Revisiting Modernist Planning in Zambia: Challenges, Paradigm Shifts, and the Case for Inclusive Urbanism

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ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in cities like Lusaka, Zambia, has outpaced the capacity of governments to provide adequate housing, infrastructure, and essential services. This has been further exacerbated by environmental degradation, food insecurity, and increasing climate vulnerability. The dominant urban planning approaches, largely influenced by modernist theories from the Global North, have proven ill-suited to address these challenges, particularly in contexts characterized by informality and socio-economic inequality.

This study aimed to examine the limitations of modernist urban planning in Lusaka and to explore the need for alternative, locally grounded planning paradigms that better respond to the realities of Sub-Saharan African urbanization. The research involves a critical review of urban planning theory—focusing on rational, communicative, and critical paradigms—and an analysis of Lusaka's planning practices. It evaluates how imported models have been implemented and their impacts on urban development and social equity. The study finds that the continued reliance on rigid, Northern-influenced modernist planning frameworks marginalizes informal settlements and excludes vulnerable populations from urban benefits. This has led to spatial and social inequalities and hindered the development of inclusive and sustainable urban environments. There is a pressing need for a structural rethinking of urban planning in Sub-Saharan Africa. Current models fail to account for the socio-spatial realities of cities like Lusaka and instead perpetuate exclusion and inefficiency. Urban planning in the Global South must shift toward context-sensitive, equity-focused approaches that center local knowledge, informal dynamics, and participatory governance. Such reorientation is essential to fostering just, inclusive, and climate-resilient urban futures in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Global South; Global North; Modernist; Normative Planning: Urban Justice; Participatory Planning

INTRODUCTION

As urbanization accelerates worldwide, the majority of this growth now takes place in the Global South. Cities in this region, however, have struggled to keep pace with the demands of rapid urbanization, often lacking adequate shelter, infrastructure, and essential services, especially for the urban poor. Many cities face additional challenges, including weak local governance, environmental degradation, food insecurity, unreliable energy access, and heightened vulnerability to climate change and financial instability. The scarcity of land has led to the proliferation of informal settlements, producing "slums of hope" and "slums of despair" that reflect both the aspirations and hardships of urban dwellers. Scholars have described urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa as being in a "state of crisis" (Parnell et al., 2009), urging an immediate rethinking of urban planning policy to address these pressing issues. However, the planning frameworks themselves are often problematic; in many cases, they exacerbate social and spatial inequalities, are inaccessible to the urban poor, and fail to foster environmental sustainability. For urban planning to address these contemporary urban challenges, it

requires a deep, structural re-evaluation, particularly regarding its theoretical foundations, such as the persistent belief in modernist planning visions.

Modernist planning theory, often categorized within "scientific rational planning" approaches, originates from the Global North, particularly Europe and North America (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000; Watson, 2009; Kamete, 2013). Rooted in the ideals of the early 20th century, modernism promoted visions of orderly, efficient, and aesthetically controlled urban spaces. Figures such as the architect Le Corbusier popularized these ideas, advocating for cities designed to separate social classes and "sweep away" poverty (Watson, 2009). In industrializing nations of the Global North, modernist planning responded to issues arising from rapid urban growth, such as overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and environmental degradation. Although it was intended to address social inequities and improve urban life, the modernist approach has often imposed a rigid and exclusionary vision that, in contexts like Lusaka, Zambia, is ill-suited to the complex socio-economic dynamics of African cities, particularly when it comes to promoting social justice and inclusivity.

This notion of modernization—often described as "west is best"—encourages the Global South to replicate the development trajectories of the Global North, adopting westernized planning models that do not necessarily align with local needs or realities. In Zambia, for instance, urban planners frequently draw upon modernist ideals, emphasizing infrastructure development and rigid spatial layouts, such as Master Plans, over inclusive strategies for informal settlements where much of the urban population resides. The result is a planning paradigm heavily influenced by northern theory, yet inadequately adapted to Zambia's urban challenges. The reliance on these imported approaches has inadvertently fostered a modernist vision among planners, who often prioritize formal infrastructure and design over the more immediate needs of the urban poor, perpetuating a cycle of social exclusion and spatial inequality. This article explores how Zambian planning has been shaped by this modernist vision and assesses its impact on urban development and equity within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Problem Statement

Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa is occurring at an unprecedented pace, yet many cities in the region, including Lusaka, Zambia, remain ill-equipped to manage its consequences. Existing urban planning frameworks, heavily influenced by modernist theories from the Global North, emphasize formal infrastructure, spatial order, and aesthetic control. These models, however, are poorly suited to the complex socio-economic realities of African urban environments, particularly the prevalence of informal settlements and widespread poverty. In Zambia, the persistence of this modernist planning paradigm has led to the marginalization of the urban poor, the neglect of informal settlements, and the reproduction of spatial and social inequalities. Despite calls for reform, urban planning remains structurally constrained by outdated, externally derived models that fail to promote inclusivity, sustainability, or social justice. This article investigates the extent to which modernist planning continues to shape urban development in Lusaka and how it undermines equitable and context-responsive urban governance in Sub-Saharan Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Planning Theory

Contemporary planning theory is often categorized into three primary paradigms: rational, communicative, and critical. These frameworks each address three fundamental normative questions: “What is planning’s purpose?” “What constitutes a good planning process?” and “What defines good planning?” (Yiftachel, 2006, p. 26). However, attempts to define planning uniformly reveal its elusive nature; planning is not easily distilled into a singular practice. Sociologically, planning can be understood through three lenses: (1) the general process of “planning” as undertaken by individuals; (2) knowledge-driven domains such as spatial or urban planning; and (3) real-world applications specific to particular contexts, such as metro-regional planning in Johannesburg or transportation planning in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Thus, planning theories have evolved to address both broad and specialized practices, including theories tailored to specific contexts such as environmental, community, or Southern planning.

In studying planning practices, three generations of theoretical inquiry emerge. The first generation was largely a-theoretical, focusing on practical implementation. The second generation—the "practice movement"—drew insights from practical experiences to inform theory. The third generation, informed by practice theories, investigates the interplay between theory and practice in depth. Nevertheless, while planning theories are diverse, they are often disconnected from the realities of enacted planning practices. Generic "planning" theories offer limited applicability in specific contexts, whereas context-specific theories, such as spatial planning theories, provide more constructive adaptations but still lack insight into real-world practices. These disconnects have significant implications for planning theory, education, and practice, especially in regions like the Global South, where planning challenges differ markedly from those in the Global North.

Rational Planning and Colonial Influence

Traditional planning models, particularly "scientific rational planning," originated in Europe and North America (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000; Watson, 2009; Yiftachel, 2006) and were introduced to the Global South through colonial rule, educational institutions, and skills transfer (Watson, 2009a; Watson & Odendaal, 2013). Before independence, rational planning was predominantly employed in African countries, often justified by regulatory and segregationist systems designed to serve the interests of colonial rulers rather than local populations. This approach reinforced social hierarchies, fostering inequality and limiting access to resources and services for the majority.

After independence, the limitations of rational planning became increasingly apparent. Many postcolonial nations, including Zambia, initially retained these colonial planning models, which focused on replicating an "idealized" modern British town. Consequently, planning legislation in much of the Global South still echoes colonial priorities, often emphasizing outdated models like "garden cities," large parks, and car-dominated traffic plans that do not adequately address contemporary urban challenges (McAuslan, 2003; Parnell et al., 2009). These relics of colonial urbanism continue to shape the visions of African leaders, who now aspire to create "world-class cities," adopting rhetoric and objectives from cities like Dubai, Shanghai, and New York, despite the pressing need for basic services such as water, sanitation, and housing (CoH, 2003). This ambition, coupled with "urbanization without industrialization," has led to cities characterized by high levels of poverty and informality, which Watson (2014) critiques as unrealistic, raising questions about whether these grand visions are achievable or merely "nightmares" that overlook the lived realities of the urban poor.

Challenges in Applying Planning Law and Policy in African Cities

Planning in many African cities is further complicated by political interference and the disconnection between planning laws and the realities of urban life. While planners often rely on legal frameworks, these laws are frequently outdated or misaligned with current challenges (Kamete, 2013). For example, informal settlements in Zambia have persisted despite official attempts to eliminate them, and street vending continues despite legal restrictions. Berrisford (2011) argues that planning laws have historically provided "oppressive regimes, whether colonial or independent, with a useful legal mechanism for restricting social and economic opportunities for most people" (p. 215). This critique underscores the need for planning laws to be responsive to the socio-economic realities of poverty, unemployment, and other systemic challenges unique to the Global South (Watson, 2009a).

