GLOBAL CITY
LOCAL IDENTITY?

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RETHINKING TANZANIA’S CAPITAL

THE NEW TOWN OF DODOMA AS A PRODUCT OF GLOBAL POLITICS AND CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES¹

Sophie van Ginneken

“We have to take advantage of the opportunity to make Dodoma a good place in which to live and work, and to bring up children as good Tanzanians. The town must be integrated as a society as a whole, it must be neither an ivory tower, nor a new version of our existing towns. It must draw upon the lessons of other specially built cities throughout the world, but it must not be a copy of any of them. Dodoma must be a town which is built in simple style but with buildings which reflect the light, air and space of Africa.”

President J.K. Nyerere in a foreword to the National Capital Master Plan Dodoma, May 1976.
In 1973, a good decade after independence, the Tanzanian Government made an official start to relocate the nation’s capital from Dar es Salaam to Dodoma. As an alternative to the former colonial capital, the newly designed town was destined to embody President Julius Nyerere’s ideology of African Socialism, Ujamaa. In the midst of the arid, underdeveloped region of the country Nyerere’s “city of self reliance” was to rise. The reasons for and consequences of this highly ambitious and costly endeavour – creating a capital city from scratch – have been widely debated. Tanzania, like other newly independent nations faced both criticism and praise for the boldness of its venture. Less discussed, however, is the relationship between the urban design by a Canadian firm Project Planning Associates Ltd (PPAL), and Nyerere’s ideology behind it. In fact, there is an enormous discrepancy between the indigenous, socialist ideas for this symbolic act, a post-independence city; and the way these ideas have been translated into a rather generic ‘New Town’ design, reflecting Western planning ideals and differing little from the average American suburb.

This article addresses the following questions: How precisely did Nyerere’s vision for an ideal rural socialist city relate to the actual design for it? And, secondly, what is the current impact of the Canadian master plan on the built city of today? In short, how does Dodoma’s planning history relate to the real city, lived by its inhabitants? These are relevant questions as still the 1976 master plan has considerable impact on Dodoma’s city planning, even though the political and economic context of today, in which the city faces several challenges (such as housing, infrastructural and sanitation problems), is completely different than forty years ago.

The Idea for a New City

Based on equality and collective rural life, Ujamaa referred to traditional African values and way of life. Ujamaa, meaning ‘brotherhood’ in Swahili, was the concept introduced by President Julius Nyerere (1922-1999) that formed the basis of his social and economic development policies for the country that gained independence from Britain under his leadership in 1961. In his prominent statement for African Socialism, the famous Arusha Declaration (1967), Nyerere imagined a modernisation
of the country by strengthening indigenous values, thereby achieving economic
self-sufficiency. An important physical part of the brand new policy was a rural
resettlement programme: all Tanzanians were to be moved into newly established
Ujamaa villages, evenly scattered throughout the country. Essentially, the already
existing informal system within the lowest possible unit – a group of people farming
and living together – was raised to national level as the cornerstone of Tanzanian
society. In the years following the Arusha Declaration, this idea was officially
formalized as a ‘ten-cell housing unit’, a group of ten houses around communal land.
The ten-cell unit (or TANU unit, referring to, what was at the time, the nation’s one
and only political party) thus became the basis for newly established Ujamaa villages.²
Nyerere’s socialist policy – he himself called it ‘a belief’ – was of great originality
and, together with his charismatic personality and modest lifestyle, gained enormous
popularity throughout the world. As a former teacher, he was nicknamed Mwalimu
(teacher in Swahili) and considered a man of great wisdom and intellect. Claiming that
Tanzanian culture had both ingredients of socialism and democracy, he was admired
and befriended by almost every leader in the world, both from the Eastern and Western
blocks.³ During the Cold War, his clearly expressed non-alignment turned out to
be a fruitful policy, keeping both East and West as close partners while building his
nation. He was seen with Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro as well as John F. Kennedy and
Queen Elizabeth; he appeared on the cover of Time Magazine, and wore his favourite
Mao tunic at many of his public appearances. Although he was blamed by the West
for having closer ties with communist leaders, he continued denying communist
allegiances, rather claiming something new and in-between: a ‘communitary’
approach.⁴ In acting so, it must have looked like as if he were emitting a new form of
world faith and energy, standing far above a global conflict.
Nevertheless, a certain tendency towards communism is unmistakably present in his
plans for the nation as well as for his new capital city. Most revealing in this respect was
his dictatorial idea of mobilising the entire population into collective villages, holding
striking parallels with Mao’s megalomaniac resettlement programmes for communist
China in the late 1950s and 1960s. An important difference with Mao’s regime
however (apart from having agricultural instead of industrial purposes), at least in the
beginning, was that Ujamaa villages were to be built and operated on a voluntary basis. Nyerere strongly believed that this was the only way to make the villages successful. The idea was that the success of the first Ujamaa villages would automatically lead to others. Later on, when this relaxed policy turned out to proceed too slowly; living in an Ujamaa village became an official order, and no longer a choice. During the 1970s tens of thousands of people were removed from their homes and forced into newly planned Ujamaa villages.

