African Cities: towards a new paradigm – 'chameleonic' urbanism for hybrid cities

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Abstract: African cities demand growing a network-type articulation between their formal centres and the vast, informal polymorphic suburban housing areas surrounding them. A new urban paradigm should be proclaimed: urban proposals that aim to consolidate an improved and adapted adjustment between regular patterns (attached to macro scale planning) and plural configurations of a self-organized city, based on micro stratagems that are developed by indigent citizens in their everyday life. This new urban paradigm relies on nature and collective/public spaces as major elements in the reassembly of fragmented African urban spaces: [re]develop wide, and [re]distribute social services, public services and civic infrastructure in the extension of African City – urban progress, articulated through improvement of human living conditions, needs to be combined with overall sustainability.

The new urban paradigm points to flexible and regenerative morphologies in urban space, that are sensible and capable of adapting to multi-contexts – a 'chameleonic' urbanism, that is based on multiple – and mixed – visions of micro-units inherent to the African City, that propose derivate forms from themselves.

Keywords: African city; formal and informal; new paradigm; 'chameleonic' urbanism; open forms; hybrid cities.

INTRODUCTION

When contemplating African Cities, one is forced to reconceptualise common, formal and quite static urban strategies (akin to regular and 'tight' urbanism), because African cities manifest a strong developmental and/or survival instinct (Koolhaas defines it as *real time solutions* for *real time problems* [Ed. – in referring to the *Cite des femmes* REFDAF network project, Dakar – (REFDAF, *sine anno*)]. Therefore, it is urgent to understand African cities socially, culturally, environmentally, economically, territorially, etc., as well as their current identities and [re]sources, in order to anticipate the sort of combinations and variations – endogenous or exogenous – that might occur in urban space when linear geometries are merged with complex ones by means of a transformational and incremental methodology that narrows the gap between arbitrary and indiscriminate morphologies (with high levels of variability) and regular urban tissue. In this sense, it's necessary to reveal urban characteristics and qualities of African cities, which are codified in the sub-elements that admit affinity with distinct processes of urban transformation: between formal and informal, colonial and post-colonial, global and local conditions, resources, technologies and environmental requests – making them interconnected and interactive.

Actions like addition, affixation, conversion, modification, permutation, repetition, overlapping, substitution, and subtraction compose a renewal and mix cognitive hypertext that expresses diverse types of African urban renovation. 'Chameleonic' urbanism regards derivative morphological components that [re]create urban qualities as friendly to the already existing signification and its prolific forms, admitting a city organization supported by a series of contrasting sequences. This kind of urbanism confronts cities in terms of its inhabitant's self-volition, presenting malleable and adaptive responses to their questions regarding different parts of an African urban space, stepping away from abstract and alien schemes that ignore its realities and specifications. This paper emphasises the need to think about urban principles, with open forms, that absorb the irregular, the

unpredictable, the apparent disorder and spontaneous innovation through creative, imitating, *in situ* urban actions.

PAPER

The African City is a set of meanings that conditioned the process of its urban transformation with practices that require the perception of its diverse realities - as well as the differences between them - crossing the formal and informal (making them inner-actors). For many African inner cities the analysis of the potential transformation that can be found in the neighbourhoods is important, because this supports the solutions and socio-urban innovations that are sought for them (Raposo & Salvador 2008). One can identify those mutations, that better reflect historical changes, social innovation, cross-cultural and technological adaptations (Salvador 2004), through examining the energies and the capacities involved in the construction of the housing unit – the place of symbolic investment choice. Developments regarding this issue reveal the appearance of new social and ideological cartographies despite hegemonic visions, that show how a network of critical and creative resistance, based on cultural, plural and multifaceted crossings of alternative urban [micro]experiences, has been created. They integrate a range of informal spaces and marginal experiences as components of a comprehensive urban type of living, often ignored, stigmatized, segmented or arranged in thematic enclaves. What is advocated in this paper is the need for an overview of the African City, paying special attention to its urban specifications and qualities and what, between the macro and micro scales, links them together.