Toward a Context-Sensitive Planning Paradigm for the Global South

As urbanization in the Global South presents unique challenges, there is a growing call for planning theories and practices that go beyond replication of Global North models. Effective planning in African contexts requires a reimagining of theoretical frameworks to integrate issues of informality, poverty, and industrialization. Addressing these challenges requires rethinking not only planning laws but also the training of planners, who must be equipped to respond to the needs and aspirations of their own urban populations rather than merely applying foreign models. This requires a paradigm shift to promote a planning approach that is context-sensitive, inclusive, and capable of addressing the complex realities of cities in the Global South.

Modernist versus Postmodernist Approaches in Planning

The modernist vision of urban planning emerged in the eighteenth century, driven by philosophers across disciplines such as science, law, and universal morality (Irving, 1993). This vision was largely a response to the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution, aiming to establish rational, structured, and stable urban environments. Domingues (2009) conceptualizes modernity as the "house of epistemology," underscoring its foundational role in shaping planning thought. Under the modernist paradigm, planners were expected to employ rational processes in land allocation and the implementation of planning regulations (Holston, 1998), reflecting a belief in linear progress, positivism, technocracy, and the rational ordering of urban space to enhance liberty and human welfare (Irving, 1993).

Modernist planners, viewing themselves as value-free technocrats, perceived their role as impartial architects of the common good, detached from competing interests. This stance rendered planners as “priests of rationality” (Hirt, 2005; Boyer, 1983), tasked with devising comprehensive plans devoid of subjective bias. However, this assumption of universal applicability has been critically challenged. Modernist planning theories, developed in the Global North, have often been inappropriately transplanted to the Global South without consideration of differing socio-economic contexts, cultural practices, and urban challenges. Koenigsberger (1980) critiqued this approach, highlighting that concepts and methods developed in the West were erroneously treated as universal laws, inherently applicable across diverse global contexts.

The transplantation of modernist planning to African cities, particularly post-independence, has largely been characterized by a failure to adapt to local realities. Despite over fifty years since independence, countries like Zambia continue to adhere to planning frameworks reminiscent of colonial models, such as the idealized British garden cities, expansive parks, and car-centric traffic plans (McAuslan, 2003; Parnell et al., 2009). These outdated models have proven inadequate in addressing the pressing needs of rapidly urbanizing African cities, which often face deficits in basic services like water, sanitation, and housing. Additionally, the pursuit of “world-class” city status, inspired by metropolises like Dubai, Shanghai, and New York, has often overshadowed more immediate urban necessities, resulting in high levels of poverty and informal settlements (CoH, 2003; Watson, 2014).

Criticism of the modernist vision has intensified over time, emanating from multiple fronts. Urban realities have exposed the inherent limitations and failures of modernist approaches, which often do not align with the lived experiences of urban populations in the Global South. Dear (1986) notes that post-structuralist critiques have questioned the underlying assumptions and authority structures inherent in modernist planning. Furthermore, the rise of neoliberalism has diminished the role of the state in planning, undermining the comprehensive and coordinated approaches advocated by modernist theories (Sandercock, 1998).

In response to the shortcomings of modernist planning, postmodernist approaches have gained traction, particularly within the Global South. Postmodernism rejects overarching metanarratives and embraces diversity, localized responses, and the inclusion of marginalized voices (Harvey, 1989). This paradigm shift advocates for more democratic and participatory planning processes, contrasting sharply with the technocratic and top-down nature of modernism. Goodchild (1990) emphasizes that postmodernism values diversity and supports localized initiatives, which can better address the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of cities in the Global South. Consequently, there is a pressing imperative for planners in regions like Zambia to transition towards postmodernist frameworks, which offer more flexible, inclusive, and context-sensitive solutions compared to the rigid, universalist models of modernism.

Overall, the debate between modernist and postmodernist planning underscores the need for a paradigm that is attuned to the specific challenges and realities of the Global South. Embracing postmodernist principles can facilitate more equitable, sustainable, and responsive urban development, moving beyond the failed promises of modernist ideologies.

