

City profile

City profile: Wa, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The UN-Habitat III has placed secondary cities at the centre of the new urban agenda, given their roles in global development trajectories in the future. Wa, though a small city, is an important growth pole in North-western Ghana. Wa emerged as a trading town in the colonial era and since independence in 1957 has become a key growth centre in the development of North-western Ghana. However, the confluence of environmental vulnerabilities and pre-existing social inequalities resulting from centuries of colonial and post-colonial neglects, have led to increasing contestations and socio-ecological challenges. We profiled Wa through the lens of Southern urbanism and highlight its socio-economic, ecological and spatial development dynamics as an ordinary city of the Global South. The dynamics reflect a disconnection between capital and labour as well as contested resource flows, and these have implications for a transformative and sustainable urban future. Through this profile, postcolonial urban studies of the Global South must reconsider deepening empirical methods and theories in addressing this unique problem-space. A transformative and sustainable urban future of Wa remains counterproductive if postcolonial urban studies do not engage with unique paradigms of the Global South in understanding and planning cities of the South.

1. Introduction

A quick review of city profiles published in this journal between 1985 and 2013 revealed a limited number of studies on small and secondary cities. The limited focus on small and secondary cities is an important knowledge gap given the critical role they will play in the urban growth trajectories of developing countries in the next few decades (de Noronha, 2015). In such cities, little is known about the past or current unique vulnerabilities, development aspirations, challenges, opportunities and their preferences for a sustainable urban future. Achieving 'inclusive' cities (Sustainable Development Goal 11) therefore becomes counterproductive to the UN-Habitat III new urban agenda on secondary cities focus (UN-Habitat, 2016) without significantly projecting such cities in urban policy discourses. In response to this shortfall in urban policy discourse, this review gives a comprehensive profile of Wa City, a small city in north-western Ghana. The profiling covers the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras in the areas of economic, social and spatial transformation. Wa is the capital of the Upper West Region (UWR) which is located in the semi-arid region of Ghana. The population of Wa grew from about 8000 in 1880 (see Wilks, 1989), to 71,340 in 2010 and

about 125,479 as of 2017 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a).

Compared to the natural resource endowments of southern Ghana, Wa is less endowed by virtue of its geographic location in the semi-arid zone. This has shaped the historical geopolitical discourse of north-south divide and labour migration (see Songsore, 2003). Before the 19th Century, Wa was regarded as the free political and business capital of the 'Country of Dagarti' until it was annexed into the Northern Territories under British rule in 1901. At the time, Wa was largely a labour reserve for the extractive industry as well as the flourishing cocoa and rubber plantations in the southern and coastal areas of Ghana (Wilks, 1989). Additionally, Wa was a strategic nodal trade centre between Southern Ghana and the Malian salt and Kola-nut trading (Daannaa, 1992).

Recognising the legacy of colonial neglect and labour exploitation, earlier post-colonial governments pursued a mix of both socialist and neoliberalist development ideas which shaped the local and national imaginaries of Wa with both positive and negative impacts (Brukum, 1998). Social policies of free education and neoliberal ideas through the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), as well as impacts of global forces, have kept Wa in a trajectory of a city that is in a continuous process of

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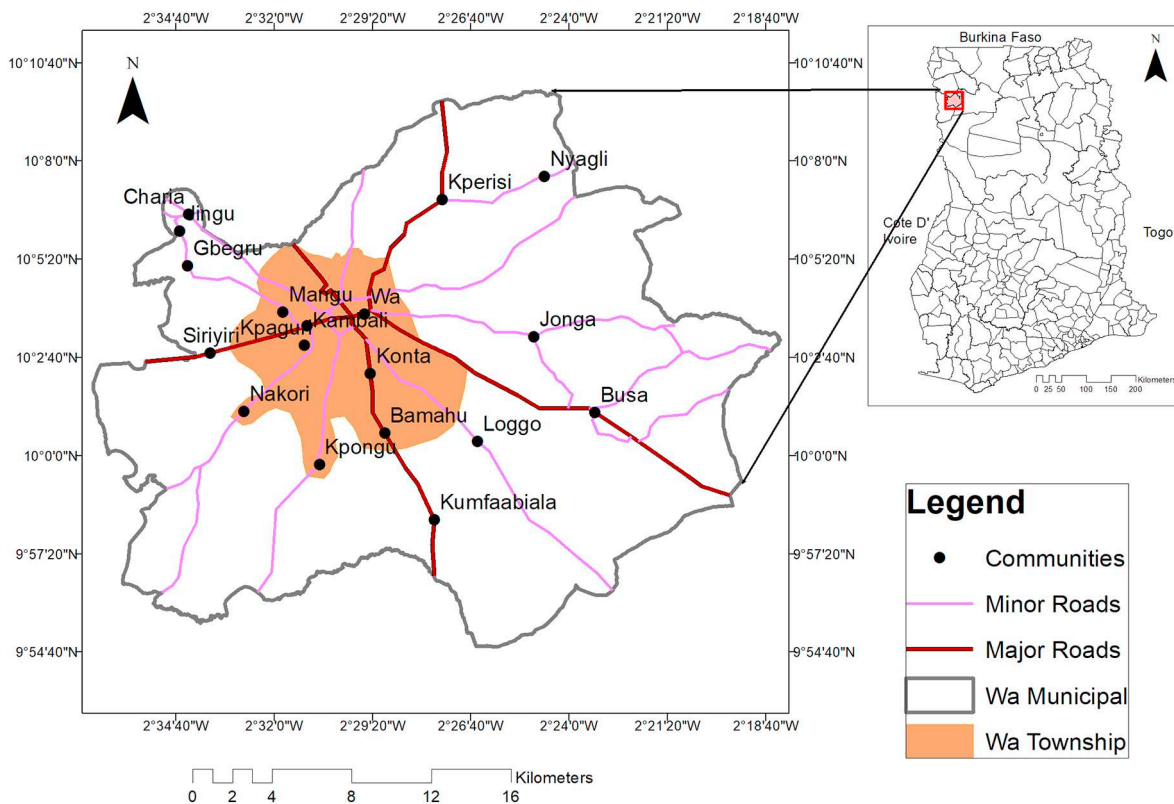


Fig. 1. Geographic location of Wa, in north-western Ghana.
Source: Authors' Construct, 2019.

'becoming' (Barwa, 1995). The search for prosperity in everyday life of the Waala¹ reflects a combination of the harsh arid weather conditions, legacy of colonial and post-colonial neglect, and post-colonial neoliberalism.

To operationalize this study, the paradigm of Southern Urbanism (Schindler, 2017) was adopted as an analytical lens in profiling Wa and projecting the context specific challenges of small cities in the Global South. To show the distinctive nature of human settlements within such cities, we aligned our profile along the major tendencies of Southern Urbanism (Schindler, 2017). The Section 2 gives an overview of the historical context in terms of location, the growth trajectories, spatial transformation, local governance service delivery and development initiatives. Section 3 puts Wa in the context of ongoing neoliberal developments and growth poles that are facilitating regional integration and economic growth. In this section, we highlight one of the major tendencies: the disconnection between capital and labour (Schindler, 2017). In Section 4, we discuss the emerging development challenges and highlight another tendency: contested resource flows and urban metabolism (Schindler, 2017). This is followed by Section 5, which dovetails the current initiatives put in place to enhance development of the town as well as their successes and limitations. We show some of the mismatches between theoretical bases of the interventions and the empirical realities of everyday city complexities of the global south. Based on all the sections supra, Section 6 focuses on the implications for urban futures and the new urban agenda. We conclude by summarising the implications of this study for urban planning and towards a paradigm of South Urbanism.

2. Background Information of the Wa Township

2.1. Location and origin

The origin of Wa, like its people, can be traced to the original

inhabitants as Lobis² who were chased across the Black Volta³ into an area now in the Republic of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso (Brukum, 1998). Before the British colonised the Gold Coast, Wa was a large trading town strategically situated in the middle of groups of acephalous people and was a significant outpost in the trade which ran along the Black Volta (Brukum, 1998). The then Wa District, now Wa Municipal, emerged from the merger of Dagaaba and Wa Sub-districts in 1907 after the establishment of civil administration throughout the Protectorate Northern Territories of the Gold Coast by the then British government. As of 1931, Wa was the only urban centre in the district with a population of more than 5000 (Wilks, 1989). Today, Wa doubles as the administrative capital of the Upper West Region (UWR) and the capital of the Wa Municipality (WaM) of Ghana. Wa is located in the north-western part of Ghana and lies approximately within latitudes 1°40'N to 2°45'N and longitudes 9°32'W to 10°20'W (see Fig. 1) (Wa Municipal Assembly, 2018). It has a total land area of approximately 579.86 Km², which is about 6.4% of the landmass of the UWR. Wa lies in the Savannah high plains, with an average height between 160 m and 300 m above sea level (Wa Municipal Assembly, 2018).