AFRICAN CITIES: PRESENT URBAN CONDITION – COMPLEXITY AND DIFFERENCE

African Cities suffered the effects of a vigorous process of accelerated urbanization, which produced elements of its unfolding urban fabric, and transformed its typologies, urban forms and their inherent limitations – revealing a seemingly limitless expansion of the urban area. These processes cannot be understood from any simplistic notion of territoriality, in that they extend their structural [sub]systems, continuously capturing the surrounding space, creating and modifying [sub]orders which embody themselves in urban topographies - fragmented, but interconnected. It assumes multiple levels of [re]reading, various experiences and complex social layers that do not fall into sectarian urban proposals.

When seen in socially fragmented and apparently uncoordinated representations, the current condition of African cities - in transition, and imprecise - exposes inherent conflict: for and against difference and plurality. Attempts to enshrine the African City as a totally planned entity proved to be sterile: the future life of their centres is intimately related to their outskirts, which are no longer outskirts. Their complex urban spaces go beyond geographical, urban or demographic boundaries, given that they propose many different ways of acting or expressing themselves, which exceed the predetermined, planned limitations. It is in the suburbs that the more significant urban transformations occur. As Salvador (2004) indicated, it was due to explosive growth that metamorphoses occurred, (mostly) in a spontaneous way and largely outside the reach of political and administrative control. With the large population flows from rural areas, the suburbs of most major African cities have become a huge yard. The ingenious, creative and alternative micro-systems that are to be found there, are systems that address the urgency of living – they are relevant and worthy of analysis, and the resulting knowledge is essential for attempts at addressing the major urban problems they contain, evaluating the possibilities of transformation and upgrading their urban spaces in future.

The extensive growth and the expansion of the administrative boundaries of African cities reflect changes in form and lifestyle of the citizens, occurring over a short period and contributing toward change in a present 'urban condition' (a construction of experiences and territories). The linear urban text – sequential, structured – that expressed many of the urban narratives of colonial origin, became a hypertext (a structure open to multiple meanings). This hypertext is not devoid of rules, structure or intelligibility. Simply, it increases the acquaintances, sequences and possible links. Many African inhabitants are located in emerging urban areas, seeking answers that the geometric city and its corresponding centre does not provide in terms of price, functionality or availability of land. The hypertext results from diversity: of living, of producing, of distributing and consuming, and from the contradictory reasons that inform the behaviour of social actors.

African cities represent an intricate territorial situation in which individual and complex microstructures of land occupation are embedded. They experienced a profound transformation in their economic base, physical structure and social composition that sprouted new urban qualities that exist as 'undergrowth'. These qualities should be converted as a factor for development, by accepting newly defined relationships between individual,

place, society and territory/urban landscape, which have come about. However, the dichotomy between political and technical limitations of the strategies of urban management (macro-scale) and the real and accelerated regional dynamics that occur (of micro origin) is one of the major constraints in the planning of the African City.

The reticule [or network-like] configuration of African City centres enables linear and sequential readings of its morphological and structural elements, staggered by thematic areas: these are currently proliferating, diverse forms of land occupation, overlapping without any precise limits – the African City expresses unpredictability, difference, uncertainty, ideological and financial problems, despotism, liberalization of markets, alignment of interests, the crisis of values in the community, etc. It has become so extensive and so diverse that it is no longer possible to address it as a linear unit only. It has overcome the paradigm of duality: it is more than a diptych – it is now an urban mosaic with multiple parts of complex geometries. The dichotomies between formal versus informal city, city versus countryside, the urban versus the rural, tend to fade, crossing and overlaying themselves, juxtaposing many others, and in the process evolving form and expression. The African City gained a plural meaning that must be strengthened.

The African City – sometimes apparently chaotic and incomprehensible – is neither explained by the old urban order, nor by unique principles of rationality and functionality. Its complexity cannot be solved through interventions in the city centres of colonial origin only, or through rules that emerge from these, or even through urban projects that may be considered as exceptional, but that actually punctuate or disrupt. Interventions may be more relevant if they respond to the scale of urbanization of the city's vast territory, with its accumulated disorders, and the realisation that they contain answers to respond to new ways of inhabiting the city, by linking the centre and the periphery (interacting their urban qualities), by facilitating the expression of joint actions of the different social sectors – political and economic – that exist in it, and by accepting that, in response to constraints, some will act through formal channels of power and others will express themselves informally.

