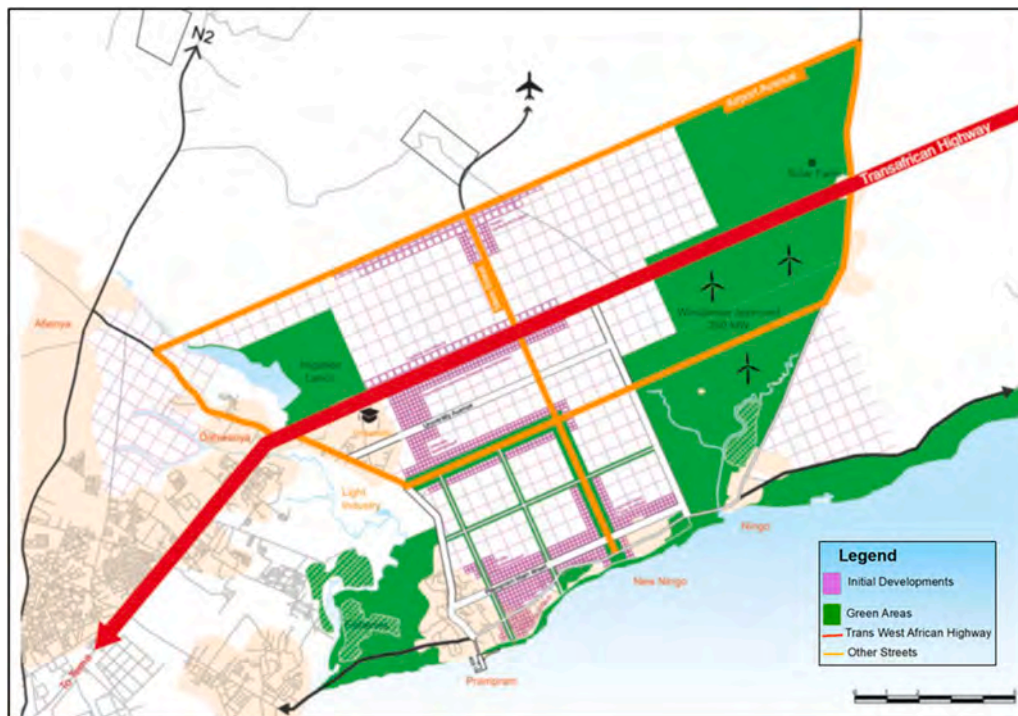


Fig. 1. Concept plan of ACEP
Source: NIPDA, 2019.

weak institutional and legal regime for spatial planning and land use control (e.g., Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2017; Cobbinah & Korah, 2016).

In recognition of the deficiencies in Ghana's spatial planning and development as explained in section 2.1, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) adopted a National Urban Policy (NUP) to guide and "promote a sustainable, spatially integrated and orderly development of urban settlements in Ghana" (MLGRD, 2012, p. 21). Objective Five of the policy specifically seeks to ensure "effective planning and management of urban growth and sprawl, especially of the primate cities and large urban centers in Ghana". The various MMDAs are thus mandated to implement the visions outlined in Ghana's Urban Policy.

Accra city extension was conceived in anticipation of population spill over from the core Metropolitan Area of Greater Accra. So it was thought by the planners at the time to begin the engagements with the requisite stakeholders to be able to afford them adequate time and space to plan and engineer that area so that as the population expanded, they will not be taken unaware. Essentially, it was a planning approach or planning attempt to provide a balanced development for the city (Urban Development Consultant, ACEP, January 2019).

The concept plan (Fig. 1) seeks to generate a viable city structure that can balance environmental, economic and social goals such as providing affordable housing (Grant et al., 2019). An interview with a Senior Planner at the Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority in Accra revealed that ACEP will serve as a satellite city that redistributes traffic in central Accra. An Urban Development Consultant for ACEP agreed with this view, stating that:

ACEP is one of the instruments in urban planning where you create new spaces for existing urban centers to take on additional population ... is a bit similar to satellite cities ... The city extension is a modified version of a satellite city where the distances (between the satellite city and the existing city) are not so wide such that they still fall within the Metropolitan functional area (Urban Development Consultant, ACEP, January 2019).