Following the national policy of the past decade, Dodoma was to be the centrepiece of the Ujamaa Villagization Programme, the new capital city envisioned as a supersized Ujamaa village. The decision was made in 1973, precisely the same year Nyerere imposed his gigantic artificial resettlement programme. Naturally, the creation of a new capital city was a chance to break away from the old capital established under colonial rule and give shape to a new national identity. Embodying Ujamaa on a national scale, Dodoma was to be the world’s first rural city: a man-centred city instead of a monumental one, a low density instead of a high-rise city, based on agriculture as its principal economy and collective life, and inhabited by farmers instead of townsmen. In fact an ‘anti-city’, this unique town was to become the symbol of Tanzania’s social and cultural values. Just as in the villages, the ten-cell housing unit was the organising principle for the design of the capital, reflecting the idea of the extended family as a self-reliant social, economical and political unit. Beginning with realising self-reliance on the level of the family (i.e. ten-cell unit), it was thought that this would, step by step, in a bottom up fashion, lead to the self-reliance of the entire community, then the entire city, followed by the entire region and, ultimately, to a self-reliant nation.

The Plan

One of the reasons for choosing Dodoma as the location for the new capital was that it was in the middle of the country, a neutral site at the crossroads of two national routes. The strategic location meant that the largest possible part of a rural population could be served, which of course had never been the case for Dar es Salaam. An already
existing settlement offered a useful starting point for the new capital. At that time, Dodoma counted 44,000 inhabitants, most of them Wagogo people, mixed with some Indians and a few Europeans; remnants from the colonial period. When the idea of a new capital was launched, Nyerere immediately set up two government bodies to build the city: the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and a supervisory Ministry of Capital Development (MCD), in which Nyerere himself was closely involved. With the idea for a rural socialist city, CDA invited several overseas planning offices to make proposals, of which the Canadian firm Project Planning Associates Ltd (PPAL) was chosen to make the master plan. One year later, a conceptual master plan was approved, and in July 1976, not even three years after the official kick off, construction of the new capital began.