The African City embodies itself in urban spaces that are open to the involvement of its different parts, for the understanding of which it is necessary to reinterpret and restructure the texture of their qualities and fragments: exposing the micro-sections in the sub-morphologies of an African City and diagnosing their strategies of self-organization, as well as considering their mechanisms of action, in order that they may be integrated and supported in a comprehensive process of urban rehabilitation that does not exclude anyone. The built (texture and its patterns and typologies) rarely corresponds to arbitrary settings only: each built form brings and induces meanings to the African City. A difficulty arises when neutrality, absoluteness or independence are ascribed to these built forms – rather, their contents and significance are in constant creative [re]construction through the action of everyday life, and their uniqueness spring from the fact that they are dynamic and flexible. It is time to consolidate urban proposals that allow for a transformation that will make the African City more liveable and caring, and transposing cultural, racial, socioeconomic, political and ideological discrimination.

The often mentioned disease of the African City, i.e. degeneration resulting from an atrophy of the structural relationship between project (first instance) and form (as a consequence), that exacerbates the weakness of links between established types, programs and social ways - that are reflected in the fragmentation and in the not-calculated hazard - is actually a basis for new microforms to use and to create space with a high creative potential, as induced by imagination, productive need (survival) and the inherent spontaneity of subjective formation of parts of urban space. From house to house, renovated patterns and types of urban tissues of the African City are being woven. The ability to overcome adversity and uncertainty, to turn 'non places' (Salvador 2004) into areas of great vitality, and to create new types of construction through the adoption of various technologies, are different indicators as to how we can design the transformation of African urban space, an action that seems insurmountable when applying imported planning methods and programs uncritically. It appears that the African City requires constant [re]framing of the constituencies in its urban mosaic: a permanent [micro]restoration is not compatible with the maintenance of a dual logic, i.e. reducing the complexity and diversity of its current urban condition.

The coexistence of mutant scenarios, in which complexity and difference are two of the major characteristics, need to be understood as a dynamic resource for the enrichment of the future life of the African inner city – allowing diversity of urban life and contradictory and multifaceted actions, highlighting the promotion of participatory democracy and consolidating the African City into various hybrid and fluid territories. It will be important to focus on absent [micro] memories, not explicit, invisible, but that are present in types of ownership and use of urban spaces of the African City, marking them with dissident and informal words. New approaches for understanding and interpreting the multiple dynamics that interact in the city require open processes: "[…] cities are not constructible or planable machines in the sense of the industrial age […]" (Gleiniger & Vrachliotis 2008:91). The strictly rationalist/functionalist macro-practises that are targeted towards the monitoring of

compliance, are poorly adapted to the concept of uncertainty in the urban spaces of the African City, in that it is difficult to establish a supra-dialogue for the city's hypertext.

AFRICAN CITY: PLURAL AND POLYMORPHIC URBAN MOSAIC – PERSPECTIVES FOR A NEW PARADIGM

The planning and land management of the African City have often been overtaken by non-infrastructured urban production that is 'not planned' and spontaneous. For example: the environmental reserves for planting trees or for economic and social facilities, the green spaces, infrastructure, no-build areas, marshes, floodplains and slopes, have been and are currently being occupied by the growing population accessing the African City, seeking shelter, security, employment, better living conditions, etc. The distribution of city growth is not uniform – the percentage of people living in designated 'peripheral' areas, in relation to those living in planned 'centres' of the African City, is rising. This has resulted in a growth in the number of degraded areas. The referenced 'peri-urban space' has become more fragile, due to the lack of tools for planning the land use, implementation and monitoring.

