20 Street vendors and planning paradigms

Amin Y. Kamete

Not being a fan of theories, approaches and prescriptions that reek of universalism, I will not pontificate about prescriptions on specific ways in which planning theories and approaches can be modified to benefit street vendors everywhere. Instead, this chapter will raise questions and discuss issues that might point towards *some* building blocks of such modifications.

What is not working?

At the risk of oversimplification, it is fair to state that planning theories and approaches have been harsh to street vendors because of the *ideals* they espouse, the *methods* they adopt, and the *scale* at which they are deployed (see Figure 20.1).

In terms of the ideals – defined here as standards of perfection or principles to be aimed at – it has often been noted that order, improvement and progress towards western-inspired modern cities are some of planning's primary obsessions. The single-minded quest for these ideals directly influences the methods adopted to attain them. Positivism, which emphasises empirical data and scientific methods, is the key ingredient influencing these methods. This is encapsulated in the process driven by the planning paradigm that has stubbornly refused to disappear completely, namely, rational comprehensive planning (RCP).
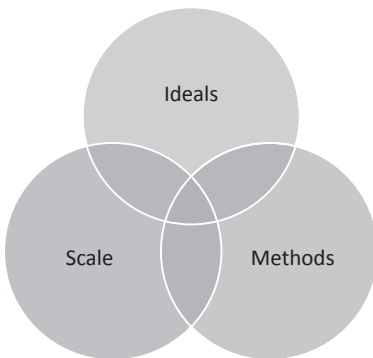

Figure 20.1 What is not working with current theories and approaches?

Then there is scale. Positivism tends to simultaneously universalise approaches, depoliticise contexts and technicalise solutions to problems. Modernist planning, as reflected in the RCP, is no exception. Spatially, because of the belief in the universal applicability of scientific solutions and methods, we see this being applied at various administrative and spatial scales, with lower administrative levels being expected to conform to what is prescribed by the levels above them. Thus, we see planning being deployed at national, regional, urban, local and "sub-local" scales, with the lower tiers being expected to faithfully reflect – or at least not conflict with – the visions and dreams espoused by the spatial and administrative levels above them. Given this, it is not surprising that the visions and dreams that cascade down the hierarchy are those of the dominant groups – the economic and power elite who control the state-level bureaucracy responsible for producing the higher-level plans.

The grand result of the intertwining of ideals, methods and scale is the spawning of a retinue of exclusionary knowledges and practices that effectively marginalise some livelihood practices. People who cannot live up to the ideals, are perceived as threats, nuisances or misfits, and are dismissed as "ignorant". Because these people operate at local and sub-local scales, they also fall victim to top-down (national to local and bureaucrat to public) planning and design approaches that marginalise them. This, of course, refers to modernist planning, which, despite some tweaking and upheavals, refuses to disappear.

So, what exactly is wrong with modernist planning? In my research in urban Zimbabwe, I have always found out that it all comes down to what Sandercock (2003) terms "pillars of modernist planning" which emphasise *rational*, *comprehensive* and *science-based* planning while amplifying *state-directed futures* and the *public interest*. I have also discovered that it is not all about modernist planning. I have discussed this elsewhere (Kamete 2013). I will focus on some important impediments generated by these pillars, namely, the organisation of planning, auto-exclusion, excluding the excluders, and pernicious assimilation. The effect of these pillars and the impediments they spawn is that street vendors are excluded, marginalised and suppressed. It is on these effects and impediments that attempts to modify planning and design theories and approaches should focus.

Modifications to planning theory and approaches?

The tyranny of opposites

No grand solutions will be attempted here, as I do not believe in these. But neither do I dismiss attempts at positive and normative planning theory. There is value in abstraction and idealism. However, I think there is a tendency to focus on generating and pursuing "opposites" to dominant theories, practices and approaches. This is not very helpful; this should be done in conjunction with a more radical and somewhat uncomfortable route. When it comes to planning theories and approaches, the starting point should not only be about generating

opposites or friendlier practices and approaches. Some energy should be directed at raising unsettling questions to which we might have no answers.

