

International Conference on

AFRICA'S MOBILITY STRUGGLES

Theme *Infrastructuring (Im)mobilities: Technologies of restraint and fluidity in Africa's mobility struggles*

Venue ACC Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

Date 22nd and 23rd February 2023

Infrastructuring (Im)mobilities

There is a growing debate on the subject of the “infrastructure turn” in tandem with widespread mobility struggles in relation to the African continent. With mobility increasingly being linked to possibilities of better life, inadequacy of infrastructures remains one of Africa's biggest challenges to be productively mobile (Calderón, 2009; Dodson, 2017; Calderón, Cantú and Chuhan-Pole, 2018). Africa's predominantly youthful population views the prospects of better life by way of being mobile, with imaginations that better paying jobs and competitive education can only be sought far away from “home”. Mobility is not only a resource and a possibility, it has become the moral imperative of a globalized world (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006; Sheller, 2018): people, things, ideas, policies, technologies, shall always move.

However, for Africa, the will and injunctions to be on the move have increasingly become constrained either by poor infrastructure networks, or by deliberate technologies of restraint that are meant to either keep everyone where they are, or structure the way they move from one point to another (Bærenholdt, 2013; Sheller, 2016). The encounter between mobilities and the involuntary forces that act against or enable some of these mobilities produces multidimensional mobility struggles. The theme of this conference is inspired by two sets of realities. On the one hand, the reality of increasing visions and interests to get Africa on-the-move (OECD/ACET, 2020; Olney, 2020). On the other hand, the reality of widespread concrete interventions not just to achieve these visions—namely; investing in (among others things) mobility-infrastructures, widely considered to be the missing ingredient in its bid to stabilize its development “pulse” (Calderón, 2009; World Bank, 2017; Calderón, Cantú and Chuhan-Pole, 2018); but also other visions of keeping Africans immobile.

The keynote and panels presentations and discussions at this conference will explore the relations between mega infrastructure projects and (im)-mobilities by interrogating the ways in which such projects are envisioned, interpreted and realised in different contexts. As a step towards the problematization and conceptualization of Africa's mobility struggles, the conveners frame infrastructures as *technologies* of both mobilities and immobilities that bring about contextually unique forms of responses, coping strategies and interventions. The

discussions have the potential to enhance an understanding of the continent's struggles to get moving, but also the struggles to build as well as adapt to the critical technological zones (Barry, 2006) that are meant to enhance mobilities.

Having noticed this relatively unproblematized mobility trends and struggles, researchers affiliated to the Research Section "Mobilities" of the Africa Multiple - Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth are organising a conference that will bring together scholars from different disciplines. The objective of the forum is to develop deeper, reflexive inter-/transdisciplinary insights into the practice of infrastructuring (im)mobilities. The focus on Africa is a deliberate entry point to understanding how the continent's desire to entangle in the global contours of productive fluidity is not only supported, but also often met with the ever-advancing technologies of restraint at different scales.

Conference Structure

The conference will be structured in two parts: Part 1 features theoretical discussions and historical perspectives on mobilities and part 2 mainly focuses on presentation of case studies by researchers working on infrastructures and mobilities.

Part 1: Keynote Presentations and discussion

This part features two keynote presentations, followed by discussions of the recent trends in Mobilities studies and how this is entangled with the push for infrastructuring mobilities. The first keynote is to reflect on the concept of Mobilities; and the second to explore the practice of infrastructuring mobilities. The objectives of this part are three-fold: first, it aims at revisiting the concept of Mobilities in light of its multi-disciplinary trajectories over the past decades, and the status of the debate at present. Second, it is intended to explore methodological issues in Mobilities studies, highlighting the present trends and prospects for the future. Third, and most importantly, it aims at drawing synergy between theory and practice, a transdisciplinary approach that is embedded in the Cluster's agenda of reconfiguring African Studies. The keynote presentations and discussions lay the foundation for empirical discussions in part 2.

- The Concept of (Im)mobilities
- Infrastructures and Africa's Mobility Visions in the 21st Century

Part 2. Panel presentations and discussions

Infrastructures are integral constituents in the performance of mobilities. Mobility infrastructures such as roads, railways, airports, bridges, tunnels enhance a structured way of being on the move. At the same time, these infrastructures also restrain movement. For example, one requires passport to check-in to a flight at any airport, but would still have to interface with different technologies of travel validation. A car owner would still require a valid driver's licence to enjoy the convenience and speed that comes with being on the road in a private vessel. Infrastructures that enhance the mobility of some people may hinder the mobility

of others. Borders, fences and surveillance technologies are infrastructures to immobilize people. As a result, utility values of mobility infrastructures are unevenly distributed and accessible. The objective of this part of the workshop is to explore case studies of how (im)mobilities in different parts of the continent are being infrastructured in accordance with the development visions of different countries. This part will feature three panels in the structure outlined below:

Panel 1. Mobility Visions

Papers in this panel specifically aim at exploring visions and imaginations that underpin decision-making processes for individuals, communities and nations to lay the foundation for certain forms of mobilities. The objective of this panel is to develop an understanding of the link that there is between mobility visions and the production of particular infrastructural frameworks for concretising these visions in time and space.