The guidelines for the Dodoma Master Plan were thus that the new capital would be ‘man-centred’, and built in a series of compact units of ‘urban villages’ where human contact and communication could be preserved, while simultaneously providing generous open spaces. To cite Nyerere there was “no need for ostentatious projects like skyscrapers and super highways; the city would be a home and not a monument.” Within a year, PPAL prepared the master plan, carrying out extensive surveys concerning geographical, climatological, urban, architectural, and sociological matters. The amount of work and research that was done in such a brief period is impressive. Not only did the planning consultants map local sociological patterns, classify the various tribes, as well as their housing types and economies – they also categorised existing city models throughout the world. The total Master Plan comprises nine volumes, with more than a thousand pages of text, design proposals, and a vast amount of surveys, analyses and diagrams. By conducting such extensive research, PPAL
attempted to grasp the identity of Tanzania, as well as local spirit, to incorporate these into what was to become a unique urban design. At least, that was the intention. However, despite the planners’ sincere intentions to make a unique and rural city, the master plan shows remarkable parallels with ‘New Towns’ – planned cities – everywhere in the world, especially Western ones. Characteristic for these ‘Garden Cities’ or ‘New Town’ models, as they are also referred to, are the hierarchical setup, the clustering of neighbourhoods, a zoning of functions, traffic and green space. These features go back to Ebenezer Howards Garden City model, developed at the end of the 19th century, combined with modernist planning principles by which they have been adapted throughout the 20th century. In the master plan for Dodoma, all these characteristics are clearly shown. Its physical layout is a series of connected communities, hierarchically structuring the city into different centres. The ‘A’ centre was to be the National Capital Centre, a gigantic new ‘mall’ to be placed on a new site, southeast of the city centre. On a lower level, the ‘B’ centres were programmed as the industrial cores, sited as separate hubs in each corner of the new city. On the residential level, the ‘C’ centres were to be the hearts of the communities, leaving on the most elementary level the ‘D’ centres as the ten-cell units. Each community was to be divided into four neighbourhood units, ‘urban villages’, consisting of numerous ‘D’ centres. A free bus lane was projected as to link all communities together by a public transport chain. Thus the heart of each community was the bus station, together with most facilities such as a market, shops, and small industries. In addition, each urban village would have its own collective amenities such as primary schools, clinics, shops, and places of worship. Next to a bus system, a vehicular road network was designed, should car ownership grow in the future. The idea of a model community, to be repeated broadly in the same physical pattern as a ‘stamp’ over and over again, provided the city the ability to expand in the future as much as needed. As a first stage expansion, ten communities directly around the old city centre were to be realised within ten years. Aiming at a total of 350,000 people by the year 2000, an expansion to the east was projected, repeated in the same formula of chained communities, and doubling the city in size. The new National Capital Centre (the ‘A’ centre) was projected as the commercial and civic hub as well as for the
ministries. On a vacant new site, on the other side of the railway, the new city centre was to be disconnected from the old city centre. However, the political heart of the new city, i.e. the parliament and the political (TANU) headquarters, were to be located possibly even further away, as an autonomous ‘centre’ on Chimwaga Hill, some eight kilometres east from the old city. This separation between people and government may seem to be a strange decision: not only is it opposite to the goal of a ‘man-centred city’, it also implied a strict division of the new city into different parts: living, working, recreation, and government were to be completely disconnected.

The most peculiar aspect of the master plan however, is that it lacks the spirit of a rural city. As the design for Dodoma gained form, it became clear that there was not much room for communal rural grounds in the urban villages. Rural plots called shambas, often seen in traditional Wagogo homesteads (and later in Ujamaa Villages), would in the case of a capital city imply extensive open spaces, which would eventually lead to a city that was simply too large and hence, too expensive to build. As a result, the shambas, once destined to be the ‘DNA’ of the new city, were finally given a secondary position, grouped as leftover and unspecified spaces along the edges of the communities (and in reality would never be realised). All the more striking
is that, instead, a lot of design energy was put into an extensive vehicular network accommodating individual car use, separated from a free bus lane by bridges and overpasses. At the same time, the communal spaces within the ten-cell units were designated as car parking. With these features, Dodoma was given form not as a socialist city, but rather as a middle of the road suburban landscape based on (Western) individualistic values, such as comfort, efficiency, and a pleasant family life.