2.2. The phases of growth in Wa

2.2.1. Colonial period (1907–1957)

Wa, like other towns, such as Tamale and Bolgatanga in the then Northern Protectorates witnessed slow growth during the Colonial era (Dickson, 1968). The reasons for the slow growth are historically embedded in neglect by the colonial administration due to the limited endowment of natural resources (Songsore, 2003, 2009). However, following the annexation of the Northern Territories in 1901, Wa

² The Lobis belong to an ethnic group that originated in what is today Ghana.

³ A river that flows through Burkina Faso flowing about 1352 km to Ghana. It forms part of the border between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

¹ The natives of Wa.

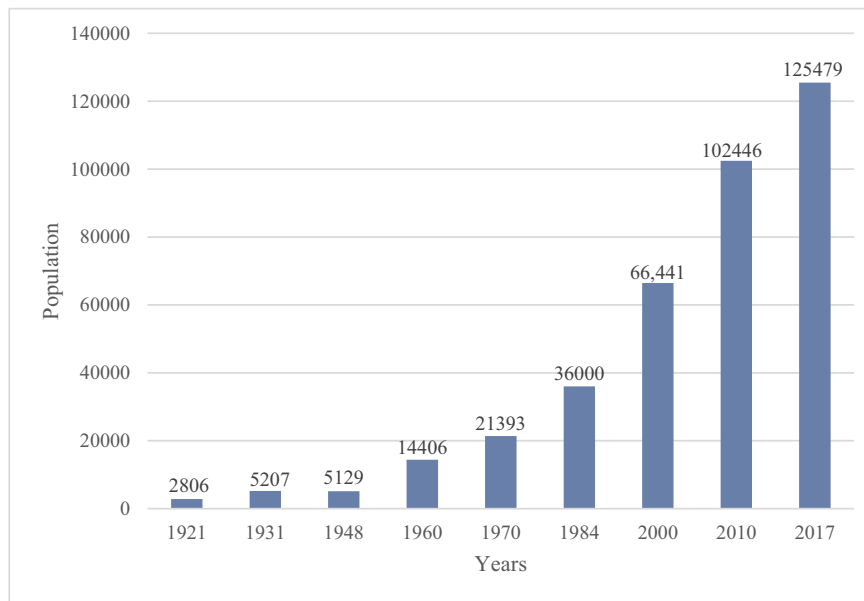


Fig. 2. Change in the population of Wa between 1921 and 2017. Source: Based on Wilks (1989) and various census reports of Ghana.

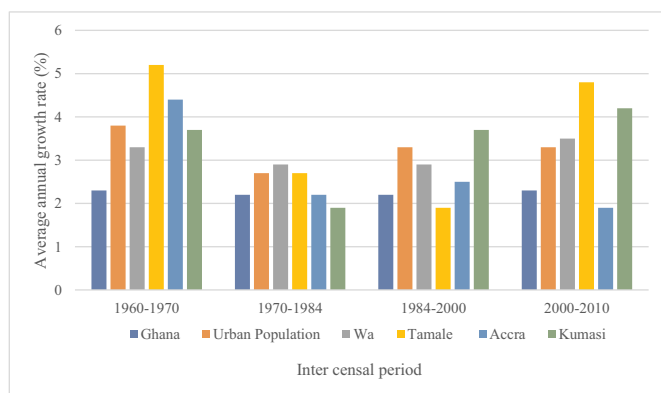


Fig. 3. Ghana inter-censal urban population growth rates in selected cities. Source: Compiled from various census reports of Ghana: 1970, 1984, 2000 & 2010.

experienced different phases of growth trajectories (Songsore, 2003). As shown in Fig. 2, the population of Wa grew slowly from about 2800 inhabitants in 1921 to 5200 in 1931. The population then reduced slightly to 5100 in 1948. Several factors accounted for this slow growth. First, it was the policy of the colonial administration to subordinate the interests of the Northern Territories to those of the rest of the country (Brukum, 1998). As the Northern Protectorate was turned into a labour pool, Wa lost some of its population through mass migration to Southern Ghana in search of greener pastures. Secondly, the colonial administrators did not tap into the economic potential of the area; deliberately they delayed educational advancement and also cut down expenditure on infrastructure and social services such as roads, schools and hospitals in Wa (Dickson, 1968). Consequently, Wa witnessed slow progress in terms of physical development, and social infrastructure and services during the colonial period because few heads of technical departments knew Wa and its needs (Brukum, 1998).

2.2.2. Post-colonial (1957–present)

The population of Wa grew rapidly following Ghana's independence from colonial rule. As shown in Fig. 2, the population increased from 5129 in 1948 to 14,406 by the year 1960 – Ghana's first post-

independence census. Wa recorded a population of 21,393 in 1970 and this figure almost doubled by 1984 with a total population of 36,000 (Figs. 2 & 3) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). Hence, the city grew more rapidly between 1970 and 1984 with annual growth rate of 2.9%, making it the fastest growing city ahead of Kumasi, Tamale, Accra and national urban population growth rate during that period (Fig. 3). The growth of Wa was spurred by the successive post-independence government's drive to pursue economic modernization aimed at overturning the spatial and infrastructure development imbalances created by the colonial government's exploitative driven investment. To this end, the government embraced a policy of import substitution industrialisation and state-led infrastructure development not only to address spatial imbalances in distribution of the national resources but also change the functions of Ghanaian cities across the country (Adarkwa, 2012).

One prominent area of state intervention was on housing delivery. The Convention People's Party (CPP) – led by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah took steps towards providing housing for the citizenry. This led to the formation of the housing provision institutions such as the First Ghana Building Society, the Tema Development Corporation and the Ghana Housing Corporation for the delivery of housing (Addo, 2014). After the overthrow of the Nkrumah government, the Acheampong regime pursued a policy of low cost housing provision by tasking the State Housing Corporation (SHC), the Tema Development Corporation (TDC) and the State Construction Company (SCC) to construct about 2000 low cost dwellings in all the regional capitals in Ghana (Addo, 2014). Thus, Wa benefitted greatly from these low-cost housing units, which were delivered in the 1970s.

Furthermore, the establishment of Wa as a regional capital of the UWR in 1984 by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime, chaired by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings propelled its rapid growth in the post-independence era. The creation of the new regional capital led to the development of several decentralised state offices and departments in Wa. Consequently, the population of Wa grew rapidly between 1984 and 2000, as shown in Fig. 3 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). In response to regional inequities in development, infrastructure provisions in Wa have witnessed an increase since the creation of the UWR. Significantly, the Rawlings' regime extended the national electricity grid to Wa, developed and expanded the road network and provided other infrastructure such as the Wa Airstrip and the current regional hospital. This critical infrastructure facilitated the development of the Wa Township. For instance, the extension of