A study in 1992 found that Accra's Central Business District was the dominant centre in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area by being the

origin and destination for about 74% of person trips (Department of Town and Country Planning, 1992, p. 60). The need to disperse some of the facilities and services in this zone to reduce congestion has culminated in Accra Airport City (Arthur, 2018). Similarly, Grant (2015, p. 300) observed that some of Africa's new cities are envisaged as world class nodes that will promote global connectivity and ease congestion around existing central business districts. ACEP is not an exception, and Ghana's National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF) for 2015–2035 aims to promote Accra as a world class city.

The NSDF seeks to support Accra, as the capital city of Ghana, to compete globally (particularly with Abidjan and Lagos) and attract investment activities through connection with international markets (Government of Ghana, 2015, p. 32). Indeed, an analysis of the project document reveals that ACEP seeks to gradually transform Ningo-Prampam into a city linked with global markets and the region, and appeal to new residents while providing employment, housing, services and culture (NIPDA, 2019). The project will harness the opportunities presented by the Trans-West African Highway and Ghana's New International Airport (Fig. 1) to make Ningo-Prampam a major commercial hub within the West-African sub-region. ACEP thus marks a significant departure from current spatial planning practice in Ghana where the objective is largely spatial ordering; it is entrepreneurial and entails spatial development, as is the case with 'soft spaces' (Waterhout et al., 2013). ACEP represents what Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez (2002) called 'neoliberal urban policy' that targets the needs of the high-income groups. Also, following Watson (2014), plans for ACEP are hosted by the websites of international urban development consultants such as UN Habitat and MLA+, and not sitting in the NIPDA physical planning department.

From the above, it can be deduced that ACEP was conceived because of Ghanaian policymakers' desire to be "proactive and creative in addressing the most salient negative outcomes of urbanisation" (Owusu & Oteng-Ababio, 2015, p. 311). NIPDA per Ghana's Land Use and Spatial Planning Act 2016 (act 925) possesses the power to plan and enforce development control. Yet under this instance, it was willing to change from a technical entity managing urban growth to a mediator

trying to create the conditions necessary for diverse stakeholders to collaborate in imagining an urban future (Healey, 2006). Robinson (2006, p. 143) observes that strategic imaginings for the future of cities have been championed by international urban consultants and property developers. In the case of ACEP, international urban planning consultants and UN Habitat were engaged by Ningo-Prampram District Assembly (NiPDA) to design the concept plan (Interview with District Spatial Planner, February 2019). The project thus originated from the local government drawing on local and learned ideas from 'elsewhere' to address a unique challenge (Robinson, 2015, p. 832). Contrary to Watson's (2014) characterisation of Africa's new city plans as originating from the private sector and often parallel to or override existing urban policies. ACEP was indeed, part of the Ghana's urban strategy of promoting the orderly and efficient development of its cities and towns (MLGRD, 2012). There are diverse rationales and justifications for ACEP ranging from economic competitiveness, orderly physical development and sustainability, to provision of social and affordable housing. However, there are also multiple actors and interests in the project.

4.2. The actors, resources and their relations in ACEP

The major actors in ACEP's evolution are NiPDA, the Government of Ghana (including the MLGRD and National Development Planning Commission), Traditional Authorities, International Consultants, and UN-Habitat. The project was initiated by the local authority (NiPDA), whose spatial planning officer, had substantial experience in urban planning. He anticipated some of the challenges (e.g., sprawl, rapid population growth, etc) confronting Ningo-Prampram. According to the interviews, the Planner engaged several technical people including the international urban planning consultants from UN Habitat and local consultants in Ghana to develop a conceptual plan to address the key challenges facing Ningo-Prampram. UN Habitat (the Urban Planning and Design Lab) provided technical assistance in the design of the whole layout for Ningo-Prampram. Nationally recognised professional associations such as the Institute of Architects, Planners, Ghana Real Estate Developers Association (GREDA), utility companies, some prospective investors some of whom had already acquired lands and were beginning to think of establishing some economic ventures, the local business sector, and the academic community, particularly Central University, were all engaged in the project (NiPDA, 2019).

