

# 1. Introduction

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Bahir Dar is a rapidly growing secondary city in Amhara Region in Ethiopia. So far, the history of fixed settlements in Ethiopia is under-researched (see chapter 3). To date, urban theory does not adequately explain the ongoing process of urbanisation defining the urban realities in Ethiopia, as it does not include qualifications of the local urbanism and practices of settling and constructing. This thesis picks up on this point and looks in to the “ordinary” or “mundane” local practices of urbanisation such as migration, auto-construction, traditional land-practices and incremental building and refers to them as “everyday urbanisation”. Until recently, not only informal housing but rather the majority of structures in Ethiopian towns were not constructed within state-led policies. Most of them built by urban residents in community efforts. Depending on the local context, availability of building materials and personal resources, these practices of urbanisation are diverse and have been shaped by a number of influences over time. They encompass strategies of the urban poor, the emerging middle-class, and also building activities by the affluent. It is a current development that these habits of construction in housing are changing; they obtain standardised designs available from the municipalities, order individual architectural designs and professional building contractors. The practices of everyday urbanisation to create shelter of various types and standards, as well as appropriating livelihood spaces in the cities are dynamic and subject to change in interaction with changing materiality and societal conventions and fashions. They are practised by residents, cooperatives, investors or NGOs outside of state institutions and are summarised as “everyday urbanisation” in the following. Be it outside or inside of land-use regulations, building standards or business regulations, they are responsible for large parts of Ethiopia’s existing urban fabric.

However, living conditions in large parts of Ethiopia’s cities are dire. The historical urban fabric has sanitary issues and the rapidly growing urban population needs to be accommodated in additional space. It is in this context that Ethiopian national politics first devised an Urban Policy in 2005 (Ministry of Works and Urban Development 2007: 20). Thereby the political vision of “development” (cf. Müller 2015) was expanded to the realm of urban development with the “Plan for Urban Development and Urban Good Governance” as part of the “Plan for

Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty” (PASDEP) issued by the Ministry of Works and Urban Development (2007). The topics of infrastructure provision and housing development have thus moved onto the Ethiopian political agenda. Thus everyday practices – whether traditional or adjusted to modernism – are often not the starting point from which urban policy derives its design principles. Instead, to implement these visions, displacement and re-construction are widely spread actions in Ethiopian cities, making way for “development” plans.

While the dire living conditions many urban residents experience do need to be improved, it needs to be questioned how we can find site-specific instruments of urban development to address the local situation under conditions of urbanisation. Outcomes of current practices of urbanisation are commonly generalised and referred to as slums (Ministry of Works and Urban Development 2007: 4). Watson (2002: 36) describes the visible indifferentiated gap between the existing practices and structures and the new standards of development as a „lack of consensus“ between explanatory and prescriptive positions. In Ethiopia, this topic resembled by the genesis of towns through practices of everyday urbanisation (see chapter 3.6) and their relation towards more recent statutory development projects have so far not been adequately structured as a topic of study. However, more qualitative data is necessary do so. To bridge this gap between competing interests, the question of development priorities in Ethiopian cities form the starting point for the investigations in this research project. Based on this, the thesis conducts a case study on the relation between statutory planning and everyday practices in this location. The thesis seeks to deliver insights into the processes that comprise urbanisation in this city as a socio-economic and cultural transition and how diverse lifestyles and habitats create the notion of contingent urbanism. It further asks, how urban development strategies can truly help to improve the diverse and challenging local living-situations of the urbanising population by developing suggestions for pilot projects. Therein rigorous discourse on local situations and contextually suited instruments has to replace a universalist attitude towards urban development at the cost of local values, assets and interests.