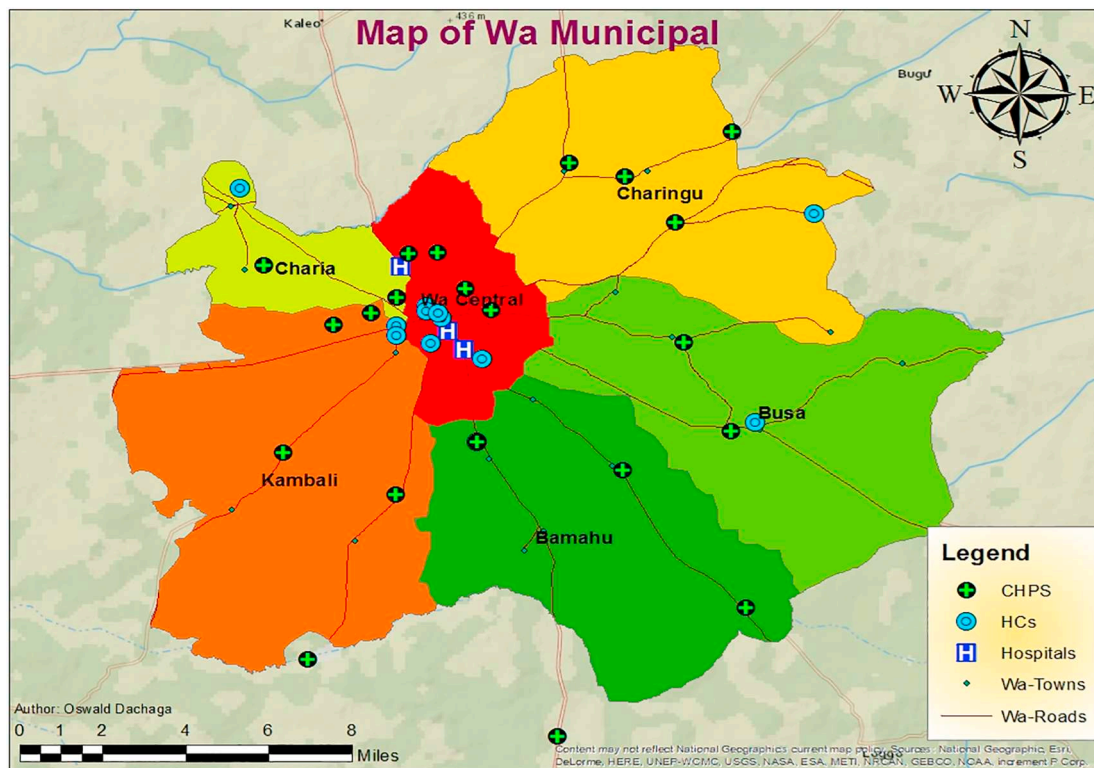


Fig. 4. Distribution of health facilities in Wa.
Source: Wa Municipal Assembly (2018).

electricity to Wa spurred the development of industries. Today, Wa boasts several higher order educational facilities such as the University for Development studies, Nasrat Jahan Training College and Wa Polytechnic as well as various second cycle institutions. In terms of health facilities, Wa has a total of 26 government health facilities including Community Health Planning Services and four private facilities as shown in Fig. 4. Thus, Wa's sphere of influence and growth has spread beyond the administrative boundaries of the Municipality to contiguous districts with a housing stock of 20,000 in 2018.

The Wa Naa⁴ palace, mosques and general cosmopolitan nature of the town has made it a centre of culture (Wilks, 1989), and its growth in post-independence era has been phenomenal. As of 2010, the total population of the Municipality stood at 107,214 and formed 15.3% of the population of UWR (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). The total urbanised population in the year 2010 was 71,051. This indicates that 66.3% of the Municipality's total population is urbanised compared to the national and regional urbanised share of 50.9% and 16.3%, respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). The total population of Wa Township in 2017 was about 125,479 (Fig. 2). Common with all major towns in Ghana, the Municipality is characterised by uncontrolled development, leading to annexation of green fields and agricultural lands for residential and commercial uses (Korah, Nunbogu, & Bernard, 2018).

2.3. City size and form of spatial development

While the Town of Wa has long enjoyed the status of a central place (see Wilks, 1989), the literature on the history and evolution of Wa has not reported its spatial extent during the colonial era and immediately after independence. This is perhaps because Wa was often classed with the adjoining villages and referred to as the 'Wa District' by the colonial officials. For instance, in the year 1925, the Governor of the Gold Coast

clarified that:

The Wa District shall comprise all the lands subject to the Chief of the Wala tribe, together with that portion of lands occupied by the Dagarti tribe lying South of the Izeri River and that portion of the land occupied by the Isala Grunshi tribe on the right bank of the Kulpaw River.

Wilks (1989, p. 10)

While the above description provided no indication of the size of Wa Town, it remained even after the immediate post-independence era. Hence, Figs. 5, 6 & 7 show the spatial growth of Wa for 1986, 2000 and 2016 as defined by different administrative legislations at different times. From these figures, the total built-up⁵ area increased from 3.7 km² in 1986 to about 14.8 km² in 2000 and then to 29.2 km² in 2016. This implies that the city grew almost eightfold between 1986 and 2016. In absolute terms, the urban land area of the town increased by 25.5 km² during the thirty-year period, contributing to 93.8% of the total built-up area of the Wa Municipality (Korah et al., 2018).

In 1983, the Town and Country Planning Department in Wa began the process of structuring land into zones (Fig. 8). This laid down a framework for the development of land in the Township. The framework prescribed permitted activities and developments within each zone and established the radial road transport. These zones formed the Wa Structure Plan of 1983 covering a substantial part (60 km²) of Wa, which has since seen three revisions in 1990, 1998 and 2008. Beyond the sphere of coverage are the immediate suburbs including Sombo, Bamahu, and Danku that were to maintain suburban character of rural agriculture (Fig. 9). The Wa Structure Plan, 1983, sets Wa into five land-use zones - residential areas, commercial areas, industrial zone, civic and cultural area and institutional zones (Fig. 8). Now in these use zones, are 53 approved local plans, detailing the designating unique use

⁴ The title of the Paramount Chief of Wa.

⁵ Residential buildings, administrative and civic buildings, commercial buildings, roads.

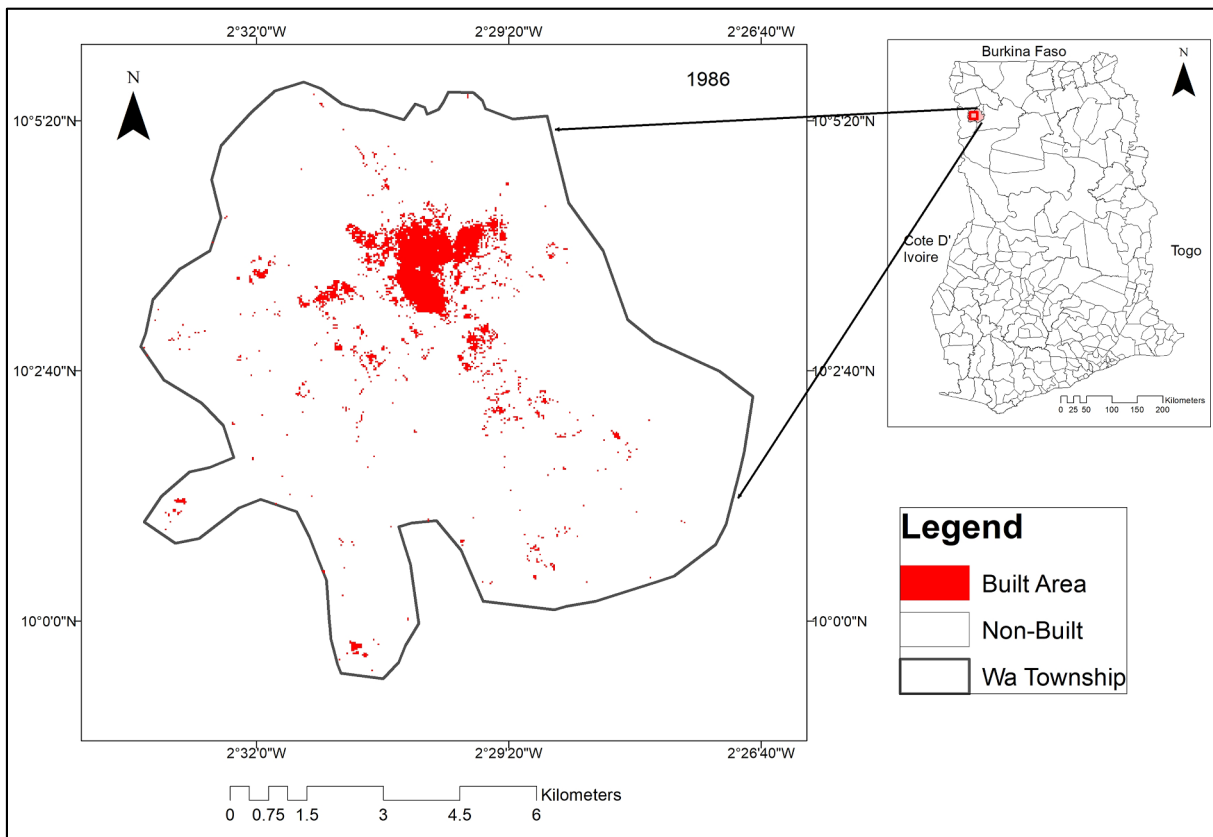


Fig. 5. Built extent of Wa in1986.