The bulk of the city's inhabitants have come to reside in areas without adequate access to basic infrastructure and social services, living in precarious housing units, without security of land tenure. A plural and inter-sectarian vision is needed for the long term: identifying trends and opportunities, formulating prior objectives and concentrating limited resources on critical issues, in order to encourage dialogue and debate, manage the community's commitment to the actions that need to be taken, and strengthen the social fabric. The historically proclaimed 'good city form' has been diluted into a hybrid and solvent composition, in which the contours of the urban fabric of the African City - that, as a readable artefact with a singular identity clearly marked its configuration, limits and centre – were replaced by a vagueness of its urban spaces. If one predicts that the African City will become a continuous extension of occupied landscape, I refer to Gausa, who says:

> [...] *la forma cristalina de la ciudad primitiva tiende progresivamente a disolverse, así en un abanico heterogéneo de salpicaduras y vacíos. La música armónica de una ciudad completa, refigurada, equilibrada, cede pues ante la evidencia de una compleja partitura arrítmica con – quizás – eventuales fragmentos melódicos, pero generalmente con un 'no-ritmo' sincopado y atonal de puntos y contrapuntos que harían del espacio urbano contemporáneo un cuerpo definitivamente inacabado y mutable en el tiempo* [...] (Gausa 2007) –

– between dialectic pairs (colonial/post-colonial; centre/periphery; formal/informal; regular/irregular; order/disorder; predictable/unpredictable; ordered/spontaneous; macro/micro; global/local; linear geometries/complex geometries). The roots of the conditions of uncertainty and transition is what will mark the African City and co-substantiate it as a plural and polymorphic urban mosaic. The attempt to understand the internal processes that occur in gradually heterogeneous realities is what will lead us to overcome the limitations of traditional planning:

> [...] *organismos en constante evolución entrópica. En efecto, del mismo modo que resulta inviable seguir aceptando el 'caos fascinante' de la ciudad como alibi del abandono a un proceso definitivamente aleatorio e incontrolable destinado a ocupar el territorio de modo ilimitado, también lo es pretender circunscribir los procesos a planificaciones cerradas – endógenas – limitadas a situaciones de coyuntura, apenas justificables desde el punto de vista de la lógica administrativa. Del mismo modo que el propio sistema territorial – el organismo global – acaba remitiendo a operaciones complejas de interacción en su seno, su proceso de renovación debería remitir a procesos interrelacionales, si no del todo coherentes sí intencionados* [...] (Gausa 2007) –

– capable of boosting the progressive development of African urban spaces, impregnating them with urban qualities that are usually only imparted to the designated 'centres' (e.g. minimum levels of basic housing, constant delivery of urban and other services, a diverse infrastructure, work opportunities, cultural amenities, etc.). The mosaic city is rooted in the multiplicity of land that overlaps, collides, hybridizes, and sets synthetic landscapes that respond to the transitional nature of their urban communities. To not recognize the unstable balance between rationality and sensibility, between conscious desire and unconscious expression, between desired inter-subjectivity and irreducible subjectivity, between collective action and individual development (Baptista 2007), is to contribute to the further disruption of the aspects of African urban spaces. There is a necessity for broad platforms of intersectional dialogue of different scales, fostering conditions for civic participation and development in the different moments along the urban process. To reconfigure the city's fractures will require a multidimensional perspective, structured through new programs and in an interconnected substance (nature/landscape, space and collective/public structures) that addresses the multiple facets that are revealed in its morphology. For this we need the strengthening of solutions, exploring contemporary ways of life found in the urban landscape, rather than a linear, catalytic shaping of existing pieces.

African urban spaces require a more interventionist approach, in which the program is not institutionalized – that is, it is not presented as a given fact in the beginning, implying a conventionality of use and language. The programmatic exploration should not only simply answer the needs of the present, but radically enhance the expectations of the future. Due to the city's tense and nebulous morphology and its plural and complex urban forms, it is difficult to identify and establish points of contact in its multiple realities that can reconfigure the unity in the urban diversity. Similar to the 'three R's' ecological strategy for sustainability and urban regeneration – Reduce, Reuse and Recycle – the reformulation of assumptions (recycle) will also make sense in terms of the African City:

- Re-infrastructure – physical and basic; acting (in a transversal way) in the processes of regeneration and redevelopment at the level of urban fabric;

- Regeneration – to make proposals for the parts of the city that exist as urban units but that are vulnerable in their physical, environmental and sustainability dimensions; adjust in a cellular manner; structure and support socially and culturally, in sync with their own dynamics,

- Conversion – to make proposals for the parts of the city that are generally inadequate and alienated in their distinct and complementary parts (urban, social, cultural, environmental and economic).