## 1.1 OBJECTIVE

Regardless of the strong focus of the scientific discussion on the primate- and megacities, the overwhelming part of urban population growth in Africa can be found in the secondary cities with less than 500.000 inhabitants (UN-Habitat 2008: ix). These secondary cities have largely been overlooked in research so far and processes within the cities as sites of an ongoing urbanisation have not been qualified. As these cities have factually not received academic attention from urban studies, neither the process of rapid urbanisation, nor its causes or consequences have been conceptualised to devise planning instruments in the face of livelihoods being at

stake. It is therefore time to shift the focus of urban research to the secondary cities, the sites that are actually most affected by the phenomenon of urbanisation, with the highest growth rates on the continent.

The PhD looks at the impact of urbanisation on city life in Bahir Dar. To do so, the thesis will compile a contextualised account of urbanisation for the City of Bahir Dar in Ethiopia and looks at living conditions in the town. The account is exploratory and will have the form of a structuring outline that can be complimented and modified by further research and findings. It serves to look into the policy implications resulting from social, cultural and economic change in the ongoing urbanisation process in Bahir Dar. As a consequence, this study is focused on the urban development of Bahir Dar as a site of impact of urbanisation. It further asks how the processes can be accompanied and shaped by urban development strategies encompassing the everyday practice. Here new concepts of spatial development are crucial, as African cities mostly do not conform to theoretical assumptions on urbanisation driven by industrialisation, and are regularly not accompanied by sizeable industrial growth (see chapter 2). Urban development theory assuming lifestyles exclusively based on industrial production and wage labour disregard large parts of the informal urban realities of these cities and, hence, need to be replaced by revised understandings of the local situation.

The underlying paradigms of urban planning will consequently be investigated to question their suitability for the environment they are applied in and find approaches to address the local context. In order to look at the situation in Bahir Dar, this thesis places the statutory planning practices next to existing “everyday urbanisation”, in an attempt to expand the current narrative of urbanisation. The research attempts to establish their particular relation in Bahir Dar, in the assumption that this relation is fundamental to the quality of urban development under the conditions of rapid urbanisation. Leaving the path of traditional theories of urbanisation related to industrialisation, the thesis aims to translate the findings from the field into a comprehensive account to inform academic debate and decision makers in urban policy. The findings will be used to discuss the phenomenon of urbanisation and re-conceptualise it to suitably describe the contingencies and impacts of urbanisation in Bahir Dar. Beyond the academic audience, the thesis is therefore written for engaged citizens, urban planners, and decision-makers in urban politics, as well as administration, who wish to review the current underpinnings of urban policies and amplify the spectrum urban development tools. The recommendations regarding pilot projects may not be adequate in other locations and it can prove impossible to replicate their effects. Nevertheless, finding an approach to contextualised urban planning is relevant and acts also as a reference, just as the empirical results from the example can be used in comparison for more general theoretical discussions on current conditions of urbanisation in Ethiopia. The findings derived from the specific case further contribute to theoretical discussions by amplifying the scope of material available on urbanisation

in Ethiopian towns and seeks to establish evidence towards a diversification and differentiation of the theoretical assumptions on African cities.

## 1.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Access to the field was facilitated by the joint Ethiopian and Swiss lead “NesTown” project for settlement development in the Lake Tana area, by which I was introduced to the area and the local institutions. The Lake Tana region has been designated for the development of new settlements to accommodate population growth by the Ethiopian government (RUPI 2000 E.C.). The project lead me to look at other examples of urban development in the area and question the relation of government provided structures and appropriation practices in the growing cities of the Lake Tana region. With this initial research idea, I began a focused literature review to try to get an understanding of the cultural, social and economic context in Ethiopia and developed the research objective. After three short exploratory visits to Ethiopia between 2009 and 2010 and encountering the designs for the first master plans for Bahir Dar from 1962 in the university archive in Darmstadt (Germany), the theme of the research project was first formulated and Bahir Dar was chosen as the site for a historically grounded case study. Preliminary research questions guided further literature reviews on the general theories on urbanisation in Africa (see chapter 2) and on the local Ethiopian context (see chapter 3), from which more specific research objectives for the study of Bahir Dar were derived (see chapter 4). In a three-and-a-half-month period of field-work in Bahir Dar in 2010, a systematic mapping exercise with research assistants was undertaken to understand the city’s layout and neighbourhood structure. Participating in an “Integrated Training and Capitalising on Experience” (ITC) workshop organised by the “NCCR North-South Research Partnership” of the University of Bern conducted in Bahir Dar in September 2010 allowed me to sit in on conversations with experts on urban development. Co-ordinating a workshop on the question of regional development in the larger city network on Lake Tana, organised jointly with the Bahir Dar University, Addis Ababa University and the ETH Zurich, established access to the network of professional planners. As a result of a contact made at the conference, there was an opportunity to sit in on an expert hearing for the development of the Bahir Dar Waterfront Development Plan, organised on 24th of February 2011 by the Canadian Urban Institute in Bahir Dar.