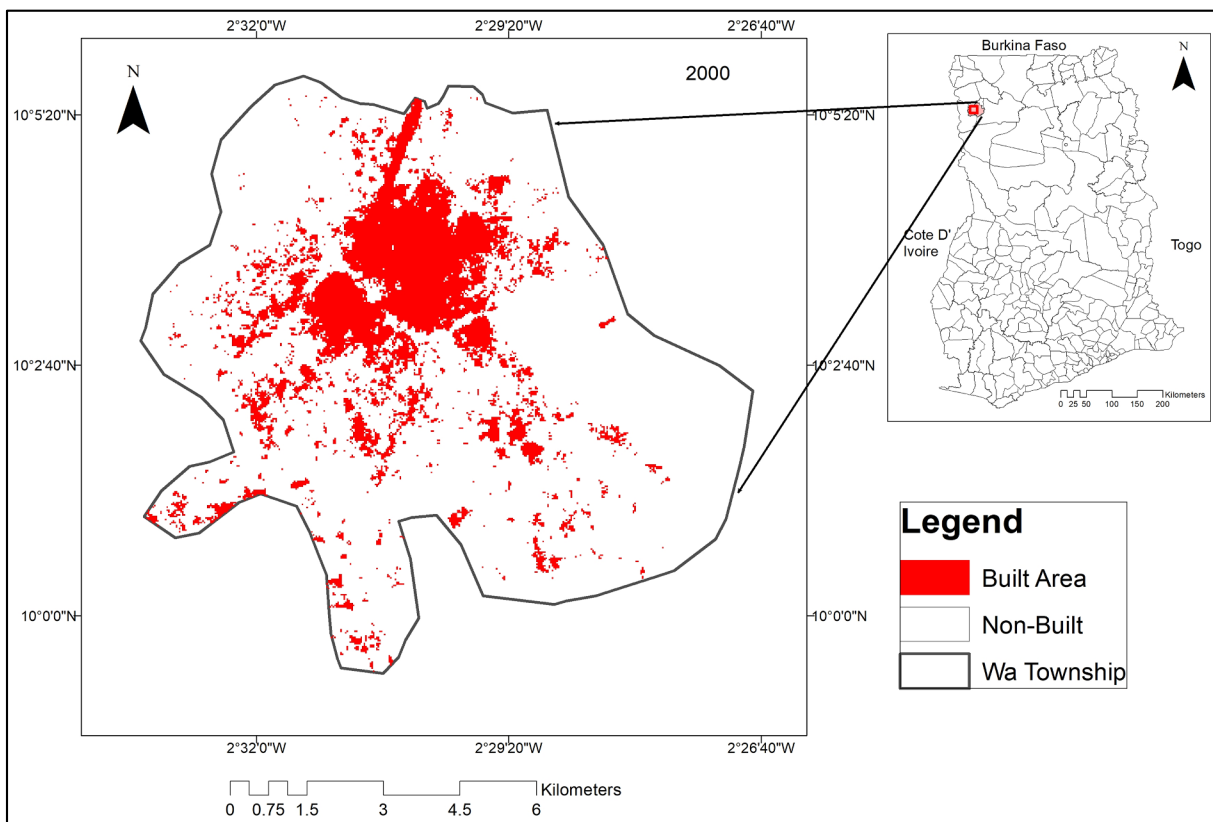


Fig. 6. Built extent of Wa in 2000.

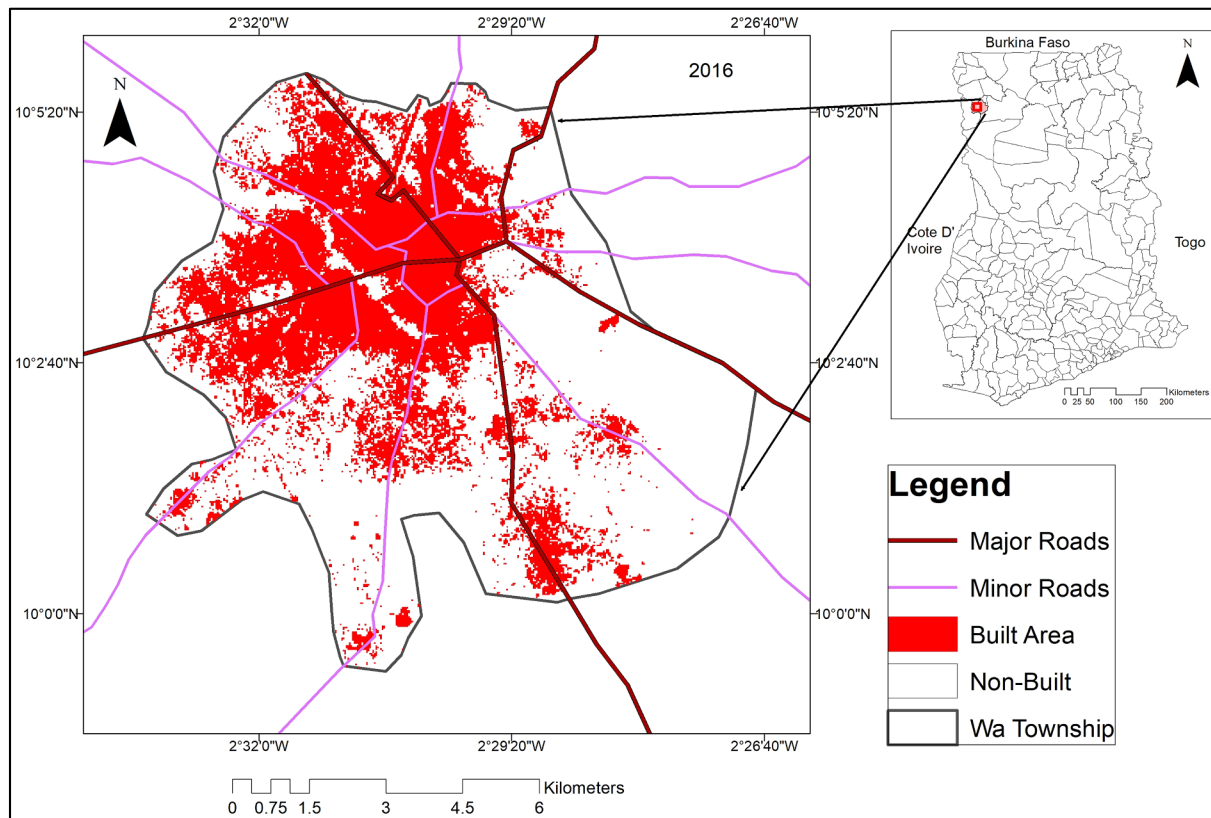


Fig. 7. Built extent of Wa in 2016.

of every square meter of land (Fig. 9).

Wa possesses the characteristics of both Ernest Burgess' concentric city and Homer Hoyt's sector models (Hoyt, 1964). Conscious efforts were made by the Planning Department to model the growth of Wa based on the concentric and sector models. Wa is experiencing a radial and concentric growth pattern although this is under check by the Administrative boundary and the Billi Dam to the north and the Forest reserve to the East (Figs. 7 & 8). The functional existence of the city is consistent with Burgess' concentric model as it has a dominant Central Business District (CBD) consisting of commercial (including banking), retail and transportation activities. In line with achieving Homer Hoyt's sector model, 33 sector layouts were prepared since 1993 to guide the growth and orderly development of Wa Town (Fig. 9). However, the implementation of these plans has been highly distorted due to weak development control on the one hand, and poor land-use management in the face of increasing urbanisation on the other (Wa Municipal Assembly, 2018).

2.4. Local governance and service delivery

Governance in Wa is hybrid in nature and consists of both traditional and state bureaucratic institutions. This governance arrangement has its roots in the indirect rule system by the colonial administration of the Gold Coast in the 1930s (Brukum, 1998; Wilks, 1989). Confronted with inadequate personnel to efficiently administer the affairs of the locals, the Native Authority administration structures were established with the chiefs serving as a link between the colonial government and locals. Ghana's Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) has recognised traditional authorities as one of the major stakeholders in collaborative local governance. Instead of top-down decision making, as was the case in the colonial era, the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) seeks to ensure a bottom-up and participatory approach to governance and development at the local level using decentralised offices.