The Clash of Two Opposing Ideologies

The commission to PPAL to design the world’s first rural socialist capital was a remarkable one. Not only is it questionable why foreign planners were asked to design something as highly symbolic as a capital city for a newly independent state; it is also notable that PPAL had already designed the master plan for Dar es Salaam, six years earlier (in 1967). According to authors Peter Siebolds and Florian Steinberg, this master plan was subject to a critical assessment in Tanzania as it didn’t reflect socialist ideals (keeping alive the segregation of the city according to income) and had to be cancelled because of its expensive investment projects. But that aside (this plan was never fully implemented), the crucial point here is that in fact very Western, in a way capitalist, planning ideals were seen as adequate tools to give shape to exactly the opposite: a socialist city. How then is it possible that Nyerere invited the same office to design his socialist capital city and, more relevantly, stated that the master plan for Dodoma was “consistent with the ideology of Tanzania”?10
The answer lies perhaps in the universal rhetoric typical for modernist plans. The hierarchical setup, so characteristic to 'New Towns’, seemed to match perfectly the political structure inherent to the ten-cell (TANU) system. Even so, the modernist idea of an open space system together with ‘green belts’ (here: the shambas) seemed to be a perfect model to shape a rural city. This is probably why, on a conceptual level, the ‘New Town’ model seemed to fit with Ujamaa. In fact, the generic aspects of modernism are exactly the reason why this model is used and reused so widely, in all contexts imaginable. Still, the very Western, capitalist features of the Dodoma plan cannot be ignored. To name a few, the carefully branched suburban road network with its curvilinear shapes (when private car ownership was not in line with socialism), the importance of parking places and the stress on pleasant family life and recreation, instead of communal farming, and the differentiation of housing typologies according to income. These ‘individualistic’ aspects are more common to the ‘American Dream’ than to an indigenous Tanzanian way of living.

If we look closer at PPAL’s background, the technical, model-based approach in Dodoma’s design is better understood. The office was led by Canada’s modernist planner Macklin Hancock (1925-2010), who had gained fame after building Canada’s first ‘New Town’, Don Mills, in the 1950s. Trained at Harvard under Walter Gropius, he had been strongly influenced by town planning models and modernist principles. He knew by heart the Radburn design (1929) near New Jersey – America’s first planned community and generally regarded as the introduction of the Garden City model into the U.S. – as well as Clarence Perry’s invention of the neighbourhood unit (both highly influential experiments for the building of ‘New Towns’ worldwide). What Hancock actually did, was import the Garden City into Canada, and then re-export it to other countries of the world, among them Tanzania. Maybe even more than an urbanist, Hancock was an excellent salesman, selling his multipurpose urban template in a successful way all over the world. However sincerely interested in each local context, it appears as if the consultants looked for a framework in which their own model could fit.

Besides the modern, capitalist roots of the town plan, global influences in the Dodoma planning process go even further. Directly after the capital city project was launched,
Nyerere and his CDA officials undertook many inspirational field trips to newly built capital cities, including Canberra (Australia), Islamabad (Pakistan), and Chandigarh (India), as well as to ‘New Towns’ like Runcorn (UK) and Columbia (USA) – all of which have been designed by Western modernist planners. During their excursions, CDA did not look only at the physical setup of cities, but also into management, financial, and administrative aspects of town planning. Partly because of this, and thanks to PPAL’s worldwide network, the capital project started to attract all kinds of architects, urbanists, and theoreticians, who flew to Dodoma like bees to honey. James Rouse, the planner of Columbia (USA), was asked to share his ideas on the master plan for Dodoma; architect James Rossant, the planner of Reston (USA), was commissioned to produce the detailed plan for the National Capital Centre. On top of all this ‘overseas assistance’, an international panel of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) settled in Dodoma to assist the planning process, this time unsolicited. In their turn, UNEP hired additional planners and consultants to review on urban design and architectural matters. It is not quite clear to me if this was on the government’s initiative, or on UNEP’s. But it is clear that the globalised sphere, in which the making of this ‘New Town’ gained form, is far-reaching. Not to speak of the exorbitant amounts of money from other countries, including considerable donations from Western countries as well as from the East. Especially in the case of what was to become a self-reliant, rural, and above all a unique and authentic city, the working method for the building of Dodoma was at complete odds with the goals Nyerere wanted to reach. The geopolitical gravitation field, in which Dodoma attracted interest, experts, and money from all over the world, can be better understood within the context of Cold War politics. In this period, urban planning was used by both East and West as an export product, in their competition for third world countries to enlarge their influential spheres. Newly independent African states formed, often as neutral grounds, and they became an interesting target for both superpowers. As architectural historian Michelle Provoost argues, urban planning in this context turned out to be a powerful instrument in Cold War politics, and the export of planning functioned as a means of cultural instead of political colonisation. In considering this specific era, we can see the Tanzanian capital project as a striking representative of the ambiguity
between two conflicting worlds with opposite ideologies, which is reflected in its design: a technical, ‘capitalist’ translation of what was planned to become exactly the opposite: a socialist city. The ideology of Ujamaa, which shows parallels with Chinese land reform plans, stands in sharp contrast to the suburban character of the Canadian master plan. In this way the Dodoma planning process can be understood as reflecting a global conflict and, as a result, showing a clash between global city references and local culture.

