

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Tesfamariam, Segen Yainshet; Alemayehu, Elias Yitbarek; Stark, Laura

Title: Neighbourhood Open Spaces : Co-production and Spatial Transformation in Addis Ababa

Year: 2022

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

Copyright: © Zed Books, 2022

Rights: In Copyright

Rights url: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en>

Please cite the original version:

Tesfamariam, S. Y., Alemayehu, E. Y., & Stark, L. (2022). Neighbourhood Open Spaces : Co-production and Spatial Transformation in Addis Ababa. In L. Stark, & A. B. Teppo (Eds.), *Power and Informality in Urban Africa Ethnographic Perspectives* (pp. 191-214). Zed Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350237599.ch-9>

Authors' final draft. Recommended Citation: Segen Yainshet Tesfamariam, Elias Yitbarek Alemayehu, and Laura Stark (2022). Neighborhood open spaces: co-production and spatial transformation in Addis Ababa. In Laura Stark & Annika Teppo (eds.) *Power and Informality in Urban Africa: Ethnographic Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 191–214.

Chapter Nine:

Neighborhood open spaces:

co-production and spatial transformation in Addis Ababa

Segen Yainshet Tesfamariam, Elias Yitbarek Alemayehu, Laura Stark

Introduction

The open spaces of a city are its lungs. They are places for people to exercise and carry out social activities, they influence the water cycle, and have considerable impact on air quality. In the developed world, companies are attracted to locations that offer well designed, well managed public spaces and these in turn attract customers, employees and services (Jason & Neil, 2010). The presence of green parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces in urban areas have therefore become vital marketing tools. Well-planned areas with green open spaces offer benefits to the local economy in terms of raising real estate prices (ibid). Open spaces facilitate social communication, relaxation and recreation, and promote trade and tourism (Catharine, 2002). Open spaces are among a city's most valuable assets that are threatened by rapid urban transformation. Protecting these open spaces and maintaining sustainable growth in cities is vital for residents' well-being in cities.

Addis Ababa is Ethiopia's capital city with an estimated 4.8 million¹ residents, growing at a yearly rate of nearly 4.4 per cent. In its construction and design, Addis Ababa has focused more on dwellings and buildings than on the spaces between them. The spaces between buildings are usually left over, sometimes appropriated by adjacent owners and sometimes utilized as trash dumps. Many open spaces have been left without proper management, becoming abused or

vandalized by residents. These spaces have, at times, been used for livestock grazing (Tesfamariam 2015). Encroachment by municipalities seeking to convert them to other uses has also been common. Yet in Addis Ababa there are good reasons why open spaces are needed: owing to its mild climate year round, many residents carry out activities in the open. Such activities include day-to-day household chores such as manual coffee grinding and doing laundry, as well as larger communal activities such as wedding ceremonies. Thus contrary to Le-Corbusier's² famous dictum that 'the house is a machine for living', in Addis Ababa it is open spaces that are machines for living.

Neighborhood open spaces in Addis Ababa are located around and within residential areas and successfully fulfill their functions if they are designed to encourage informal and formal activities and can create a more peaceful and comfortable environment for residents (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing 2015). For example, they have become key sites for communal events and activities such as those of *iddir*³ groups as well as public meetings and various celebrations (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing 2016). Functionally, they overlap with other green networks in the city such as surrounding parks, and often also incorporate playgrounds and small formal outdoor sports facilities. Quite commonly, they are also linked to major walkways, cycling routes, and bus stops (*ibid.*). As such, successful neighborhood open spaces play an important role in communities in that they facilitate a sense of place and belonging and improve quality of life by providing something for everyone. They also minimize the negative impacts of high density in urban environments such as isolation, exclusion, and lack of space for leisure activities.

This chapter asks: *how was the co-production between community and city for open spaces development in the neighborhood case under study initiated and how did it proceed? What were the barriers to fully successful implementation?* We answer these questions using qualitative data collected by the primary author between 2011 and 2014. In addition to the qualitative data, we use data from government agencies, community members, official documents and observations regarding the physical environment of the housing, all collected by the primary author. All interviews were conducted in Amharic and were subsequently translated into English and transcribed verbatim.