Panel 2. The Production of (im)mobilities

This panel is inspired by the assumption that the idealisation of mobility visions brings about the creation of concrete spaces for performing mobilities. This calls for the development of infrastructures that specifically reflect the desire to achieve these visions. However, while infrastructures achieve certain mobility visions, they also act as technologies of constraint to others. The papers in this panel should feature case studies of contexts in which mobility-infrastructure constrain certain movements as they intend to produce specific kinds of mobilities, networks and interconnections

Panel 3. Mobility Struggles

Mobility visions are often tested by a number of factors that are both global and contextual in nature. Consequentially, the actualisation of these visions interacts with different aspects of the uneven global order of performing and governing mobilities (Bærenholdt, 2013; Sheller, 2016). The politics of mobilities—that is speed, power and convenience—are getting increasingly entwined with global and contextual issues of fundamental importance. At the global level, mobility politics feature issues such as climate change and human rights; migration crisis in the global north; energy (in)security and energy transition. These are interwoven with contextual factors such as drought and famine; poverty and unemployment; resource-scarcity and conflicts; opportunities; the need for economic development and other forms of historico-political factors (Aalders, 2021).

The fragility of infrastructure-led development discourse on the African continent is being tested by the problematic interaction between mobility visions and some of these issues at different levels. The objective of papers in this panel is to highlight the different ways in which Africa is engrossed in struggles to be mobile as well as “keep-in-place” as interactions among infrastructural forces take shape.

Call for Papers

The conference conveners are calling for papers that speak to any of the three objective areas. Presentations that draw on empirical research on topics such as mega infrastructures; migration (border) controls; resources flow; project-induced resettlements; refugee camps; the diaspora; in relation to Africa are especially welcome to this conference.

Outcome

It is our plan that the proceedings of this two-day conference produce a concrete outcome in the form of a publication. We envisage publishing the proceedings as a Special Issue to be titled “Infrastructuring Africa’s (Im)mobilities” in an internationally reputable journal. Such a publication builds on the “Sprint Lectures” initiative by Postdocs in the RS Mobilities, in the way of initiating a debate on the subject of “Africa’s Mobility Struggles”.

Funding

On the basis of merit of the abstracts, funding including flight and accommodation will be provided for selected participants. Due to constraints in our conference budget, we encourage participants to make efforts to solicit funding from alternative sources. Please, indicate against your abstract whether your participation will be financed by your institution.

Interested participants should submit their abstracts by 31st January 2023 to the addresses below:

Dr. Paddy Kinyera: p.kinyera@uni-bayreuth.de

Dr. Jochen Lingelbach jochen.lingelbach@uni-bayreuth.de.

The final workshop programme will be shared with the participants by 10th February 2023.

Further readings

- Aalders, J. T. (2021) 'Building on the ruins of empire: the Uganda Railway and the LAPSSET corridor in Kenya', *Third World Quarterly*, 42(5), pp. 996–1013. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2020.1741345.
- Bærenholdt, O. J. (2013) 'Governmobility: The Powers of Mobility', *Mobilities*, 8(1), pp. 20–34. doi: 10.1080/17450101.2012.747754.
- Barry, A. (2006) 'Technological Zones', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2), pp. 239–253. doi: 10.1177/1368431006063343.
- Calderón, C. (2009) *Infrastructure and Growth in Africa*. WPS 4914.
- Calderón, C., Cantú, C. and Chuhan-Pole, P. (2018) *Infrastructure Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Scorecard*. WPS8425. Washington, DC.
- Dodson, J. (2017) 'The Global Infrastructure Turn and Urban Practice', *Urban Policy and Research*, 35(1), pp. 87–92. doi: 10.1080/08111146.2017.1284036.
- Hannam, K., Sheller, M. and Urry, J. (2006) 'Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings', *Mobilities*, 1(1), pp. 1–22.
- OECD/ACET (2020) *Quality Infrastructure in 21st Century Africa: Prioritising, Accelerating and Scaling up in the Context of PIDA (2021-2030)*.
- Olney, W. W. (2020) *Intra-African Trade*. 20–15.
- Sheller, M. (2016) 'Uneven Mobility Futures: A Foucauldian Approach', *Mobilities*, 11(1), pp. 15–31.
- Sheller, M. (2018) 'Theorising mobility justice', *Tempo Social*, 30(2), pp. 17–34. doi: 10.11606/0103-2070.ts.2018.142763.
- World Bank (2017) *Africa's Pulse: An analysis of issues shaping Africa's Economic future*.