Following on the above, it will be necessary to progressively look towards an increasing network-type articulation of additional centralities/nuclei between central urban areas and designated 'suburbs'. This articulation can be achieved by interconnecting the complexities of the urban tissue, delimiting minimum units of order and meaning, and by identifying indivisible sections of urban areas (form), and those that are not divisible (meaning). The aim is to express regular and/or irregular properties within the parts of the urban polymorphic mosaic and any combinations and variants (endogenous or exogenous) which are established between them. The diagnosis should be based on the decomposing forms of the African City, on identifying symptoms of actions that empty it of significance and recognition, on territorial inadaptability, inadequate use of available resources and operational redundancies, amongst others.

The characteristics of the African City may also be encoded in properties of sub-units, and subjected to morphological relational principles, in order to admit affinities with different processes of urban transformation through the adoption of approaches that describe and comment on: the constituents of urban spaces; the types of morphological processes (simple or complex) that change (or have changed); and the meanings and categories of the urban forms (at the process, plant and disposal levels). Cognitive links must be formulated regarding urban measures of addition, display, composition, modification, permutation, repetition, overlapping, substitution and subtraction. It may be possible to consolidate the adjustment of African urban spaces to diverse forms and meanings as a set of proper principles, in which the combined disposition of their constituents allows different structural relationships between them. It will be important to propose flexible and regenerative morphologies for the African City, that are sensitive and adapted to the diversity of their contexts (understood in the broad sense of the term: social, environmental, economical, territorial, etc.). Such a new paradigm will look to effect modifications in urban spaces through multiple and crossed readings of their internal micro-units, and so suggesting forms that are derived from them. This transformational methodology addresses the morphologically arbitrary and indiscriminate with high degrees of variability, and looks for possible forms in still non-existent urban idiosyncrasies.

It involves a descriptive and relational capability that makes possible the distinction between the existing forms and the possible ones. The re-qualification of the African City should observe the urban [ir]regularities in its different aspects, distinguishing the structural of the complement, in order to [re]define morphological components that allow to [re]create the urban area linked to the existing forms and meanings in its subunits. This type of urban morphology – derivative, which acts on the process of urban derivational way – allows the organization of the city in sequences of contrasts, crossing specificities and making them properties of the urban structures. The non-ordering characteristic of parts of the African urban spaces, despite their shortcomings and weak physical infrastructure usually diagnosed in them, makes it receptive and willing to adapt to [sub]morphologies with larger environmental concerns and that explore the condition of complexity, in which continuously occur overlapping and juxtapositions of patterns and typologies. They must intersect in or move to more unexpected morphological change, but adaptive, sustained in the flexibility and flowing in more organic and hybrid urban settings – the result is a city less formal than the colonial one, more malleable, in transition, a reflection of a society that should seek (itself) alternative ways to the urban practical in the African City.

AFRICAN CITIES: 'CHAMELEONIC' URBAN TYPES – OPEN SYSTEMS FOR HYBRID URBAN SPACES

Part of the challenge for the African City is to find another process for urban structuring that accommodates the dynamic patterns of texture, and where:

> [...] roles and functions can vary within short spaces of times [...]. Public spaces and buildings become multi-functional, used differently at different times. Streets become 'theatres of activity' [...]. The emphasis will be on the importance of connectivity, choice, and a framework that encourages movement, activity and pulse [...]. The flexible framework will therefore be key to this urban design future. It will enable development to respond to uncertainty [...]. Such adaptability will also see the emergence of new typologies and spatial components to inhabit the framework. (Malcolm & Rowland 2006:186)