Setting and data

The focus of our study is a neighborhood in Addis Ababis we will call *Churchside*, a pseudonym. Churchside comprises twenty-five housing cooperatives (containing a total of 448 households), which together form one housing association. The neighborhood is a residential one with single-story attached cooperative housing. Housing cooperatives are formed by individuals on a voluntary basis and are autonomous self-help organizations controlled by their members. The idea of self-help housing projects was formally introduced in the Addis Ababa Master Plan drawn up by C.K. Polonyi in 1978 (Tufa 2010). Following the nationalization of all land and rental housing by the Marxist Derg regime in 1978, plots of land were distributed for free to those who could afford to build houses that were then organized into housing cooperatives. Thereafter, even after the change of government in 1991, cooperatives have been one of the mechanisms through which new housing is provided. This policy has targeted middle-income households. The main advantage of housing cooperatives has been to facilitate the construction of houses through mutual assistance by pooling resources, knowledge, and labor – difficult to achieve if done individually (Alemayehu 2018).

The primary author is an Ethiopian urban development studies researcher who lived in the neighborhood under study during her childhood and youth and continued to visit it due to family ties until 2016. The second and third authors are, respectively, an Ethiopian urbanism scholar, and a Finnish ethnologist who has conducted preliminary fieldwork in urban Ethiopia. Long-term collaboration has been carried out between the first and second authors, as well as the second and third authors. The present chapter is therefore the outcome of a sustained ethnographic approach interweaving ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives. In addition to the primary author’s qualitative data consisting of semi-structured interviews and informal group discussions with 17 local officials and neighborhood residents, this chapter draws on her experiences and participant observation as a former resident, as an insider who has followed and understood the context of the more subtle issues of power that are easily missed by outside researchers.

Churchside was built in the period 1987–1991. It was a cooperative housing scheme launched to house government employees of nationally-owned facilities such as hydro-electric plants, shipping lines or sugar factories, which were at the time facing serious rental housing shortages. At the time it was built, Churchside was not centrally located. It lacked major road access, and the surrounding streets were dark at night. However, as the city expanded to the south and east and a main road was built next to Churchside, its location has gradually become more central. In the past fifteen years, many homeowners have sold or rented out their homes, and the

neighborhood is now dominated by high- and middle-income residents. The household income in Churchside typically ranges from 5000 to 15000 ETB (approx. 240–715 USD) per month. In addition, businesses have opened within the neighborhood, altering residential dwellings for commercial use. Churchside is now bordered to the south by a busy street with restaurants, bars and shops, with access to a high school and a small church, to the west by a commercial street, to the east by a residential street facing an enormous Toyota car sales lot, and to the north by a large open site containing a new stadium under construction. The four green open spaces discussed in this chapter are located *inside* the perimeter of the neighborhood.

The legislative and policy framework for open spaces in Addis Ababa

The Ethiopian government has recognized the significant role that neighborhood open spaces can play in sustainable development,⁴ emphasizing their importance in combating climate change, addressing issues of social cohesion, contributing to food security, and reducing poverty through job creation (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing 2015). According to government guidelines,⁵ green spaces should be in balance with buildings and can incorporate services such as playgrounds, formal outdoor sports facilities, public arts, seating and tables, lighting, and fences. It is vital that these spaces are protected against pollution, garbage dumping, vandalism, and heavy motor traffic. In addition, diverse vegetation should be maintained throughout the spaces so as to contribute to biodiversity, ecosystem health, and a beneficial microclimate at the neighborhood level. Significant steps taken in Addis Ababa in the past few years have included trees planted along streets, private stakeholders investing in the beautification of green areas, and the protection of open spaces by building fences around them. Despite municipal plans and policy guidelines, however, there exists a significant gap between policy planning and the implementation of developing urban open spaces in Addis Ababa. For example, more than 10,000 hectares of planned green areas have been used for purposes other than their original intended use in the development plan (Wondimu, 2007, in Tadesse 2010). Religious institutions, especially the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, have contributed to conserving indigenous forests, but these have also been indiscriminately chopped down for burial spaces or for building (ibid). On the one hand, these spaces are under constant threat of land acquisition by the government, who leases the land to private developers. On the other, the Ethiopian government recognizes the threat to these spaces

from high rates of urbanization and the fact that they often are either not designed properly or otherwise fail to serve their intended purpose (*ibid.*).