The Plan and the City

What is the effect of all this global concern for the city of today? To date, the overall structure of the master plan (mostly its infrastructural system) is vaguely visible as a faint imprint onto the existing city fabric. Mostly from an infrastructural point of view, the master plan has actually added something positive to the city, especially in terms of infrastructure. However looking more closely, most of the master plan has never been realised. Before construction of the city was well underway, the entire nation faced bad economic times, and saw large sums of money spent on the war with Uganda. At the beginning of the 1980s the Dodoma project was abandoned, as was the entire Ujamaa Villagization Programme. The party headquarters on Parliament Hill were barely finished when the paving of the free bus lane stopped abruptly, as was the construction of Kikuyu, Dodoma’s model community. The National Capital Centre never saw the light of day. Still, the ‘Canadian’ street pattern is clearly visible today in the residential areas Area ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, and ‘D’ – as these neighbourhood units are still prosaically named – just north of the city centre. Apart from the community centres and green spaces, they have been realised according to plan. Today, the Western ‘prototype houses’ are in a run-down state, cul-de-sacs are mostly empty, with some parked cars every now and then. Given the harsh character of the soil, Dodoma doesn’t seem to be the most suitable place for intensive rural production. Shortly after the capital city project stopped, Nyerere resigned in 1985 as president of the nation. From that moment, his successor Ali Hassan Mwinyi undertook the first steps towards a free market economy. In the meantime, Dodoma grew steadily,
following an intrinsic logic. While the designated site for the National Capital Centre remained empty for a long time, a second ‘city centre’ containing the Bunge (Parliament Building), and a Business School gained form, on a more ‘natural’ site next to the old centre (originally designated for industry). Along the streets, close to the markets, numerous dukas (small shops) have settled, selling fruits, beans, or nuts, cultivated mostly outside the city. In the residential areas hairdressers, bars and pharmacies are scattered, adding another layer to its planned basis. New houses are built on free plots; entirely new neighbourhoods are taking shape next to the existing ones, replacing former squatter settlements. This altogether leads to a layered city, showing an indistinct mix of long existing Swahili houses, some colonial buildings, occasionally mixed with remnants of the Canadian plan and newly (sometimes exotically) designed institutions. Next to the older St John’s University in Kikuyu, an entirely new university complex is taking shape on the former Parliament Hill, incorporating the old TANU Headquarters as principal lecture hall. In 2007, the current president, Jakaya Kikwete, decided to realise a university of international importance in Dodoma, as being the most prominent environment for higher education in Tanzania. When fully operational, the University of Dodoma (UDOM) aims to have 40,000 students in a variety of academic disciplines. This is more than double the present size of the University of Dar es Salaam. To date, most governmental functions are still based in Dar es Salaam, and few believe the city will ever get the status of a real capital. However, with a current total population of more than 400,000 people, the city – at least in size – is close to living up to Nyerere’s expectations. New universities and schools triggered the city’s natural growth and brought new economies, people and facilities. These current developments are leading to a city that has outgrown its original blueprint, performing as a pleasant and lively environment for a diversity of people and cultures. At the same time however, most of these people live in unplanned settlements, many of them without good access to water and sanitation. This informal pattern is taking shape along a north-south axis, i.e. in exactly the opposite direction as was projected by the master plan, mostly because this is where relatively good roads and water supply are located. Nevertheless, the internal road systems in these residential neighbourhoods have never
been paved, and neither are the connections between these neighbourhoods. This is the city we found in the past few years (2009-2011), during visits within the framework of a larger research into ‘New Towns’, initiated by Crimson Architectural Historians.\(^{16}\) During these visits, the current state of the town was explored, as were its future prospects. This is when we learned to our surprise that still today, the Capital Development Authority is developing the city according to PPAL’s master plan. Although slightly amended, the main concept of the master plan – a series of connected communities complemented with detached cores for different functions – seems neatly intact. Even the construction of the gigantic and peripherally located National Capital Centre still figures as a realistic building project, one of the highlights projected for the near future. At the moment, the National Bank of Tanzania and the Ministry of Finance are being built here.\(^{17}\) Characteristic to the actualised plan is the planning of new, peripherally located cores. In a way just like the Canadians proposed almost forty years ago, these separate cores are to be autonomous centres for learning (the university town), governance (parliament town), working (industrial centres), business (the National Capital Centre) and living (the communities). Lastly, an overseas planning consultancy has been involved for revising the master plan. The South Korean engineering company SAMAN Corporation is expected to present their proposals before the end of this year (2012). Even more than the actual Canadian master plan, it seems that its mentality of hard-core top-down planning is still alive, perhaps even livelier than ever. From this point of view, the master plan seems to have left its mark deeply in the minds of Dodoma’s city authorities.