As part of the effort aimed at promoting participatory planning and decision making at the local level, Wa Municipal Assembly has five Zonal Councils (Wa, Busa, Kperisi, Kpongung and Boli) and 73 unit committees (Wa Municipal Assembly, 2018). Each community in the Municipality has a unit committee that works through the Area/Urban Councils to the Assembly level. To ensure representation of the local communities in decision making, the Wa Municipal Assembly is currently composed of 44 Assembly members (40 males and 4 females): two-thirds are elected, and the remaining one-third appointed by the president in consultation with opinion leaders of the Municipality (Wa Municipal Assembly, 2018). There are five mandatory sub-committees namely development planning sub-committee, finance and administration sub-committee, social services sub-committee, works sub-committee and justice and security sub-committee. These are supposed to assist the Assembly in thoroughly deliberating on critical issues relating to their respective committees.

3. Wa in the face of neoliberal development

Ghana was not insulated from the global economic depression in the 1970s. This led to the resurgence of liberal economic philosophy - neoliberalism - to mitigate the Keynesian economic lurch at the time. The history of neoliberal policies in Ghana can be traced to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s as part of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). The SAP was characterised by deregulation of businesses, trade liberalisation, reduction in government expenditure, promotion of export, privatization of state-owned enterprises, elimination of social welfare programs and reduction of taxes on businesses (Barwa, 1995; Kotz, 2002). After the SAP in 1992, neoliberal policies of the World Bank and IMF continue to dominate economic policy decisions of governments in Ghana. The neoliberal policies seek to promote rapid industrialisation through capital

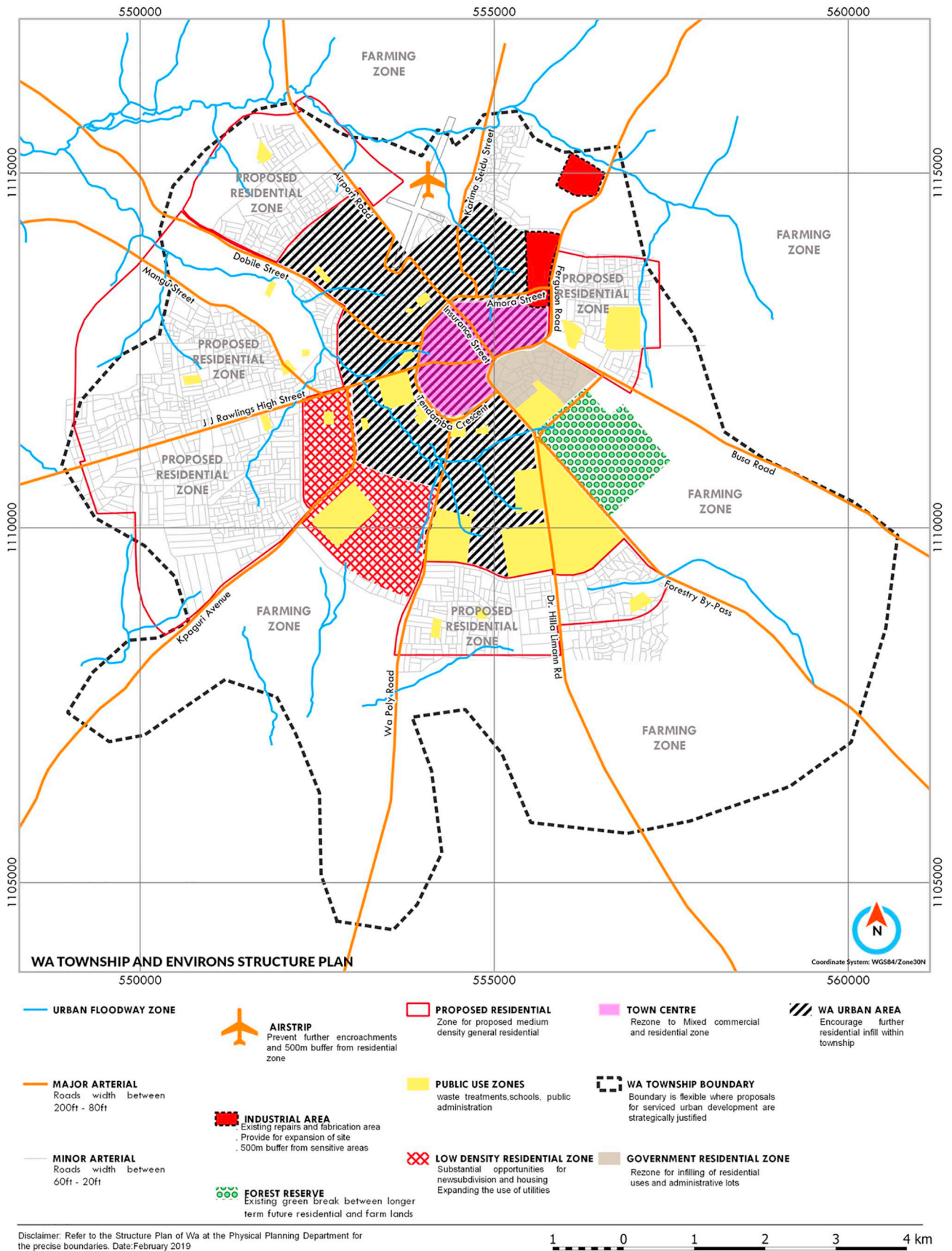


Fig. 8. Structure Plan of Wa for urban development.
 Source: Wa Municipal Spatial Planning Authority, 2019.