Zambia presents a compelling and highly relevant case study for examining the failures and limitations of modernist urban planning in the Global South. As one of the most urbanized countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Zambia has seen rapid and largely unplanned urban growth. According to the Zambia Statistics Agency

(ZamStats, 2022), over 44% of the population now lives in urban areas, with Lusaka alone growing at an estimated annual rate of 4.8%, one of the fastest in the region. Yet, more than 70% of Lusaka's residents live in informal settlements, characterized by poor access to water, sanitation, waste management, and secure housing (Kaulule, 2024). This urban reality underscores a clear disconnect between formal planning frameworks and the actual needs of the urban poor.

Historically, Zambia's planning system has been heavily influenced by colonial legacies, with current planning legislation and spatial frameworks still resembling outdated British models. The continued reliance on Master Plans, rigid zoning, and formal infrastructure development reflects a modernist ethos that has not been meaningfully reformed since independence. Despite being over fifty years post-colonial, Zambia's planning approach remains top-down, exclusionary, and often unresponsive to informal realities. This makes it an ideal context to explore how imported planning paradigms perpetuate socio-spatial inequality and fail to adapt to the unique urban challenges of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Zambia's urbanization trends are both rapid and uneven, with empirical data revealing significant challenges:

1. Population growth in Lusaka: from approximately 1.1 million in 2000 to over 3.3 million in 2023 (World Bank, 2023).
2. Housing deficit: Estimated at 1.5 million units nationally, with 75% of urban housing considered informal (UN-Habitat, 2021).
3. Informal economy: Employs over 60% of urban residents, many of whom are excluded from formal planning processes (ILO, 2022).
4. Basic services: Only 34% of Lusaka's informal residents have access to improved sanitation, and many rely on unsafe water sources (ZamStats, 2022).

While substantial research exists on urbanization in the Global South, there is limited empirical scholarship that critically examines the persistent influence of modernist planning in postcolonial contexts like Zambia. Most studies either assess planning outcomes without interrogating the underlying theory, or they adopt a normative stance without incorporating local voices. As such, a gap remains in understanding how planning theory, colonial legacies, and practitioner perceptions intersect to shape urban inequality in African cities like Lusaka.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a grounded theory approach to explore the interactions, social actions, and experiences of spatial planners in Zambia regarding their application and consideration of modernist planning approaches. Grounded theory was chosen to allow for an in-depth examination of planners' perspectives and practices, enabling the emergence of themes related to the suitability and limitations of modernist frameworks within the Zambian context.

Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered from a population of 116 local authorities across Zambia. From this population, a purposive sample of 15 spatial planners was selected, including planners from all five major cities—Lusaka, Livingstone, Ndola, Kitwe, and Chipata—as well as representatives from 15 municipalities and a selection of district councils. In Zambia, local authorities consist of city councils, municipal councils, and district councils, but not all function as planning authorities. The sample thus focused on planning authorities, which include all cities, all municipal councils, and certain district councils with designated planning roles (Kaulule, 2017).

In addition to an extensive literature review on planning theory in Zambia and globally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 spatial planners, including the president of the Zambia Institute of Planners. This sample encompassed planners from all cities, selected municipal council, and selected district councils to

ensure a comprehensive representation of planning practices and challenges across various types of planning authorities.

Table 1: Sampled Personnel

Location	Sampled Personal	Sample Size
ZIP	President	1
Livingstone	Director Planning	1
Lusaka	Director Planning	1
Kabwe	Director Planning	1
Choma	District Planning Officer	1
Chipata	Provincial Planner	1
Ndola	Director Planning	1
Pemba	District Planning Officer	1
Mumbwa	District Planning Officer	1
Mwandi	Physical Planner	1
Chirundu	District Planning Officer	1
Zambezi	District Planning Officer	1
Mongu	Physical Planner	1
Kitwe	Physical Planner	1
Kapiri	Physical Planner	1
Lundazi	Physical Planner	1
TOTAL		**15**

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method used to obtain qualitative insights from spatial planners across Zambia. All 15 interviews were conducted either in person or via virtual platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, depending on the availability and geographic location of the participants. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, allowing for in-depth discussions on planning practices, institutional challenges, and policy frameworks.

The interviews were conducted in English, the official language of communication in Zambia and the standard medium for professional and administrative discourse among spatial planners. In cases where clarification was needed, local vernaculars were occasionally used, though responses were recorded and transcribed in English for consistency and analysis.

Ethical safeguards were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent after being briefed on the purpose, scope, and intended use of the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and participants were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board.