A series of retreats and seminars were organised by the project technical team, which provided stakeholders the opportunity to shape the content of ACEP. One of such retreat workshops was held in 2015 at Central University in Prampram, which involved political appointees such as the then Special Advisor to the President of Ghana, the former District Chief Executive of NiPDA and former Mayor of Accra Metropolitan Assembly, local experts such as the Executive Secretary of the Lands Commission and international consultants from UN Habitat and MLA+ (SkyscraperCity, 2015). In addition to the retreats and seminars, the ACEP planning team engaged with the residents and traditional authorities in Ningo-Prampram. While the residents may not have had greater power and influence over the content of the plan, these findings do not support the argument of less participation and consultation in the planning of new cities (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018; Watson, 2014). The involvement of UN Habitat and international urban planning consultants demonstrate that ACEP is made of parts that are near and far, local and international expertise, institutional capacities and regulations that are assembled for specific purposes and interests (McCann & Ward, 2012b, p. 328).

The availability of land is a prerequisite for the accomplishment of the visions outlined in ACEP. Yet, over 80% of land in Ghana is owned by Chiefs, families and individuals. The remaining stock is owned by the state. This land ownership arrangement means that while spatial planning is the responsibility of the various MMDAs, Chiefs, families and individuals together constitute the major source of land supply for all development in Accra (Larbi et al., 2003). Thus, effective spatial

planning and development control, in many cases, is limited to state-owned lands (Larbi, 1996). Therefore, unlike other cases (Goldman, 2011; Van Noorloos et al., 2019), the Ghanaian government does not possess absolute power to fast-track new city projects without stakeholder (e.g., traditional authorities) consultation and engagement.

The interview with the Ningo-Prampram Spatial Planner revealed that there is a vast availability of state land that could be harnessed for the project (Fig. 2). The state has previously acquired land from the Ningo-Prampram stools, which the NiPDA Spatial planner argued could be harnessed for this project and would improve the ACEP's feasibility. However, some of the land earmarked for the project is still held by the Ningo and Prampram stools, so it was necessary to engage with these various landholders.

People hold firmly to ownership of such assets (land) and so notwithstanding the utility of any proposal and to the extent that it can either undermine the ownership of land or can threaten the ownership of land, people become very anxious and can create some tensions, so it required extensive engagements, and this was achieved (Urban Development Consultant, ACEP, January 2019).

A former Minister of the MLGRD at one of the stakeholder meetings echoed the above concern:

Owing to our peculiar land ownership system, we have a problem implementing plans. It is the most fundamental problem that we need to address, and that I cannot, and you cannot, but the landowners in Ningo-Prampram can. That is the commitment we need from them (Former Minister of Local Government and Rural Development).

The involvement of different actors as mentioned above generated knowledge, resources, and institutional expertise necessary for the project, but also created constraints. One constraint relates to conflicting rationalities regarding the purpose of the project. While the stated wider aim of the project was to achieve sustainable urban development and provision of social housing (NiPDA, 2019), economic benefits became a priority for the private sector. Interview with the Project Manager revealed ongoing speculative land buying around the project area. Some developers have already acquired lands in the project area and are developing gated communities targeted at upper- and middle-income classes. Fig. 2 shows that a significant portion of the project area falls within the Ningo and Prampram stool lands. As explained earlier few traditional elites benefit disproportionately from the commodification of customary lands which belong to an entire clan or family (Obeng-Odoom, 2016) leading to land-related conflicts, the menace of land guards, and litigations (Barry & Danso, 2014) which may undermine the project.

Different families on various occasions have contested ownership of land within the Prampram stool, especially around Central University (Grant et al., 2019, p. 334). In other cases, disputes have risen between the Indigenous youth, and the Chief, private developers and some government officials. While large portions of land in the project area were acquired by the state under the National Liberation Council (NLC) Act 123 in 1968 for public good, there is evidence that portions of the acquired land has been released to a private establishment, Volta Investment Company Limited (VICL) (Agbenyega, 2015). The original landowners (the stool) claimed the processes leading to the acquisition of the land by VICL were shrouded in secrecy, illegal, and may have been a case of 'politically induced land grabbing' (see Grant et al., 2019, p. 334). The youth in Ningo-Prampram feel they are being marginalised as customary lands are alienated to private developers (GhanaWeb, 2017) and have mobilised and engaged in what Agyekum (2019) terms 'takashie', i.e., a form of insurgence for their own benefit. Social movements such as 'takashie' are counterproductive to the planned growth and development of Ningo-Prampram (c.f. Roy, 2009). Yet, such insurgent movements are necessary as they decenter state and neoliberal hegemony and claim their right to the city through dissent, contesting, and determining their own rules of engagement in relation to planning projects (Mirafitab, 2009). Given the multiple land ownership and interests, an analysis of the project document revealed that several