These impressions helped to revise and focus the eventual research design, which was set up during a methodological workshop conducted jointly by the Technical University Dortmund, the University of Dar Es Salaam and the Kumi University in August 2012 in Arusha, Tanzania. A single-case approach with sub-cases now formed the methodological frame, on which four neighbourhood sub-cases were chosen within a single case set-up (see chapter 4.2). The research

questions (see chapter 4.3) were broken down into a programme for situated data collection in the field (see chapter 4.4). These focus sites were studied in depth with the help of two student assistants from Bahir Dar University's newly established Faculty of Architecture, by conducting semi-structured interviews with residents. The students translated from Amharic into English during the interview sessions and approached the interviewees in their homes. This final round of fieldwork was completed during January and February 2013. The empirical results are collected in chapters 5 and 6.

On returning to Germany, the data was interpreted and structured to relate to the research questions in an iterative process. The material was discussed with peer-groups from the HafenCity University, as well as the Technical University Dortmund. The results of these discussions are presented in the findings and proposals of this thesis (see chapters 7, 8 and 9).

### 1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The content of this thesis is divided into nine chapters (see Fig. 1). Following the introduction, the second chapter describes the main directions of theoretical discourse on urbanisation and how they relate to the issue of rapid urban growth currently observed across the African continent. The third chapter specifies this outlook for the Ethiopian situation, giving an overview of the current narrative regarding the country's urban growth and development. The second and third chapter thereby form the exploration of current theorisations on urbanisation and investigate how, to date, they have been regarded within the Ethiopian urban studies and urban policy context.

Based on these insights, the research gaps in the current discussion serve as the focus points from which chapter 4 develops the research design for the empirical study. It introduces the case-study methodology, by which Bahir Dar was chosen as a case study site for conducting empirical research, as well as the research questions. The research questions are intended to guide the research process to find empirical evidence that can overcome the assumption, that the urbanisation process we see in Sub-Saharan Africa is a homogeneous phenomenon that can be met with standardised answers in the shape of quantities of housing units. It is meant to produce information that can be used for diversified planning, geared to local demands, furthering inclusiveness and also targeting the majority of the population who is dependent on subsistence practices and informal incomes. The material from this data collection is presented in chapter 5 and chapter 6. Chapter 5 gathers information on urban planning, urban policies and administrative practices exercised in the city. In order to present a first comprehensive overview of material on Bahir Dar's urban planning history, the material is presented in a historical timeline, which extends as far as the final field visit in 2013. The historical deve-

lopment is portrayed in order to explain influences still notable in the built structure, planning policies and urban practise of the city today. The account of formal urban planning and the governmental implementation practices contrast with an exploration of everyday practices of urbanisation from four sub-case neighbourhoods presented in chapter 6. Here, the residents' conventional practices of settlement and appropriation of space as producing urban structures by engaging with materiality is described. The findings from the two chapters 5 and 6 on "urban planning" and "everyday urbanisation" in Bahir Dar are then jointly discussed in a synthesis in chapter 7. In this synthesis, data interpretation is undertaken by juxtaposing the findings from these two different topics of data collection. Here, the aim is to establish the relations between statutory planning and practices on the one hand and mundane practices of settling, living and constructing in the city.