Following data collection, interviews were transcribed and manually coded using a thematic coding approach. Key themes were identified both deductively from the research objectives and inductively from the data itself. To enhance reliability and manage data efficiently, qualitative data analysis software NVivo (version 12) was employed. NVivo facilitated the organization, retrieval, and comparison of coded segments, supporting a more rigorous thematic analysis.

This study distinguishes itself by using grounded theory methodology, a relatively underutilized approach in African urban planning research. Rather than imposing external theoretical frameworks from the outset, grounded theory allows for the inductive development of theory based on empirical data, making it uniquely suited to uncovering context-specific insights. In Zambia's highly complex and informal urban environment, grounded theory enables a bottom-up understanding of how planning is practiced, challenged, and negotiated on the ground.

Another novel contribution lies in the combination of planners' lived experiences and perceptions with a critical analysis of planning theory. This dual lens enabled the study to:

- Reveal the tensions between normative theory and practical realities;
- Examine how planners internalize or resist modernist assumptions;
- Identify how informal practices are accommodated or excluded by formal planning processes.

This approach bridges the long-standing gap between theory and practice in planning discourse and offers an original contribution to both academic and policy-oriented urban studies in the Global South.

Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis of quantitative data was conducted to provide an overview of planners' demographic characteristics and institutional contexts. Thematic analysis was then applied to both the qualitative data obtained from literature and interview responses, facilitating the identification of key themes that address the study's objectives. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of planners' perspectives on the applicability of modernist planning theories, their critiques of these frameworks, and alternative approaches that may better suit the Zambian urban context.

Through this methodology, the study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the theoretical and practical foundations of urban planning in Zambia, highlighting how global planning theories are interpreted and adapted within local contexts.

Limitations

This study employed purposive sampling, which, while suitable for capturing expert insights from relevant planning authorities, introduces potential sampling bias. The selection of participants was based on their roles and knowledge within planning institutions rather than random sampling, which may limit the generalizability of findings beyond the selected sample.

Moreover, while the inclusion of planners from cities, municipal councils, and district councils aimed to ensure a broad representation, the sample size of 15 planners—though sufficient for qualitative depth—remains relatively small. This limitation is further compounded by the possible exclusion of perspectives from non-planning authorities or informal actors who may influence planning outcomes in practice.

Lastly, reliance on self-reported data from professionals may introduce response bias, with participants potentially portraying their institutions or practices in a more favorable light. While triangulated with literature and policy documents, the study's findings should be interpreted within the context of these methodological constraints.

The interviews with 15 spatial planners yielded several recurring themes that illustrate both the systemic and context-specific challenges within Zambia's planning authorities. These themes are summarized below:

Table 2: Thematic Outcomes from the Interviews

Theme	Description	Representative Quote
Institutional Capacity	Lack of qualified staff, inadequate resources	"We are only two planners covering the entire municipality—it's simply not enough."
Legal and Policy Framework	Outdated legislation, poor enforcement	"The law exists, but implementation is a different story altogether."
Political Interference	Politicians overruling planners, undermining processes	"We often submit technical advice, but it's ignored if it conflicts with political goals."
Public Participation	Minimal community involvement in planning processes	"People see planning as something done to them, not with them."
Land Tenure Conflicts	Customary vs statutory land disputes affect planning	"You can't plan where ownership is disputed—it halts everything."
Infrastructure Funding Gaps	Limited financial support for implementation	"We can draft the best plans, but without funding, they remain just that—plans."
Coordination Among Agencies	Poor inter-agency collaboration and data sharing	"Every department works in silos. We don't even share base maps!"

Furthermore, some of the views that came out from the planners included:

"At our level, planning is more of a dream than a function. We rely on templates from the ministry because we don't have the tools or staff."

While another planner from the Capital indicated that:

"Even in Lusaka, we still struggle with implementing plans due to political interference and overlapping mandates from ministries."

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The modernist approach to planning, characterized by master planning, zoning, and a focus on rational, technocratic decision-making by planners presumed to represent the "public interest," has shown significant limitations in addressing urban challenges in cities across the Global South (Watson, 2002; Kamete, 2010). This approach, centered on separating land uses and criminalizing or legitimizing certain practices, has often overlooked the socio-economic diversity and unique needs of these regions, frequently favoring global capital and wealthier interests over those of marginalized groups (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Forester, 1999; Devas, 2001; Innes, 2004). In Zambia, particularly in Lusaka, the persistence of modernist planning through tools like the JICA master plan reveals critical gaps, especially for the 75% of the population living in informal settlements, where zoning fails to meet their needs and entrenches exclusionary policies. Many Zambian planners continue to rely on zoning and master planning approaches deeply embedded in the modernist planning paradigm (Kaulule, 2024).