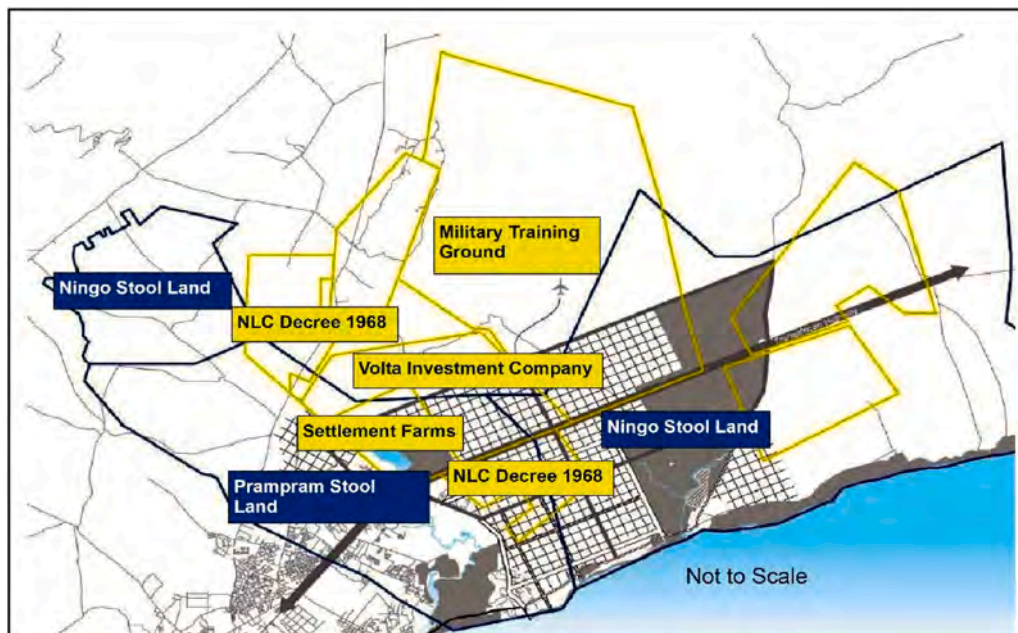


Fig. 2. Land ownership boundaries in Ningo-Prampram for ACEP
Source: NIPDA, 2019.

consultations and meetings were held with the traditional authorities and Indigenous People to ensure the project is communally owned, and for the people to understand its vision. While it is not yet known how profits from investments in ACEP will be shared, the Project Manager indicated that potential profits will be shared among the local government, central government, stools and private landowners who supply lands for the project. Decision making powers with respect to land allocation will rest with a Development Corporation. Hence, notwithstanding that the project seeks to involve local communities, it excludes them from influencing the content of the plan and subsequent proceeds that may accrue thereof.

4.3. Stabilisation/implementation arrangement: mobilising institutional capacities/expertise for ACEP

In Ghana, the problem is not the lack of plans to guide urban transformation; the issue is with implementation (Interview with Urban Development Consultant, ACEP, January 2019). Implementation is generally a challenge, especially where political disposition sometimes displaces logical planning and development projects (Cobbinah & Darkwah, 2017). The dilemma of planning and implementation in Ghana is more an issue of the “inherent tension between urban policy documents that convey the planning process as ... participatory and implementation that is less participatory, messy, contested and dynamic” (Oteng-Ababio & Grant, 2019, p. 9). Further, relational complexity, in which the majority of land in Greater Accra Regions is managed and controlled by traditional authorities under customary laws, while planning remains a municipal function, means that many brilliant urban growth plans were never successfully implemented (e.g., Owusu, 2013). Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan, 1993 which among others aimed to promote compact urban development and curtail sprawl in GAMA failed to achieve its purpose as Owusu (2013) observed that the metropolitan area has expanded in all directions except to the south which is bordered by the Gulf of Guinea. Land ownership was identified as one of the key reasons why the plan failed to limit the urban footprint. Another example is Hope City, which despite the euphoria and enthusiasm that characterised its launch by then president John Mahama in 2013 and the prospect of transforming Ghana into a knowledge-society has since stalled because the project

was overly ‘political’ and failed to address the basic needs of the larger urban populations (Vourlias, 2015). Thus, the central question is whether ACEP will be able to fulfil its vision of curtailing sprawl while generating a sustainable city structure for Ningo-Prampram?