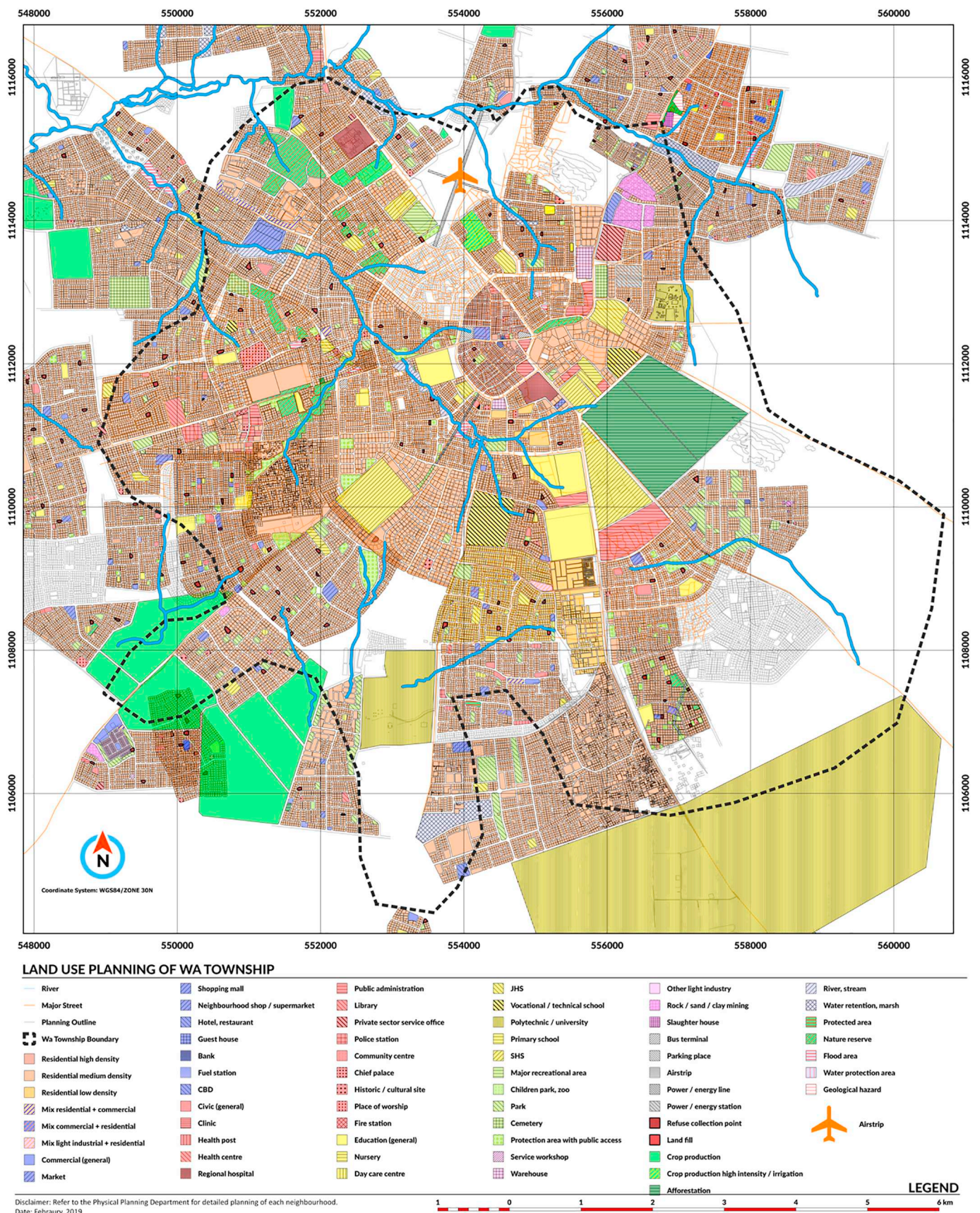


Fig. 9. Local plan for Wa Town.
Source: Wa Municipal Spatial Planning Authority, 2019.

formation (Barwa, 1995; Fuseini, Yaro, & Yiran, 2017; Obeng-Odoom, 2012).

In the context of urban theory, economic history has shown that mainstream urban theory was based on cities in the North that experienced rapid industrialisation through the absorption of wage labourers (Lawhon, Nilsson, Silver, Ernstson, & Lwasa, 2018; Schindler, 2017). This was done through the transformation of peasantry into productive proletariat combined with capital from bureaucrats for city expansion through industrialisation (Schindler, 2017). However, in current cities of the Global South, formal economy is not able to absorb labour, especially rural-urban immigrants and those dispossessed of their land (Li, 2010; Sanyal, 2007). As a result, both private and public capital tends to focus on real estate and social service provision (i.e. housing, electricity, waste management, transport, and health among others) (Schindler, 2017), hence transforming the cityscape of Wa differently from that of the Northern cities (see Fig. 10).

First, since the implementation of the SAP in the 1980s, the private informal sector has remained the single most important source of employment in urban areas of Ghana (Barwa, 1995; Ghana Statistical Service, 2014b, 2014a, 2015a). According to Barwa (1995), the informal sector employed approximately 80% of the urban labour force between 1983 and 1992. In 2010, it increased to 86.2% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). In the Wa Municipality, the sector in 2010 employed 80.1% of the labour force (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). Informal jobs are generally in retail, transportation, construction and service sub-sectors. The rising informal sector is a reflection of the disconnect between labour and capital. Due to this disconnection, production and industrialisation are no more the primary focus of Wa Municipal Assembly as there is less justification for industrial proletariat and more demand for meeting the social service needs of the growing informal economy.

Second, land market and tenure arrangements have also shaped the face of Wa through the ease of land dispossession, loss of peasantry and property transfers. The majority of those dispossessed of their lands lose their main subsistence and end up in the informal economy, as the formal sector cannot absorb the labour. A major part of the land in Wa and the UWR is owned by families, individuals and Tendamba (Abubakari, van der Molen, Bennett, & Kuusaana, 2016). The family holding of land in Wa also means that urban developments are occurring at different levels and in different directions depending on when families are willing to release a share of family land into the market. As the whole of Ghana was declared a planning area in 1992, both government agencies and landowners in Wa have collaborated over the years to initiate the development of local planning schemes. These local plans made the land market in Wa very vibrant because there was less risk in acquiring land when the boundaries and ownership were clearly and easily identifiable. At the same time, the wide proliferation and operationalization of the concept of leasehold after independence has also contributed to the development of land markets as well as housing. Leased lands are less susceptible to land disputes, and hence present an opportunity for mortgage financing. The number of residential deeds registered in Wa increased from 346 in 2006 to 482 in 2008 (Kuusaana, Kidido, & Halidu-Adam, 2015). A study by Biitir and Kuusaana (2019) between 2011 and 2017, reported that registered parcels of land in just five selected residential areas stood at 1456. Although such a wave puts Wa within the twilight of modernity and development, it has also made it easy for the rich and the economically powerful to dispossess vulnerable land users. This is reflected in the way large tracts of agricultural lands in peri-urban Wa are being leased for housing (Korah et al., 2018; Kuusaana & Eledi, 2015). This practice, if not controlled, can have negative ramifications on urban food security and livelihoods in the future (Eledi & Kuusaana, 2014; Korah et al., 2018).



(a) Water Airport



(b) Shopping centre



(c) Modern Hotel



(d) New regional hospital

Fig. 10. Changing face of Wa in terms of socio-economic services.

Third, in this neoliberal era, housing and modern infrastructure supplies have seen modest improvement in all urban centres, including Wa (see Fig. 9). Historically, housing development has been the role of the state. However, in recent times, the role of the private sector in housing supply to meet housing needs of those working in the informal sector has been imperative in Wa. The housing deficit of Ghana increased from 736,657 in 1970 to 1,536,275 in 2000 and further up to 1.7 million in 2017 (UN-Habitat, 2011). Like all urban centres in Ghana, housing needs in Wa far outstrip supply. According to the 2010 Population and Housing census, the total number of houses in Wa was 5794 with an average of 12 persons per house (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). The survey further revealed that 38.1% of households in Wa were living in one room (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). However, with the deregulation of the economy through the SAP, private sector participation in housing development was a major priority in cities. This was in relation to the increasing population growth and the limited state resources to supply housing for the urban population. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2013), national annual growth in the housing stock between 2000 and 2010 was 4.4%, the highest ever since 1960. Private individuals have stepped in as major providers of housing in Wa. However, due to the poor enforcement of development controls (Ahmed & Dinye, 2011), housing development has been characterised by sub-division of rooms, conversion of utility areas as living rooms and poor access to social services. This imaginary of Wa like other cities of the Global South has been highly contested but nonetheless forms a key identity of Wa due to the large unregulated informal economy. The situation becomes even more complex in the inner city of Wa, where native populations reside as first settlers of the city and as landowners.

Also, with the increasing demand for housing due to population growth, private sector is unwilling to build for the urban poor and the preference of tenants generally favour new comers rather than natives. This is reflected in the mass proliferation of apartments for the middle class and hostels for students. The increase in higher educational institutions has therefore contributed to the housing problem in Wa. The establishment of Wa Polytechnic in 1999 and Wa Campus of the University for Development Studies in 2001 by the government has attracted students and investors to Wa. Consequently, the population of Wa increased rapidly from 36,067 in 1984 to 66,644 in 2010 and further up to 71,051 in 2012 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). This has further deepened the woes of the urban poor in accessing decent housing at affordable prices outside the already built up inner city close to the CBD.

Finally, during the SAP, transformation of energy, road and waste infrastructure has significantly shaped the urban metabolism of Wa. Cities of the Global South have highly contested resource flow and dynamic metabolisms as residents are connected formally or informally to both grid and off-grid infrastructures (Lawhon et al., 2018; Schindler, 2017). Wa Township, and the UWR as a whole were first connected to the national electricity grid in 1992 (People's Daily Graphic, 1992). Until then, Wa depended on two 500 kW generators for power supply (People's Daily Graphic, 1992). Grid electricity, compared to other sources of energy (i.e. generators), is cheaper, thus reducing operational cost of businesses. The 2010 Population and Housing Census reported that 81.5% of dwelling units in Wa were connected to grid electricity. Despite the connection, a lack of payment of bills and erratic power supply makes electricity flow in Wa significantly different from other cities of the North. Also, in the wake of neoliberalism, city authorities are now collaborating with the private sector in urban waste management. In Wa, the Municipal Assembly has relinquished 80% of waste management responsibility to Zoomlion Ghana Ltd. (Peprah, Amoah, Thomas, & Achana, 2015). Although private organisations have played a significant role in urban waste management in Ghana, a large chunk of waste is still left uncollected mainly due to the inability of many households to pay for collection fees (Peprah, 2014). Only 4.4% of households in Wa patronise the services of the private waste collector

(Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). It is estimated that only 216 tonnes of the 810 tonnes of solid waste, generated daily in Wa, are collected (Amoah & Kosoe, 2014). The situation is further aggravated by the lack of engineered landfill sites. Collected waste is dumped in the open at Siriyiri, a peri-urban community of Wa. Also, access to basic infrastructure services such as safe water and good sanitation is a major challenge. For instance, about 47.7% of households practice open defecation while 48.55% depend on boreholes outside the home for water (Wa Municipal Assembly, 2018). Such dynamics in Wa are different from the cases in the Global North.