Some building blocks for modifying theory and approaches

What is the danger to street vendors in current practices?

I have argued elsewhere that the real danger to informality is the state's modernist rationality (Kamete 2017a). In one of his metaphors, Bauman describes the modern nation state as the "gardening" state (Bauman 1993). This explains the state's proclivity for order, progress, well-being and betterment (Scott 1998). The gardening state is the epitome of "solid modernity" (Bauman 1991) which, as Jacobsen and Marshman (2008) assert, is "all about 'cultivation', planning and design" to improve and speed up the process of western-inspired modernisation. For street vendors, the danger of the gardening state lies in its "separation" practices and the ascription and denying of value to certain spatial practices and groups. In this "garden", people deemed to have value as citizens are nurtured as "good plants" whereas those seen as having no value are treated as "weeds" – useless social undesirables (Bauman 1991). There is no prize for guessing where street vendors are placed in this separation.

Rethinking dreaming and the organisation of planning

What does this have to do with planning? The problem comes down to *dreaming*. There is a danger in coming up with collective templates, be they dreams, visions or futures. Yet this is what planning is all about. Plans are collective dreams. But then, dreams are about destinations. The problem here is that you cannot talk about a destination without identifying obstacles and threats in your path. This is where the second threat comes in: the identification and designation of "good plants" and "useless weeds" – good citizens and dangerous outlaws. So, any planning that entails creating desired futures is potentially exclusionary and/or dangerous to people such as street vendors, who do not fit into or cannot live up to the dreams and visions of the politically and economically dominant groups. It is exclusionary because it inevitably creates undesirables, rejects and leftovers; it is dangerous because it constitutes some groups as threats and nuisances. So, the question for planning theory and research is: *Should we, as a collectivity, dream at all?*

Rethinking development planning

This is something that strikes at the very heart of "development planning" or "forward planning", which is a key component in the organisation of planning. Seen this way, the question can be rephrased as: *Should society plan at all?* My view is that it should. Which is where the real challenge for planning theories and approaches lies. The challenge is to come up with a different kind of dream-

ing *where the dominant vision does not generate a nightmare* for those whose dreams do not see the light of day or are not articulated, captured, sought or acknowledged in the official plan. In other words, planning theory should come up with a way of reconciling the dreams of different strata of society and a way of dreaming that does not instinctively divide people into "good plants" and "useless weeds". It should explore a kind of planning where the Other's failure to conform is seen not as a *threat* to be eliminated or a *pathology* to be eradicated, cured or excluded, but rather a reflection of diversity of dreams and visions or indeed of deficiency in the official plan, and therefore a challenge to be confronted and addressed.

Properly theorising development management

Development management is the "policing" arm of planning where the dream is meant to be protected and realised. It consists of development control and planning enforcement. This practice is severely under-theorised in planning scholarship. Planning scholarship relies on perspectives from other disciplines to illuminate it. While planning theory has done well in importing, internalising and deploying knowledge from other disciplines in development planning, there is not much on development management. In the absence of research, development control remains a legalistic, depoliticised and technicalised endeavour. This makes it "inaccessible" or even hostile to street vendors who, by the time development kicks in are classified as hostile deviants and threats. This is so because, according to the official plan, where vendors operate they are "out of place" – deviants who pay no heed to planning diktats on the occupation and use of land.

The same applies to planning enforcement which is the state's tool for handling things, people and activities deemed to be violating planning controls. Planning enforcement is characterised by "urban cleansing" through evictions and demolition. Planning theory and research need to expand to this technicalised and depoliticised arena. Research should go beyond describing and critiquing urban clean-up campaigns. It should also determine the extent to which planning systems and practices are the creators of the "problems" that they now purport to resolve and how these systems and practices could be made to work for street vendors. The challenge is to come up with perspectives and prescriptions that bring politics and context into this arena. Abandoning this important practice in the technicist and legalist realm partially explains the persistence of urban clean-up operations as the favoured response to "spatial unruliness" (Kamete 2008).

