Persisting Meanings and Evolving Spaces
The origin of traditional meanings attached to urban spaces and their reinterpretation in rapidly transforming built environment

Genet Alem
IPS: International Planning Studies
Technical University of Dortmund
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Outline

- Introduction
- Trinity of space in Ethiopian urban culture
- Long distance trade and emergence of urban spaces as market places
- Religious rites and role in the formation of urban spaces
- Socio-political administration and the process of urban spaces formalisation
- Current transformation of urban spaces and transcending meanings from the past
Introduction: context

- Urban spaces are origin of urban culture in Ethiopia
- These spaces are indeed where the traditional Ethiopian urban centres emerged.
- The urban spaces played key role:
  - in structuring the so called informal settlements in Ethiopia as centre of settlements, integral part of how people do they daily life (from the most private to the public level)
  - Key elements of settlements needed for ceremonial and religious related activities
  - A place of social encounter to settle conflicts and celebrate holydays
To understand the nature of urban spaces in Ethiopian tradition, it is necessary to see the unity and differences of three major factors in a single urban spaces.

- Trade: major form of space creation as market places (initiating the formation of urban spaces).
- Rites and routines related to religious and social life fostering a symbolic of a particular urban space.
- Socio-political administration: legitimizing factor in the formation process of urban spaces.
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Long distance trade and the emergence of market places in different hierarchical level

Trade routes in 19th Century Ethiopia
Source: Adopted from Bahiru Zewde, 2002
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Long distance trade and the emergence of market places in different hierarchical level

Market system in Ethiopian tradition – Catchment and intensity of service
Source: Alem, 2015
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Rites and routines related to Religious life and institutions

- As anywhere in the world, religion has informed the creation of urban spaces in Ethiopia.
- In Ethiopia in this case, religion was essential factor in the development of concept attached to the meaning of spaces
  - Space as hierarchical system and linked to the spiritual life
  - It reinforced a symbol which transcends to the formation of urban identity, image and culture
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Rites and routines related to Religious life and institutions

The spatial concept of EOC
Source: Alem (2011)
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Rites and routines related to Religious life and institutions

- EOC (Ethiopian Orthodox Church) was part of the government system with the so called “Siso- Mengist”, (literally: one third of government), which give it a right to clime one third of land in the country.
  - With this influencing the land management and enhanced urban development

- Churches were also the centre of education:
  - Endowed churches with famous teaching centres attracted great deal of students from all-over the country
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Rites and routines related to Religious life and institutions

- Influence of churches on political administration
  - Sanctuary in turbulence times and asylum for any one who fears persecution of any kind
    “Even the monarch coulnd not tracepass the church power once someone, even the worest criminal get asylum under the church protection.” (Crummy, 1987)
  - Property under the protection of church was safe from any kind of looting
    ✓ Urban centres with endowed churches had store houses belonging to the elites and nobilities.
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Rites and routines related to Religious life and institutions

Timket (Epiphany)
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Rites and routines related to Religious life and institutions

Meskel (cross feast)
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Socio-political administration in the making of urban spaces

- The formal character of major urban spaces in urban Ethiopia comes from the few legal provisions within the legal system of Ethiopia
  - Setting up the “Adebabay” (central square) or formalising the same were mostly the role of the sovereign
  - Ensuring the sustainability of an urban space as market places by
    - providing protection
    - Assigning officials as judges and tax collectors
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Socio-political administration in the making of urban spaces

- Provision of legal framework which influenced the formation of urban spaces
  
  ➢ Legal documents guiding royal activities and procedures of ceremonies through the book of “Serate Geber” or “Serate Mengist”
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Socio-political administration in the making of urban spaces

Enclosures of royal camp and the gates as provided by Ser'ata Mengist

Source: Adopted from Kropp (1988:232)
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Socio-political administration in the making of urban spaces

The camp of Minlik II during Adwa expedition
Source: Adopted from Guébré Sellassié in Pankhurst (1966)
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Role of Socio-political administration in the making of urban spaces

Ras Hailu Sefer in 1930s in Adet
Source: Griaul in Pankhurst (1966)
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Socio-political administration in the making of urban spaces

Addis Ababa in 1897

Source: Adopted from Gleichen in Pankhurst (1966)
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Socio-political administration in the making of urban spaces

- A complex system of land administration
  - About 101 different tenure types establishing a complex system of land ownership
  - Decentralised land administration
    - Informal land development in formal occupation of land
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Transformation of urban spaces and transcending meanings

- Traditional urban settlements and their urban spaces are a result of negotiation process between formal and informal institutions and within the informal once.

- Trade and market place are a good example for this process
  - Informal process:
    - Allocation of space
    - Setting up market days
  - Formal process:
    - Tax collection
    - Conflict management (formally assigned offices within informal process)
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Transformation of urban spaces and transcending meanings

ECA Area redevelopment project, 2010
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Transformation of urban spaces and transcending meanings

Haile Gebreselasie Road, 2010
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Transformation of urban spaces and transcending meanings

Addis Ketema Sub City, 2008
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Transformation of urban spaces and transcending meanings

Bole Sub City, 2008
Thanks!