Although the systematic nature of the modernist approach has benefits, particularly in structured decision-making, it remains unsuited to the complex socio-economic landscapes of cities like Lusaka. Rigidly applying modernist principles often exacerbates inequalities, with disadvantaged communities in informal settlements further marginalized. Given the distinct challenges in the Global South, where informality and poverty are widespread, this study advocates for a shift from rationalist, technocratic planning to more inclusive, adaptive approaches drawn from normative planning theories.

Normative Theories of Planning

Normative planning theories, which emerged as alternatives to the rationalist, modernist approach, emphasize inclusivity, local engagement, and responsiveness to socio-economic diversity. This study explores three key normative theories—communicative planning, the just city, and co-production—that offer relevant frameworks for addressing the limitations of modernist planning in Zambia.

Communicative Planning Theory

The communicative theory of planning arose in response to the need for greater democratic participation and consensus-building in urban planning (Healy, 1999). Drawing from Habermas' liberal philosophy, communicative planning is grounded in the idea that open dialogue, debate, and mutual understanding among stakeholders can produce more acceptable and effective solutions (Healy, 2003; Watson, 2002). Unlike traditional planning, which relies on technocratic authority, communicative planning advocates for deliberative engagement to generate common ground among diverse interests (Innes, 1995).

Despite its inclusive vision, communicative theory has been criticized for assuming that consensus is always achievable and for potentially overlooking power imbalances that can skew planning outcomes (Hillier, 2003; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000). These limitations notwithstanding, communicative planning offers valuable insights for Zambian urban planning, particularly in Lusaka, where informal settlements and lack of civic engagement often result in the marginalization of low-income communities. By emphasizing dialogue and participatory decision-making, communicative planning encourages planners to include a wider array of stakeholders, fostering a democratic space for negotiating urban futures that more accurately reflect the needs and aspirations of all residents.

Watson (2009), Sandercock (1998), and Dear (2000) have been central in articulating the inadequacy of universal, technocratic models of urban planning, particularly in postcolonial cities. Watson (2009) emphasizes the disconnect between planning ideologies and the everyday realities of Global South cities, where informality, poverty, and exclusion shape urban life. Sandercock (1998) advocates for a "postmodern planning" ethos grounded in diversity, narrative, and emotional intelligence, prioritizing the lived experiences of marginalized groups over technical rationality. Similarly, Dear's (1995) postmodern urbanism critiques spatial determinism and calls for planning that is contingent, localized, and socially constructed. These theoretical contributions support the argument that urban planning in Zambia must abandon rigid, universalist frameworks in favor of locally rooted, pluralistic approaches that recognize difference and foster equity. Healy (1997), through collaborative planning theory, also underscores the importance of institutional capacity for dialogue and joint learning, reinforcing the call for participatory governance in Zambian cities.

Just City Theory

Fainstein's "just city" theory focuses on equity in both planning processes and outcomes, advocating for participation by less powerful groups and equitable resource distribution (Fainstein, 2000). Rooted in post-Marxist political economy, the just city theory emphasizes bottom-up transformation and aligns with Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "Right to the City," which argues that all citizens should have equitable access to urban spaces (Purcell, 2013). Fainstein's model, exemplified by the city of Amsterdam, champions fair distribution of urban resources and democratic governance, acknowledging that marginalized communities may require external advocacy to ensure their voices are heard (Fainstein, 2010).

For cities like Lusaka, where spatial planning has traditionally excluded informal and marginalized communities, the just city theory provides a framework for analyzing how planning regulations might be restructured to support inclusivity and fairness (Kaulule, 2024). The theory's emphasis on equitable urban access is particularly relevant in contexts where informal settlements lack basic amenities and legal recognition. Incorporating just city principles into Zambian urban planning could help rectify systemic inequalities and promote sustainable urban development that benefits all residents, rather than just privileged groups.