In the meantime, with experience from past project failures, a new approach—a private sector-led model is being adopted for implementation of ACEP. It is essentially a public-private partnership (PPP) that promotes urban entrepreneurship (Grant et al., 2019, p. 325). ACEP is estimated to cost approximately US\$ 4.8 billion (Myjoyonline, 2019) and the government cannot finance this project, making a PPP the most feasible approach (Government of Ghana, 2011). Private real estate developers will partner NIPDA to develop housing units in the area. According to the Project Manager, the PPP will eliminate the risk of political interference and boost investor confidence. However, PPP implementation arrangement will legitimise entrepreneurial urbanism and further disregard the needs of the poor such as housing. The reduced role of government in the implementation also mean that many development proposals may not be subjected to public scrutiny. The project aims to service and regulate urban development in Ningo-Prampram to prevent sprawl and the proliferation of slums. One key strategy is to consolidate lands in the area into landbanks, service them as means to commodify them and use the proceeds to develop infrastructure such as roads, drainage, security, water, power and so forth (Project Manager, ACEP, February 2019). A Project Management Centre (PMC) has been established to oversee the implementation of ACEP. The setting up of the PMC is a governance reform aimed ostensibly to reduce bureaucracies and inefficiencies that characterise public service in Ghana and create an opportunity for expedited approval of investment projects (c.f. Goldman, 2011). The PMC as an Urban Development Corporation may undermine public participation and engender social exclusions in the development process since its sole aim will be to transform rural landscapes into urban real estate (Goldman, 2011) rather than solving the pressing needs of urbanites such as poverty, slums and inadequate housing.

The PMC has launched a Land and House Ownership Scheme which aims to deliver about 500,000 affordable housing units and serviced plots across NIPDA and adjoining districts (Myjoyonline, 2019). A one bedroom flat, the lowest cost housing unit in Newac, is Ghc 176,400 (US \$ 33,923) (Newac City, 2020). Per the payment arrangement, Ghana

Nationals can pay in installment for up to 20 years. This translates into a monthly installment of Ghc 735 (US\$ 141). With a reported mean annual gross household income of about GH'16,645, translating to US\$ 8,446³ (GSS, 2014, p. 153), it would be difficult for many Ghanaian households particularly the low-income and middle-income groups and those without regular source of income to afford a property in Newac. Thus, there is a contradiction in relation to how the project will promote social inclusion through the provision of affordable housing.

5. Conclusion

Land ownership is given little attention in accounts of how and why new city visions are mobilised and dis/assembled in Africa. In this paper we examined the evolution of Accra City Extension Project (ACEP) — an urban strategy to modernise Ningo-Prampam and respond to urbanisation pressures in the Greater Accra Region, Ghana — by tracing its origin and rationale, the actors involved, resources, institutional capacities and their relations. Drawing on Healey's concept of relational complexity and urban policy mobilities literature, the article suggested that beyond efforts to make Ningo-Prampam an economically vibrant city in the West-African sub-region and enhance its global connectivity, ACEP also represent attempts to improve the qualities (e.g., orderly development and provision of services) of an urban milieu. The project aims to achieve sustainable urban development by curtailing sprawl, minimising unplanned growth and provide adequate access to infrastructure and services for the citizenry such as affordable housing. Social inclusiveness is promised, however, like many new city projects, ACEP risks becoming a utopian 'dystopia or heterotopia' because of its potential to worsen inequality and socio-spatial disparities (Carmody & Owusu, 2016, p. 69). The ability of ACEP to balance economic rationales with social and environmental protection goals is uncertain (Grant et al., 2019). Multiple interactions and relations around the project have produced knowledge, specific interests, resources and constraints. While the project brought together diverse actors such as local and central governments, international planning consultants, UN Habitat and traditional authorities, with varying degrees of power and agendas, the paper found that land ownership significantly structured and or limited the range of visions that could be implemented. We argue that contemporary urban policymaking is a complex and emergent socio-political process that draws on both local and learned ideas from 'elsewhere'. Therefore, it is more helpful to transcend the focus on what is circulating (a policy and the networks through which it is set in motion) and instead, examine how policymakers in specific contexts 'arrive at' their ideas through "multiple and often untraceable influences" (Robinson, 2015, p. 833).