The development of transport infrastructure (i.e. roads and airport) has shaped the urban trajectories on Wa. This was part of the government's effort to create an enabling environment for private sector growth. Many roads in Wa and the UWR were constructed and/or paved during and after the SAP. Major road networks are the Wa-Sawla-Fulfuso-Tamale trunk road, Wa-Bole-Bamboi trunk road and the Wa-Nadowli-Babile-Lawra-Hamile truck road. The Wa-Bole-Bamboi trunk road in particular opened up Wa and the UWR to southern Ghana, facilitating spatial interaction and trade. Also, over 90% of urban roads within Wa town are tarred, thus making the town attractive to investors. Outside Wa, many roads in other parts of the Upper West Region are untarred, limiting the movement of people, goods and services (Department of Urban Roads, 2018). As at March 2018, only 144.3 km (37.4%) of 385.4 km of road network in the Wa Municipal (i.e. mostly in the rural areas surrounding Wa town) was tarred (Department of Urban Roads, 2018). Untarred roads of major concern to commuters and traders in the UWR are the Wa-Tumu trunk road, Wa-Funsi trunk and Wa Wechiau road. These roads lead to the food baskets of Wa. Aside the road infrastructure, the extension of electricity to the Upper West region fundamentally stimulated private sector growth.

The above city development trajectories are consistent with other cities of the Global South and particularly in Ghana (Schindler, 2017; Watson, 2014). Although Wa has been impacted historically by the global economic networks, the growth trajectories discussed above position the city generally as an ordinary city of the global south (Robinson, 2006). The city of Wa cannot be viewed as an example of a global city (Sassen, 2013), but a city of hybrid cultures, informal economy and mixed land use development mediating through the duality of modernity and development. Conceptualising Wa as an ordinary city we have outlined two major tendencies of southern urbanism shaping the cityscape (i) disconnection between capital and labour (ii) dynamic and contested flows and urban metabolism.

4. Socioeconomic and ecological challenges

As Wa mediates through modernity and development, there are different challenges that are constantly produced and reproduced as everyday realities of an ordinary city. Here, we discuss the different contested issues in Wa that offer insights into the theorization of cities of the Global South.

4.1. Climate variability and food security

Climate variability of Wa is a dual manifestation of two extreme events of floods and droughts (Derbile, Jarawura, & Dombo, 2016). For the past two decades, Wa has recorded four major flood events in the years 2003, 2008, 2012 and 2018. These floods have destroyed millions of properties as well as considerable damage to crops. As shown in Fig. 11, Wa recorded its highest average annual rainfall in 2008. This coincided with the extreme flood of northern Ghana which displaced over 317,127 people (Lolig et al., 2014), including residents of Wa Township. On the other hand, small droughts, particularly in the year 2013, have affected production of crops and livestock rearing (Wa Municipal Assembly, 2018). The double tragedy of flood and drought in Wa and its environs expose inhabitants to higher-levels of livelihood

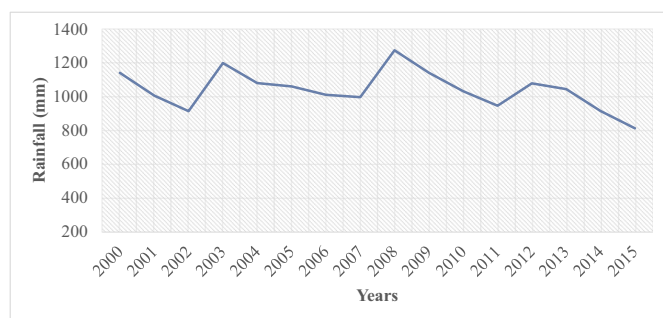


Fig. 11. Average annual rainfall (mm) from Wa Meteorological Station, from 2000 to 2015.

vulnerability, particularly food insecurity. Peri-urban farming and inner city agriculture are constantly at risk not only because of climate change but also pressures of urbanisation (Padgham, Ahmed, Ayivo, & Dietrich, 2015). For example, over 12.3% of households in the UWR are reported to be food insecure (World Food Programme, 2012) and 35.5% of the population are poor (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015b).

4.2. Urban sprawl and wetlands under siege

Wa has witnessed rapid urbanisation, which has resulted in land use changes in recent years (Figs. 3, 5–7). As mentioned earlier, urban land in Wa increased annually by 5.9% between the years 1986 and 2016 (Korah et al., 2018). The indigenous settlements and the urban core are dominated by 'compound housing' which accommodates 58.3% of households (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a). This type of dwelling unit promotes compact land development and increases concentration of people and business activities within a limited land area. The recent increasing demand for detached and semi-detached houses coupled with the unregulated land market has led to uncontrolled lateral and patchy expansion of the town at the suburbs (Korah et al., 2018). The resultant effect is the mass conversion of wetlands, waterways and agricultural lands in the periphery for housing development. Such conversions have implications on disaster risk reduction due to flooding, food security and loss of livelihoods (Eledi & Kuusaana, 2014; Korah et al., 2018).

4.3. Land disputes and administration

Wa has a decentralised land governance structure whereby land ownership and control devolves from earth priests to clan and family heads and family members (Abubakari, Richter, & Zevenbergen, 2018). Land disputes in Wa emerged from disagreements between individual landholders and landholding families with respect to multiple land sales, indeterminate land boundaries (Kansanga et al., 2019) and sometimes through administrative inefficiencies of the Lands Commission, the Customary Land Secretariats and Town and Country Planning Department. The multiplicity of landholding families opens the possibilities of boundary disputes since family land boundaries are not well defined (Abubakari et al., 2016; Kasanga et al., 2019). Land disputes in Wa, like other urban areas, affect land management in general but most especially land registration, as it cannot be performed without the certainty of land ownership or landholding. When landholdings are disputed, prior to or after registration, land development is often stalled through court injunctions. Land disputes also reflect on the activities of the property market as buyers and sellers are unable to transact on disputed lands.

To settle these disputes, contesting parties often explore opportunities from within the setting of the traditional authorities of landholding (Tendaamba, clan and family heads) for arbitration and negotiation (Kuusaana, Kidido, Appiah, & Mireku, 2013). Such avenues

provide win-win opportunities for contestants rather than the adversarial winner-takes-all outcomes of the formal court systems. The courts in Ghana are flooded with a backlog of land cases and are comparatively slower in justice delivery (Crook, 2005; Kansanga et al., 2019; Prah, 2005) and most cases may take over a decade to resolve (Crook, 2005). By virtue of the flexibility of the alternative dispute resolution system, contesting parties only resort to the court as a secondary system.

4.4. Enforcement of development controls and the spread of temporary structures

Owing to the weak capacity of the planning authorities and poor planning over the years (Ahmed & Dinye, 2011), physical development has far outpaced spatial planning. This has led to organic and sporadic spatial development which has several consequences such as loss of access routes, lack of social amenities and poor sanitation. The poor state of spatial development is further propelled by the recent rush in the supply of housing (Korah et al., 2018). In Wa, urban development usually precedes spatial planning as planning agencies lack the capacity to monitor and control physical development. Temporary structures are therefore a major component of heterogeneous infrastructure of the city and the siting of these structures are inextricably linked with social networks, culture and local politics. Proliferation of temporary structures has raised serious policy and planning concerns. From policy and planning perspectives, the emergence of temporary structures is both a governance failure and a response to filling infrastructure gaps created by the demand of the informal economy. Nonetheless, in terms of research, studies are still fragmented on the important roles of such informal and heterogeneous urban infrastructures in socioeconomic development and urban resilience.