Chapter 8 goes on to revisit the theories first presented in chapter 2 and reviews the empirical findings from the case study to point out the specificities of the urbanisation process in Bahir Dar. Thereby, the findings from the empirical work contribute to theory building on rapid urbanisation for the case study location. The insights in turn form the basis through which recommendations for the case study are formulated. Here, the principle of inclusive planning is set as a planning objective. In chapter 9, this aim is broken down into site-specific approaches for the sub-case sites, and suggestions for a revised spectrum of planning tools are made as a basis for discussion of a revision towards a situated urban development strategy.

Fig. 1: Structure of the Thesis

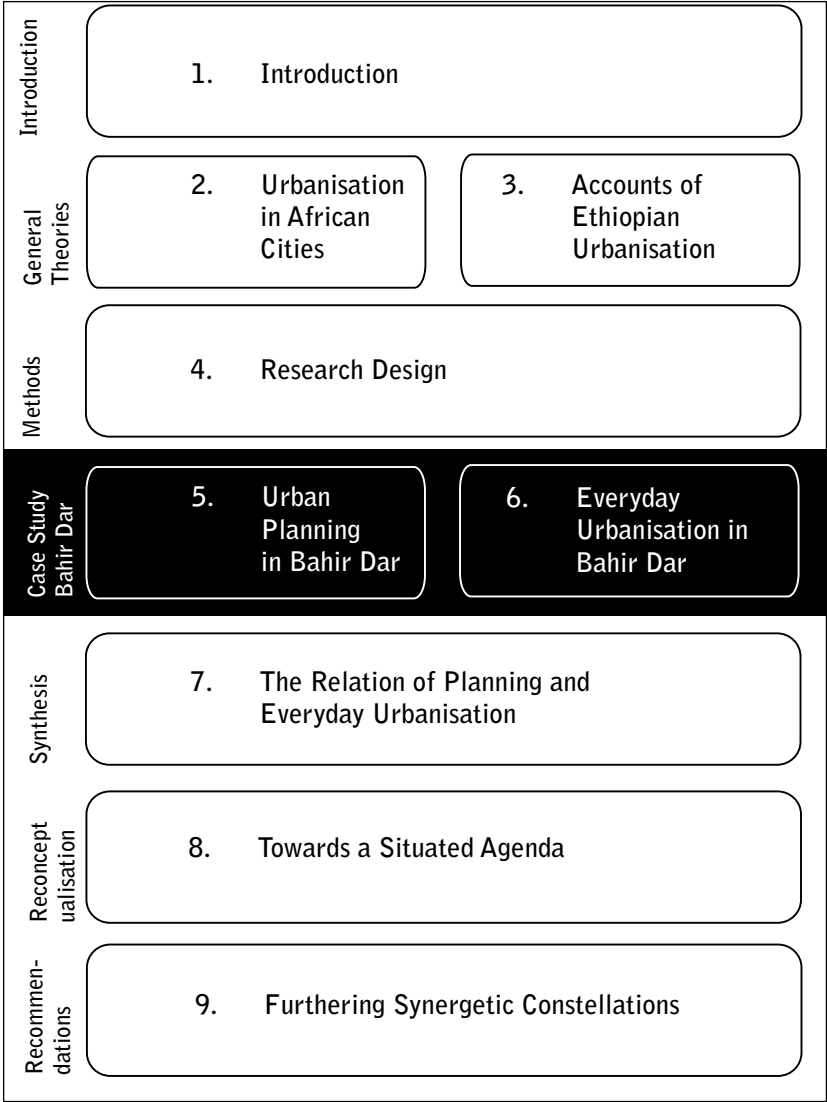


Image by the author.