A Public Private Partnership (PPP) was adopted to implement the project, yet the Ningo-Prampam District Assembly does not own the lands and cannot use those to leverage private sector investment. The first thing was to get the commitment of the landowners so that lands in the area could be consolidated into landbanks. The ACEP case shows how the implementation of a new city vision cannot be fast-tracked by the state (Goldman, 2011; Van Noorloos et al., 2019) but is mediated by the nature of land ownership. Therefore, agency and power are distributed among various actors. While the project purportedly aims to balance social, economic and environmental objectives, the PPP approach to implementation which supports entrepreneurial urbanism raises concerns regarding how ACEP will deliver affordable housing. Speculative land transactions are ongoing in the project area owing to the confluence of investors scrambling for land and uncoordinated lease of land by landowners following announcement of the project. Again, because the land owners interest is about economic profits from the leasing of their lands, it affects the project's ability to deliver on its

³ This figure is based on the prevailing exchange rate of GH'1.97084 to the US dollar in 2013.

promise of delivering affordable housing. ACEP thus resembles an autonomous urban enclave for the high- and middle-income classes that will, at worst, exacerbate socio-spatial segregation and displacement of the poor from land (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018). It is therefore not surprising that social movements such as 'takashie' is present in Ningo-Prampam as the youth mobilise and resist spatial interventions that do not enure to their benefit.

The future of ACEP will to a greater extent depend on how best the project meets the needs of the various local communities in Ningo-Prampam. Watson (2014, p. 230) envisages that the nature of Africa's new city visions might elicit a response from disadvantaged groups who will seek to counter such interventions. The relational complexity perspective applied in this paper decentred the 'hegemonic power' of the state in the making of ACEP and render visible, the tensions, agency and the 'multiplicity of citizenships' which different kinds of groups and people have in a place (Healey, 2006, p. 542). The paper showed how ACEP is being imagined and how its future trajectory might change owing to the distributed agency across diverse *actants*. Therefore, this paper has brought to the fore, *agency* which has received less attention in scholarship on Africa's new city imaginings specifically and urban policy mobilities generally (see McCann & Ward, 2012b).

Given that customary land constitutes the dominant form of land supply for all development in Ghana, spatial interventions such as ACEP need substantial stakeholder engagement. While the evidence (i.e., interviews and project documents) suggests that extensive stakeholder consultations were undertaken, the contestations and ongoing speculative land transactions in Ningo Prampam is a testament of the complexity of the planning process in an African context. As noted by Oteng-Ababio and Grant (2019, p. 9), "planning in African cities is less transparent and organised than in the Global North and public deliberation and opposition are more unpredictable". Policymakers in Greater Accra Region should embrace complexity and non-linearity in the planning process by engaging with diverse actors including the elite and vulnerable around socio-spatial initiatives (see also Nunbogu, Korah, Cobbinah, & Poku-Boansi, 2018). Through engagement, the needs and interests of various actors will be known and incorporated in the project objectives to arrive at a consensus and avoid future oppositions. Analysing the role of dominant actors (e.g., international property developments, state, consultants, planners) and associated discourses (e.g., economic competitiveness, smart and modern cities) have produced useful insights on the phenomenon of new city imaginings in Africa (Côté-Roy & Moser, 2019; van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018; Watson, 2014). We call for further attention in international scholarship on the nature of land ownership and its relationship with new African urban visions. We suggest this will add to the range of determinations that underlie and constitute new city making, as well as the mode of regulations and institutional capacities/expertise that are mobilised.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Prosper Issahaku Korah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization. **Tony Matthews:** Writing - review & editing, Supervision. **Natalie Osborne:** Writing - review & editing, Supervision.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2020.102277>.

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