In Addis Ababa, the situation of neighborhood open spaces is particularly visible in the city's neighborhoods administered by *woredas*, which are the lowest administrative levels in the city. To protect the environment and open spaces, the urban administration has introduced several new policy and regulatory tools applied through different institutions. The participation of key stakeholders, particularly community members, has been a key factor in this quest for better management and protection of the environment. This reflects more generally the situation in Ethiopia following the adoption of the country's new constitution in 1995, after which participatory development has been a major pillar of development strategy. Devolution of power to regions and cities all the way to *woredas* has been carried out in order to facilitate the active role of citizens in their communities.

Mobilization in Churchside to develop open spaces through co-production

Following the participatory turn in development project planning, co-production in the urban context has become a term used to refer to community-city or community-state partnerships in service delivery, driven by the limited capacities of government agencies (Banks et. al. 2020). The concept of co-production is an outgrowth of the participatory development approach. In the debate regarding participatory development, it has been noted that this approach tends to regard the 'local' as something homogenous, overly harmonious, and static, implying shared common needs regardless of people's age, sex, class, ethnicity, and religion (Cooke and Kothari 2002; Mohan and Stokee 2000). All too often, the changing identities of the community and people's differing abilities to choose whether and how to participate have been overlooked (Cleaver 2002). Interestingly, most participation-based approaches have regarded participation as a moral imperative, while non-participation is seen as a sign of irresponsibility. While the stated goals of participation as empowering people and preventing abuses of power appear noble (Rahnema 1992), in reality participation fails to address the issue of who grants or transfers power to whom, and precisely who should be empowered and to what extent (Cleaver 2002). Participatory methods can also exclude or otherwise be of no interest to participants, offering few benefits to them (Cooke and Kothari 2002). There is still insufficient empirical data on outcomes of co-production for urban

citizens. This chapter therefore focuses on the interaction of stakeholders in the co-production of neighborhood open spaces in a single case.

In Addis Ababa, the *Beautification, Parks, and Cemetery Agency* (BPCA) was established in 2010 by the city government (Addis Ababa City Administration 2012) to ensure the city's aesthetic beauty through green development based on the participation of society and various other stakeholders (ibid.). Since the task is enormous and the available resources few, in recent years the agency's main strategy regarding green area development has been geared towards popular mobilization and partnerships with the private sector (Forum for Social Studies 2013). The agency has set itself up locally at *woreda* levels to accomplish more effective devolution of power and to facilitate participation by people in local development programs while ensuring gender equality in the empowerment process (Serdar and Varsha 2008; Tegegne 1998). In order to protect and develop open spaces, the BPCA typically enters into three-year agreements with communities and other actors designated as 'developers'.

After the construction of the housing blocks was completed in Churchside in 1991, four open spaces inside the neighborhood totaling approximately 9,000 m² in area were left to be developed by the community. A major problem experienced by residents was the lack of safety in the Churchside due to burglaries. The open spaces had no streetlights and were therefore completely dark in the evenings. Householders began patrolling the areas but soon asked their fellow residents to contribute 10 ETB (.5 USD) a month as a security fee to hire guards who worked at sentryposts. The number of guards was, however, later reduced by half due to lack of funds, and some guards conspired in thefts within the neighborhood. Consequently, the residents who were contributing the 10 ETB per month felt they were getting nothing for their money, and hired private guards to guard either individual dwellings or whole blocks (four attached row houses made blocks of 8, 16, or 24 households). It was in this situation that the process to develop the open spaces began, with one aim being to make them safer for residents.

This occurred in practice through owner-led decision-making. All owner-residents were entitled to participate directly in the general assembly meeting of the housing cooperatives, although not everyone actually attended the meetings. In practice, tenants could represent their owners in the meetings, since after the general assembly was formed, there were no rules or bylaws clarifying who could actually attend. In the year 2000, this general assembly set up a *development committee* with subcommittees for security, road construction and drainage systems.