It feels a bit out of place to criticise these current plans, while at the same time being a foreigner myself, thus always operating from a distance. Still, the question arises: how should one interpret these plans? Does today’s strict and model-based approach justify the real identity of this city, which in the meantime has become far more diversified – and more complicated – than the original model? Or is it an attempt to rectify the failure of the previous ‘New Town’ plans by a new, even more ambitious one? By planning separate, autonomous centres for government, education, living and working, it appears that the real city with its pleasant atmosphere and often bad living conditions is neglected in favour of entirely new and inevitably desolate areas, far away
from the older and lively neighbourhoods. Given the reality of a largely informal city, most dwellings built in a fairly compact manner close to the city centre, the master plan is clearly obsolete, and denying the existing complexity of the city and the needs of its inhabitants. Moreover, the idea of projecting several different centres, most of them located far from the city centre, is hard to understand given the bad quality of the infrastructural network. It is not difficult to predict that these places (university campus, national capital centre, the government town) will be out of reach for a vast majority of people, since few own a car.

The plan and the city are in fact two completely different matters, the future concept not meeting the actual realities of the existing situation. It therefore seems useful and appropriate to question whether the 1976 master plan needs serious reconsideration. How well off is the true and complex development of the city with a global growth model? And to what extent are foreign consultants with their well-intentioned plans really able to justify the local qualities and needs of this city? Fifty years after independence, it is time that Tanzania finally seizes the opportunity to fully shake off global reference points and to rely on its own uniqueness and expertise.
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2. Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), of which Nyerere was the leader and founder. In 1977, TANU merged with the Afro Shirazi party (ASP) from Zanzibar, forming Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). To date, CCM is the largest party in the Tanzanian government.


5. The other two offices were Doxiadis Associates International from Greece, and Engineering Consulting Firms Association from Japan. A fourth company, Planning and Development Consultants from Germany, provided an unsolicited proposal.


8. Interview by the author with Matthias Nuss, project architect of the master plan of Dodoma, d.d. 02-07-2009, Darmstadt, Germany.


11. Interview by the author with Matthias Nuss, project architect of the master plan of Dodoma, d.d. 02-07-2009, Darmstadt, Germany.


16. The research project ‘New Towns on the Cold War Frontier’ (in which the author is involved) is a project initiated and conducted by the Dutch firm Crimson Architectural Historians (Rotterdam). Dodoma is involved as one of 20 case studies. Publication forthcoming in 2013. For more information see www.crimsonweb.org

17. Interviews with the Capital Development Authority on 19 November 2009 and 11 October 2011. Construction of the National Capital Centre was witnessed in October 2011.