Co-Production Theory

The co-production theory, which gained prominence through grassroots movements like homeless federations, advocates for collaborative partnerships between citizens and authorities in shaping urban spaces (Watson, 2014). This approach emphasizes incremental progress, social learning, and the inclusion of local voices in decision-making, aiming for solutions that address immediate community needs while fostering sustainable, long-term development (Mitlin, 2008; Albrechts, 2012).

Co-production offers a practical model for Zambian urban centers, especially Lusaka, where informal settlements are numerous and in need of tailored, community-driven planning solutions. By prioritizing shared decision-making, co-production enables planners and residents to collaboratively address pressing issues, such as housing, sanitation, and infrastructure, in a manner that respects local knowledge and adapts to the unique dynamics of each neighborhood. This approach contrasts with top-down modernist planning, which often imposes standardized solutions that fail to account for the lived realities of residents in informal areas. The co-production theory's focus on partnership and inclusivity makes it a suitable framework for urban planning in Zambia, where local engagement is critical for sustainable and socially inclusive development.

Furthermore, Kenya and South Africa offer valuable insights into how planning systems in the Global South have attempted to move beyond modernist frameworks. In Kenya, initiatives such as the Kenya Informal Settlements Improvement Project (KISIP) exemplify co-production in practice, where communities collaborate with government agencies to prioritize, design, and implement infrastructure projects. These efforts have helped legitimize informal areas and integrate them into formal urban systems. In South Africa, post-apartheid planning has seen a partial shift toward just city principles, particularly in cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg, which have adopted spatial development frameworks emphasizing social inclusion, mixed-income housing, and public transport accessibility (Harrison et al., 2008). However, both contexts also highlight challenges such as elite capture and implementation gaps that Zambian planners must anticipate. These cases suggest that political will, community empowerment, and institutional reform are critical ingredients for transforming urban planning systems.

Towards an Inclusive Urban Planning Paradigm

The normative theories explored in this study communicative planning, just city, and co-production highlight the need for a paradigm shift in Zambian urban planning from a rigid modernist framework to a more flexible, participatory approach. Each of these theories provides strategies for addressing the limitations of the modernist vision by fostering democratic engagement, promoting equity, and empowering local communities. In Zambia's urban centers, particularly Lusaka, adopting elements of these theories could enhance planners' ability to address socio-economic disparities and create cities that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all residents.

Transitioning to a postmodernist planning approach that integrates normative theories could enable Zambian cities to move away from exclusionary zoning and master planning. Instead, planners can embrace collaborative frameworks that consider the unique socio-economic conditions of the Global South. This shift toward more inclusive, community-centered planning has the potential to create urban spaces that reflect the diversity of their inhabitants and foster a sustainable, equitable urban future for cities like Lusaka.

CONCLUSION

Postmodernism fundamentally challenges the rationalist underpinnings of modernist planning, particularly its reliance on universal truths and grand narratives (Dear, 1995). In contrast to modernism's search for objective, overarching explanations, postmodernism promotes skepticism toward singular truths or metanarratives, advocating instead for an understanding of knowledge as contextually constructed within unique social, historical, and political frameworks (Dear, 1986). This perspective asserts that knowledge and truth are not absolute but are products of pluralistic discourse, shaped by local contexts and specific cultural interpretations (Jameson, 1985).

In the context of urban planning, postmodernist thought calls for epistemological and moral pluralism, rejecting one-size-fits-all solutions and instead encouraging localized, context-sensitive approaches. It embraces diverse perspectives and acknowledges the role of power dynamics, social networks, and pragmatic decision-making. This shift suggests a move away from the rigidity of modernist planning toward a more inclusive, flexible, and participatory framework that reflects the complexity and diversity of urban communities in the Global South. Postmodernist planning, therefore, offers a pathway for planners in places like Zambia to respond more effectively to the nuanced socio-economic needs of their communities by prioritizing collaborative, localized, and adaptable strategies that can foster inclusive and sustainable urban development.

There is also need for policy reforms that align with SDG 11, including:

1. Reform Planning Curricula
2. Developing Inclusive Legal Frameworks
3. Institutionalizing Community Participation
4. Pilot Co-Production in Informal Settlements

By grounding urban planning practice in postmodernist and normative theories, Zambia can move beyond exclusionary, technocratic models and cultivate cities that are inclusive, resilient, and reflective of local realities. This shift is not just a theoretical imperative, it is a practical necessity for achieving more equitable and sustainable urban futures.

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