The development committee consisted of seven members drawn from the community, six men and one woman. They had been chosen based on their trustworthiness, the respectability of their day jobs, and their social networks within Churchside. The decision was then taken by the assembly to collect a 15 ETB monthly contribution from each household for all development work related to the community. The development committee then proposed a green area development project. Having no ownership title on file, the green areas in question were assumed to belong to the housing blocks standing adjacent to the open spaces. However, in 2009 the Land Bank Administration disputed the community's ownership of these spaces. The Land Bank Administration was part of the city government, and its function was to document and create title deeds for unidentified lands. Since in Ethiopia all land belongs to the government, the Land Bank's purpose was to record all apparently untenured and 'unused' land that could be leased by the city to private commercial developers through open auction. Since urban land prices were rising steadily throughout the period of this study (increasing more than ten-fold in some places), such land parcels represented an important potential source of income for the city government. By the time the Land Bank contested the community's ownership of the open spaces inside Churchside, land prices were already high. The community, therefore, needed to mobilize in order to retain their open spaces. According to the sitting chairman of the development committee, a man in his seventies who lived in the neighborhood,

the market demand for inner-city land led the Land Bank office in the sub-city to designate these open spaces as underdeveloped and suitable for private development. Members of the community were afraid that these spaces would be taken over by wealthy developers and that new housing units such as condominiums [=government-built multi-story housing blocks] and other mixed-use complexes would be built in them. (Conversation with male chairman in his seventies, January 2013).

According to this chairman, several women volunteer members of a local *iddir* [=voluntary burial associations and emergency support groups common in Ethiopia] had raised the issue. They had approached the local development committee to discuss the neighborhood open spaces. The chairman then suggested that a separate local women's *iddir* of roughly a dozen contributing members be established to facilitate open spaces development projects. Once that was done, the

women's *iddir* took the lead, and urged the subcity BPCA to give them the right to develop the spaces while also calling for a meeting of the cooperatives' General Assembly to meet and discuss the development of the open spaces.

The same women's *iddir* conducted the first negotiations with the BPCA regarding joint development of the spaces. In collaboration with the women's *iddir*, the development committee then took over the talks with the the Woreda and then the Bole subcity to push for further protection and development of these spaces. However, the Land Bank Administration was still eager to pursue sale and private development of the spaces, given that they were owned by the government in accordance with the FDRE Constitution. The sitting development committee chairman explained the situation and how it was resolved:

Well-endowed private developers have been a challenge for the committee, given the limited funds of our [cooperatives' residents'] association, collected as they are from small membership contributions. For this reason the [development] committee considered all the vital needs of these spaces and discussed [these needs] with the [Bole] subcities' chairman from whom we got a positive response. But the land bank administration has continued to put pressure on us to develop these spaces with private developers. Therefore I took the matter personally to the mayor of Addis Ababa. He was helpful and sorted out the dispute, even putting a personal phone call to our subcity chairman about the matter. After a number of meetings between the women's *iddir* and the [Bole] subcity, the open spaces were designated as a green area for the entire neighborhood, to be developed by the community through a three-year contract between the development committee and the woreda, signed by the Woreda BPCA on 23 April 2010. (Conversation with male chairman in his seventies, January 2013).

Once the contract was signed, the development committee went on to compile a joint project proposal with volunteers from the community. The resulting green areas development project was submitted for approval to the General Assembly of the housing cooperatives in June 2010. One of the stated rationales for the project was that, due to the lack of day care and safe parks in the area, many children had no option other than to remain inside their apartments, which hindered social activities and physical exercise. Particularly in summer when school was out and

parents were working, children and youth had nowhere to go in terms of nearby recreation areas for a period of two months, because the undeveloped areas of the housing cooperatives were near heavily trafficked roads and contained other dangers for children. Children thus often spent excessive amounts of time watching television or playing video games indoors, given the lack of outdoor entertainment options. The proposal also described a need among parents for quality outdoor spaces and services such as tea stalls where they could socialize, particularly on the weekends.

The specific objectives of the project were to develop the four spaces by creating: 1) a sports and recreation park where residents could play basketball, volleyball, and tennis; 2) a park for social and entertainment activities, offering a tea room and an internet café; 3) a park with a fountain and chairs for adults to relax in, and 4) a playground with a merry-go-round, a seesaw, and other equipment for children. The proposal's aim was to improve the neighborhood open spaces so as to bring them into conformity with the regulations of the municipality of Addis Ababa and ensure their maintenance.