This basic condition does not reject urban principles of a more standard bias. It implies that the city is to be articulated in a more integrated and systemic process, involving issues such as un-multiplied interconnectivity, individual action and the provision of adaptable spaces that can accommodate temporary uses, both volatile and transient. There is a need to enhance performance regarding the, continuously increasing, illegal and informal interstices, linking them with the centres of the African City and impregnating them with social meanings, sustained in a network of references and collective services. This will not only make centres more liveable but also, ecologically and urbanely, more sustainable. This also implies proposals for and consolidation of complementary centralities in their urban localities, together formed into organic [re]infrastructured networks that are regenerated (or converted) through alternative urban processes, in order to establish more flexible, structures, that should be strong and productive, for communities to allow them to share healthy urban environments. These urban processes include specific, committed interventions – of limited (surgical) and balanced nature – applied on a small-scale and if necessary with few resources, and employing upgrade strategies, not only for the re-fitting of an urban area, but also for the management and use of available financial and energy resources. This is an approach that implies complimentarity, support, the seeking for a higher quality of urban life and the enhancement of basic infrastructure and services that make small urban spaces environmentally more appropriate, as well as the seeking for sustainable processes for progressive urbanization of the African City. Through gradually halting the perpetuation of disqualified urban strategies, such an approach will heal the rift that exists between the urban elite and the unsupported clandestine.

A search for morphologies that adapt to African urban spaces requires the rejection of totalizing and airtight forms. Standards-based Guidelines that are open to interaction must be formulated for urban settings: these should be defined as an integrated whole in order to promote the recognition, assimilation and actual application of the guidelines *in situ*. In order to re-integrate the urban periphery, with their less serviced properties more feeble (resulting from the physical and cultural separation of the city's infrastructure and services), the guidelines must be integrated, participative, systemic and include the approach areas described as 'suburbanized' must be fully rehabilitated.

Strategies can be simple, but enriched by public participation, by addressing the community and its groups, the environment, the African City and its ways, places, centres and resources, inclusive of the interaction that is exists between all. It requires an open and inclusive political and administrative approach to the management of urban areas, by creating the capacity for cooperation and negotiation with the residents and their representatives, formal and informal. A re-qualification should be established with the residents. The sense of order and peaceful coexistence that most people maintain in the face to the paucity of institutional instruments of social control and information, is remarkable - this can only be understood in a context of traditional microstructures in which family ties and hierarchical relationships retain their social relevance, and in which the so-called 'informal authority' that embodies these traditions, is accepted as a form of social integration of the family and the individual.

'Chameleonic'[1] principles, i.e. principles that show changeability and flexibility in adaptation, are urgently needed to attune urban operations and behaviour to the specific features of the African City (with identity, or meaning, fixed or in flux). They are principles that promote an urban spin, that do not want to 'jump' onto the radical emptiness, opting instead for a 'low key track' that is connected with reality, problems/weaknesses and emergent urban potentialities.

The way toward socio-physical consolidation and an economically-productive and sustainable energy-environment for the new African City will be by encouraging physical development that is linked to the

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1 The chameleon is mostly found on the island of Madagascar but lives in large areas of the African continent. It is a reptile known for its ability to change its colour as a means to adapt to an environment or a situation.

development of the human dimension. Given the condition of transience of the African City, this re-qualification process may be organized into relational methodologies of the relational paradigm (i.e. open systems, free forms, absorbing that which was pushed 'outside', absorbing the irregular, the unpredictable, the apparent disorder, the spontaneous innovation coming from creative imitators – add to this the 'digestion' of the new (created by others) to form a vision of itself (Lemaire 1997). This proposal can be a process whose body/torso is as common as a collective, manageable with little hierarchy and stratification, organized in a very flexible and adaptable way – like a chameleon. The internal organization of this type of proposal should be constantly evolving, in order to be able to adjust the strain of transition that is felt in the African City: chameleonic principles that themselves metamorphise in order to better fit the urban spaces, to better diagnose the weaknesses, and in them their therapy – regenerative urbanism. They will by necessity have to be operational [sub]structures that are able to acquire knowledge *in situ*, not only of the physical characteristics of degraded areas, but also of their social composition and the internal dynamics of groups and the organic make-up of local authorities.