Addressing the under-theorisation of space and place

Another explanation for the dominance of technicalism and legalism in development management is the under-theorisation of space and place in planning theory. Disciplines such as social theory, urban geography and urban sociology have yielded deep insights into the social production of space and the imbrication

of power therein. Critical thinkers such as Lefebvre, Foucault and de Certeau have offered rich insights into the contestability and "power-laden-ness" of space and place. Some planning scholars have built on this line of reasoning and produced thought-provoking reflections and analysis on public space and place. This should be expected to have an impact on planning and design approaches leading to a broadening of practices such as development management beyond their present technicist and legalist confines. In theory, this should have led to a democratisation and radicalisation of planning practice beyond public participation and consultation. Arguably, this could lead to the integration of street vendors into urban plans and landscapes. There is need for serious research on why theories of space and place remain marginalised in planning scholarship and how these can be integrated into planning thought, and thence practice.

Dealing with "auto-exclusion"

Planning theory and approaches recognise the importance of involving all stakeholders in planning. The popularity, and in some countries, the legislation of public participation, public consultation and collaborative planning stand as testimony that planning theory and approaches have taken inclusivity on board. This should be good news for street vendors. However, in many contexts, research shows that participation is not as widespread as would be anticipated. The blame cannot exclusively be attributed to planning systems and practices. The woeful rate of participation is partly a result of "auto-exclusion" or self-exclusion. Marginalised groups such as street vendors have been known to stay away from public consultations. They are also known to "exclude the excluders", by "locking out" planners and other bureaucrats (Kamete 2007b). This is unfortunate because it normally happens during that crucial element of the planning system, development planning, which, as shown above, is where the plans, policies and strategies are conceived, made and adopted. When development control and planning enforcement come to haunt them, street vendors, as one planner told me during my research in Zimbabwe, "cannot cry foul and say they were excluded, when it is they who voluntarily and unwisely boycotted the process".

The challenge for planning theory and practice is not to be obsessed solely with widening participation within the current frameworks and terms of engagement. It should also be concerned with understanding and tackling the dilemmas of auto-exclusion. Planning research can contribute to this by, among other things, gaining deeper insights into the phenomenon of auto-exclusion in planning and (re)interrogating the very concept of public participation and public consultation.

Acknowledging and addressing the dangers of "pernicious assimilation"

The brief for this part refers to modifying planning theory and approaches "to integrate street vendors into urban plans and landscapes". Elsewhere, I have argued that planning theory and approaches should raise uncomfortable questions about "integration" (Kamete 2017b). I have tackled what I term "pernicious assimilation" (ibid.). This exposes the dark side of integration or inclusion. Not all mainstreaming, integration or inclusion is good for street vendors. Some integration practices that emphasise formalisation amount to a sinister "forced conversion" (Kamete 2013). This entails railroading street vendors into making crippling Faustian bargains that strip away the very soul of informality.

They are forced to shed offending traits of informality and take on the favoured traits of formality. What we need is planning theory that does not blindly accept integration or mainstreaming as the panaceas for all the problems faced by street vendors. Planning theory needs to muddy the waters by exposing what amounts to pernicious assimilation. It needs to explore alternatives that truly work for marginalised groups. More critical research is needed into practices of integration in specific contexts to determine their impact on street vendors, to capture the vendors' perspectives, and document their experiences. This could help re-evaluate current practices and come up with integration practices that are not insidiously pernicious.

Conclusion

As indicated above, I am not enamoured by grand universalist prescriptions. I am also not convinced that generating opposites to what is not working is the best way to go forward. What we need are not ready-made modifications to planning and design theory and approaches. Our effort should be expended on developing building blocks that can be adapted to different times and contexts.