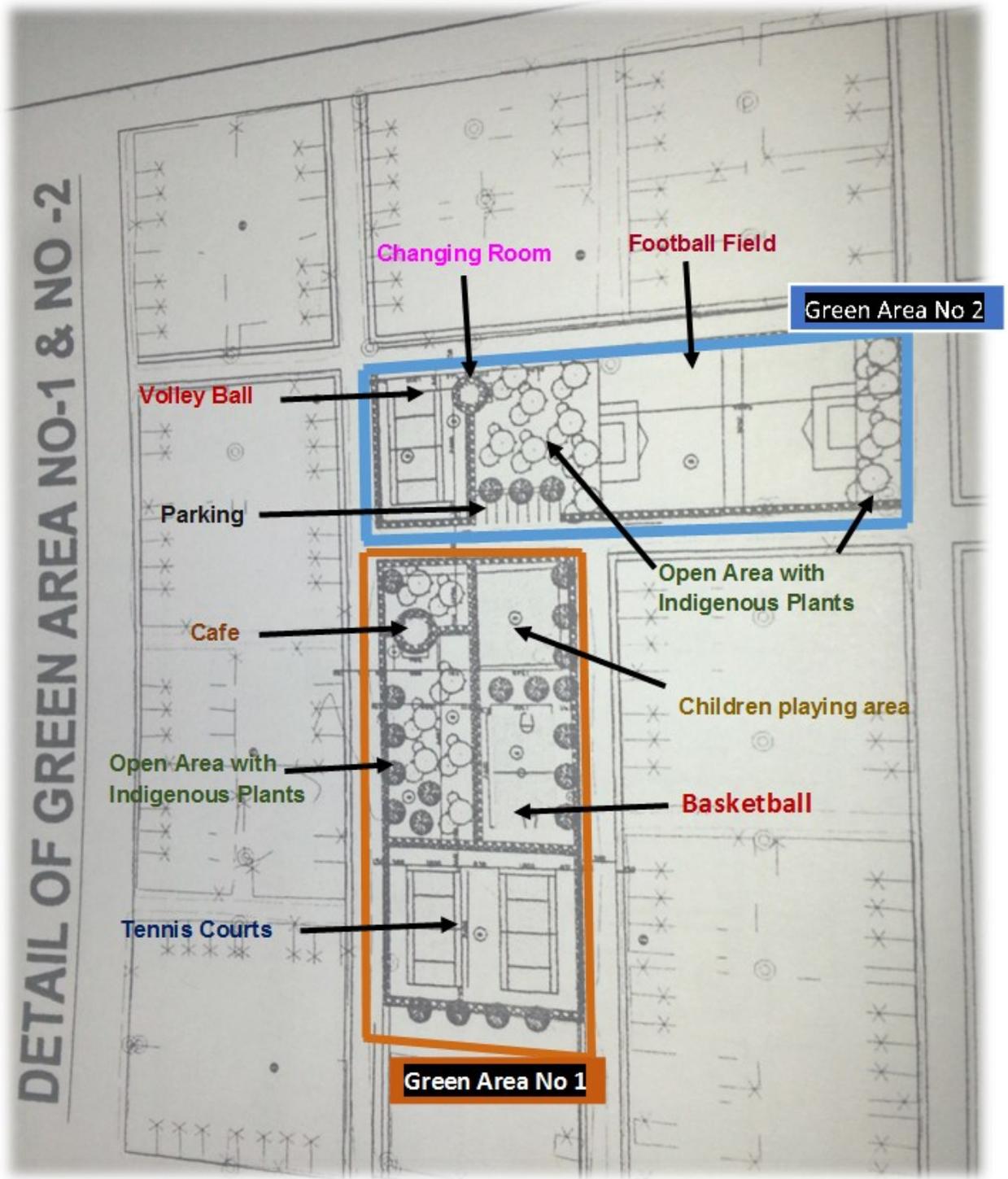


Figure 1: *Proposed Open Spaces Development Design in Original Plans, by Yainshet Tesfamariam 2012.*

Financing the project and maintaining momentum: challenges and obstacles

Once the neighborhood open spaces project was underway, the community development committee in the area attempted to increase participation by the community. Apart from the development committee, grassroots organizations such as *iddir* groups were vital in mobilizing resources for the project.