The elements that may disturb stability and affect the residents and the history of transformation of the African City, as well as value systems that carry special meaning for different social groups, are some of the other dimensions to be considered. It is required to understand relations between neighbourhoods (informal and formal), their relevance, their correct insertion into the proposed network of urban infrastructure and their role in what needs to be provided in terms of urban services and social facilities. The ordering system of straight streets in an orthogonal grid, with land divided into regular, rectangular stands, as an exclusive model to achieve urban structure, has shown shortcomings - in most cases, it led to the socio-spatial alienation of citizens. This type of system, which results in the 'deletion' from the territory of everything with a particular spatial relationship, must not be replaced by another which is also forced, that does not consider the established sub-relations in a place and that despises a micro-design that reflects commitments, negotiations and compromise. Rather, a proposition that will be useful will be one with receptive measures and a flexible and open vision that is able to materialize real operations *in situ*, to serve as a reference for alternative methods to current forms of 'redevelopment'. This proposition calls for open systems:

> [...] which remain in a state of continuous exchange [...]. In such system's elements at the micro level can collectively generate patterns and structures at the macro level, which can, in turn be traced back to the behaviour of the individual elements. Chaos and order, then, organize themselves through these interactions between the micro and macro levels of a complex system, and are governed by feedback loops [...]. In such cases, we refer to the 'self-organization of chaos and order in open complex dynamic systems' [...]. Self-organization is linked to the phase changes of complex and dynamic systems, leading to the genesis of increasingly complex structures. The genesis of a structure that can be traced back to the self-organization of a complex system is also referred to as 'emergence' [...]. With a view to cultural history, it seems promising to conceptualize the development of human societies as dynamic and complex systems [...]. (Gleiniger & Vrachliotis 2008:93)

In this sense I refer to Gausa, who states that:

> [...] *hoy se requieren nuevos dispositivos – sistemas a gran escala – capaces de abordar la propia dimensión casual y, al mismo tiempo, infraestructural de la ciudad y del territorio. El estudio científico de los sistemas dinámicos conduce* […] *análisis de procesos complejos – caóticos – caracterizados por el denominado factor 'in': alto grado de indeterminación, de inestabilidad, de incoherencia, de infinitud, es decir de informalidad. Son sistemas que, no obstante, permiten adivinar cierta idea de orden interno, un código genético impulsor, asociable a diagramas o trayectorias más o menos complicados, que dibujan – generalmente estructuras rizomáticas, fractales, caracterizadas por la auto-organización matricial, el entrelazamiento, la secuencialidad y discontinuidad, la evolución discontinua, la ausencia de escala, el desarrollo orgánico más que mecánico y, sobre todo, la importancia de la seriación 'vació-lleno'. Emerge, entonces, la fuerza del espacio 'en negativo', no tanto como resto – o reserva residual 'entre cosas' sino como engranaje estructural. Y, en el marco de las actuales estructuras urbanas, el paisaje – el vació – aparece entonces como un 'subsistema', tanto o más importante que el urbano – una infraestructura, a su vez* […]. (Gausa 2007)

Structuring 'emptiness' (with the landscape/nature as linking matter) as a 'multi-element' (embodied in both horizontal and vertical spaces), will integrate and articulate many urban dimensions of the African City.

CONCLUSIONS

The condition of uncertainty (tragedy in, and hope for the future life of the African City Centre) implies a questioning of beliefs and habits: a systematic correction of perceptions and patterns of action – extending the field of vision and review of models of urban growth, in the context of questions concerning the validity of the political, social, economic, cultural and environmental. Demonstrating, as Virilio (2000:549) says, "[...] the crises

of the grand narrative and the rise of micro-narratives are ultimately the crises of the 'grand' as well as the 'little' [...]", I conclude by stating that the African City is supported through numerous connections, through retractions and dilations, and extensions and clippings of open development, through not contrasting landscape/rural and urban spaces, but through making them live together in systems in transition; mixed zones; associations between ambiguous situations and linked developments; and through creating places and between-posts (filled and empty), at different scales (Gausa 2007). It is possible to suggest points of inflection, decisive moments that reflect and express tension, as well as destabilizing signals, which require the need - because of complexity and difference - to change course towards a new paradigm.

A line of development may be the focus on models that will, through experimentation *in situ*, result in the self-organization of urban space – space shaping itself along predetermined and/or set rules, as well as generating apparently uncoordinated proposals that follow implied or 'hidden' rules. This interaction between rules, balancing several factors and behaviours, is common in biological systems that generate, adapt to standards, [ir]regularise their own principles – for example like the 'chameleon' – and that evolve to be adaptive through morphological changeability and flexibility. These biological systems are indicative of the hybrid urban spaces discussed above.

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