4.5. Revenue mobilisation

Related to the issues of development controls and temporary structures is poor revenue mobilisation due to (i) weak property identification/addressing and (ii) weak institutional capacity. Until 2014, Wa did not have a comprehensive database of property addressing and street naming as a tool for property taxation within the city. The historical unregulated development control has led to property tax evasion. At the same time, the technical capacity for property identification/addressing has long been weak and poorly developed. As the city is characterised by a large informal economy, the city authorities have not been able to adopt a fit-for-purpose approach for revenue mobilisation within the city. Ad-hoc task forces are intermittently deployed but these have not been able to adequately address the revenue gaps of this informal economy. The city's ability to mobilise revenue through formal systems has largely been limited to the few formal institutions in Wa. Hence, there has been an over reliance on informal revenue sources especially through market tolls, fees and levies. However, these sources have remained inadequate to support the ever-expanding needs of the urban population including street lighting, security and waste management among others.

4.6. Rent surge

The influx of students has contributed to a tremendous demand for housing and transportation. Rents have increased due to the shortage of housing relative to the demand (Eledi & Kuusaana, 2014). The housing market has become more challenging especially the residential segment, due to the market supply responses to meet the rising housing demand of the surplus population. This also increased land market transactions around the campuses of tertiary institutions and also within the city core as developers tried to participate in the growing rental market. Over the last 5 years, demand for residential housing, especially for student accommodation, has declined tremendously due

to reduced numbers of admissions in both the University for Development Studies and the Wa Polytechnic. Purpose built student accommodation providers have consequently lost revenue to high vacancy ratio. The majority of them have tried over the past two years to leverage these losses by charging rents above market rents. This notwithstanding, accompanying residential demand in the inner city of Wa and other peri-urban residential areas continue to be significantly high. Rent surges in the inner city of Wa can be broadly attributable to the concentration of inhabitants in indigenous neighbourhoods of Wa. For instance, residence of areas such as Dondoli-Limanyiri, Zongo-Kabanya and the Wa Central residential areas, continue to stay in these areas even when their financial situations improve. This may be largely due to keeping with close social ties in these areas, but also because the insurgent insecurity (mainly arm robbery activities) in the Town makes people sceptical to stay in the peri-urban areas.

5. Development and planning initiatives: successes and limitations

5.1. Preparation of local plans

Wa has been extensively planned covering 60 km² composed of fifty-three individual neighbourhood local plans. These local plans have achieved more in the implementation of the arterial roads that have defined the spatial character of Wa. The Local Planning Authority in 2018 started the implementation of the Wa Town road improvement project to add 300 km of arterial roads connecting the various neighbourhoods. This makes the new market and the new regional hospital easily accessible to other parts of Wa town. To address the numerous disputes resulting from land development, another initiative was put in place to share all the composed local plans in digital formats with all the units of Lands Commission and Utility service providers. It is anticipated that their activities are done in accordance with the plans. Significantly, also, is the inclusion of spatial planning in the medium-term development planning process. Over the years this was absent and there existed a disconnection between the two planning entities at the local governance level. Now with the inclusion of spatial plans, existing and projected interventions are visualized for clarity and importantly determine the locations of these interventions for a greater impact.

5.2. Street naming and property addressing

The process began in 2014 to sequentially number properties and name streets for the purposes of identification, valuation and collection of rates. 20,000 properties, both completed and uncompleted, and 2309 accesses have since been numbered and named in the town of Wa. Data about the characteristics of property, ownership and use will be uploaded onto a computer for the purposes of revenue tracking. The German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) has supported the project for decentralisation reforms under the auspices of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Increased revenues from property rates are yielding the benefits for which the project was intended. The issues of road signage and number plates on the properties are outstanding. The absence of property number plates coupled with few access routes in the urban peripheries makes property identification difficult. The Local Authority aims to make the process self-sustaining so that it is able to finance the development of infrastructure.

5.3. Land administration project (LAP)

Ghana's Land Administration project started in 2003 with the aim of enhancing efficiency in land administration in terms of time, cost and procedural complexities. The LAP was also meant to eliminate multiple land registration and to reduce land litigation (Ehwi & Asante, 2016). The LAP brought together four different land sector agencies involved in land administration, namely the former Lands Commission, Land

Valuation Board, Survey Department and Deed Registry, as divisions of the new Lands Commission. These agencies have been renamed respectively as Public and Vested Land Management Division, Land Valuation Division, Survey and Mapping Division and the Land Registration Division (Biitir, Nara, & Ameyaw, 2017). The enabling legislation for this merger is the Lands Commission Act, 2008 (Act 767). The Lands Commission office in Wa is one of the few regional offices that have all the four divisions physically co-located in one building, which facilitates collaborations among the Divisions. Such collaborations have greatly improved efficiency and improved revenue generation through ground rent mobilisations (Ehwi & Asante, 2016).

6. Implications for sustainable urban futures and new urban agenda

A common imaginary of Wa like many other cities of the Global South tends to point towards a dystopian future characterised by collapsing socioeconomic and environmental systems (McPhearson, Iwaniec, & Bai, 2016). As secondary cities are positioned as the future of new urban agenda (UN-Habitat, 2016), it is therefore imperative to increasingly discuss the barriers and enablers (Section 5) for such a transition in order to shape a trajectory different from the experiences of those from the North (Oteng-Ababio, Owusu, & Asafo, 2019). Cities in the Global South are confronted with prospects of making such sustainable transition as the "problem-space" they occupy is multifaceted and dynamic (Schindler, 2017). As in the case of Wa, these problems are social, economic, environmental and cultural.

However, a sustainable transformation of Wa might be impossible if urban planners do not understand the complexities and uniqueness of cities of the Global South. There is wide mismatch between the development challenges (Section 4) and interventions in Section 5. Interventions such as zoning and street naming have their epistemological basis from the experiences of cities in the North. A recent review of contemporary textbooks of urban geography showed that the Global South accounted for 2–23% of the content and in most cases served as an example rather than a source of theory (Lawhon & Le Roux, 2019).

In this regard, the post-colonial perspective of urban planning and visioning is required to shift from the global city paradigm (Sassen, 2013) towards embracing contextualised conceptualisation of individual cities, especially Wa (Robinson, 2006). Although attempts have been made in theorizing cities of the South, such efforts have not matched with the development of empirical methods to actually understand Southern cities (Schindler, 2017). It is therefore imperative for urban planners of Southern cities to engage scholarship of Southern Urbanism in order to inform planning practice consistent with the problem-space of their cities.

While the neoliberal approach believes that the solutions lie on the market, they also lead to exclusions and marginalisation of different groups (Parnell & Robinson, 2012). In the case of Wa, the introduction of the concept of lease made it easy for land dispossession by the economically powerful. This can potentially derail global efforts towards inclusivity of secondary cities within the framework of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) (UN-Habitat, 2016). Although the NUA lacks a formal implementation framework (McPhearson et al., 2016), critical engagement and discussion around the intersection of specific geographies of modernity and development can provide stakeholders with informal processes of achieving the NUA (Valencia et al., 2019). A successful emergence, beyond the unique spatial challenges of Wa, also tends to transform it from patches of trading villages and grassland to a vibrant secondary city in the global south (Osumanu, Akongbangre, Tuu, & Owusu-Sekyere, 2018).

7. Conclusion

This paper presents a profile of a city that has evolved from patches of trading villages to a major secondary city. This profile seeks to project such secondary cities in urban discourse given the recent Habitat III new urban

agenda which had a secondary cities focus. Drawing on the lens of Southern Urbanism, we argue that the transformation of the cityscape varies considerably from those in urban theory based on the experiences of cities in the North. Wa exhibits two major tendencies of Southern Urbanism identified by Schindler (2017). Firstly, the development trajectories reflect a disconnection between capital and labour as the city is characterised by a burgeoning informal economy involved in the rising social needs other than production of an industrial proletariat. Secondly, the flow of resource and metabolism are highly dynamic and contested thereby making Wa different from the Northern trend of networked grid infrastructures. There is a mismatch between urban planning practice in Wa and the reality (i.e. the tendencies) as the epistemological basis of the former is developed based on city experiences of the North. Therefore the understanding of these tendencies is limited in empirical studies and urban theory. Postcolonial urban studies of the Global South must reconsider deepening empirical methods and theorization based on southern cities in order to address unique problems. A transformative and sustainable urban future of Wa and other cities of the Global South remain counter-productive if postcolonial urban studies do not engage with paradigms of the Global South in understanding and planning cities of the South.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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