The costs of the proposed open spaces development project covering landscaping design, construction work, and supervision were estimated at 660,000 ETB (31,430 USD). According to the proposal, the needed funds were to be collected from community members through fundraising events and from local and international funding agencies. An executive committee was set up under the cooperatives' General Assembly to implement the plan. There was also a technical team working under the vice-chairman of the committee, and its task was to closely monitor the execution of the project with the assistance of a consultant who would be hired to supervise the day-to-day activities. The implementation period was set to cover three years, from 2010 to 2013.

When the detailed project proposal for developing the green areas was presented to the general assembly meeting, a 1,000 ETB (48 USD) one-time contribution per person was proposed to meet the costs. The development committee had the support of the General Assembly during the meetings held. However, as the sitting chairman of the committee later explained:

the assembly met with almost half of its members absent. Since most households either rent from or have been purchased from the founding members of the cooperatives, this created a problem for the concept of full participation in the General Assembly. Lack of awareness and accountability to community development have been major challenges for the development committee both in the past and also in this project. However, the members present in the meetings were granted access to the proposed project along with full opportunities to communicate with the committee and collectively vote on decisions. In this way, the proposed project was then approved by the members in attendance, and sent to the development committee for implementation. Subsequently, also the local *iddir* group of the cooperatives contributed financially to the project [...] Once the project was underway,

however, it turned out to be very difficult to mobilize the households expected to pay and to collect the fees from households, because sometimes the founding members were not located since they had moved out of the neighborhood. [Also] people, not all but some, were not interested in the development (Conversation with male chairman in his seventies, January 2013).

The lack of participation, commitment and interest in paying the monthly fees needed to develop the spaces was mentioned by all of the men who had served as development committee chairmen as well as by a woman tasked with collecting twenty ETB (.95 USD) from female members of her iddir group. The chairmen were responsible for collecting the one-time 1000 ETB (48 USD) fee and described how they were forced to knock on doors and send reminders and warning letters to collect the missing money. The major problem in collecting fees from households and individuals was that nobody had any means of enforcing contributions.

One government official in his sixties living in Churchside who had served as a development committee member expressed his frustration at how difficult it was to create momentum among community members to participate. This lack of motivation was explained by the fact that by this time, many residents were renters rather than owners, and saw themselves as having less stake than owners in the future of the neighborhood. Residents were not enthusiastic about attending long meetings on top of otherwise busy days, and the importance of developing the neighborhood – in terms of raising the market value of everyone’s properties – was not fully appreciated by many residents. This was reflected in the low participation in meetings (sometimes only 1 in 9 residents attended), which was in turn exacerbated by a lack of clearly communicated goals from the assembly officials. Each household might receive one flyer announcing the meeting, but the benefits for attendees were never enumerated in such flyers, although such benefits included social networking, an important aspect of Ethiopian society. It was for these reasons difficult to inspire especially younger people to join neighborhood committees.

The development committee’s proposal nevertheless won the approval of the Bole subcity. The committee obtained permission to begin construction work once the proposal had been modified to incorporate the standards and guidelines of the municipal authorities. These modifications resulted from the contractual need to de-prioritize income-generating facilities such

as a small tea-serving kiosk and internet cafe due to budget limitations: there was simply not enough money in the budget to implement them.

The open spaces and what happened to them

The proposal encompassed four open spaces in Churchside. Green Area No.1 (the largest of the four with a total area of 4,150 m²) was located in the centre of the neighborhood. According to the proposal, it was to have two international-sized tennis courts, one basketball court, one children's play area, and a small *tukul*, a traditional cone-shaped mud hut with a thatched roof where soft drinks and sweets could be enjoyed. The *tukul* was to be located next to the children's playground so that parents could relax while their children played. Due to the changes introduced to the original proposal by the development committee, only one sports court for both tennis and basketball was built on this space, and this court was paved with hard concrete (see Figure 3). The rest of the space was reserved for planting trees, with outdoor seating provided as well. During field visits for this research, children and adults from the community were found to regularly use the tennis court, which was available to those paying an additional monthly membership fee. Tennis coaching was also available for anyone wishing to learn. The court was also used by local youth to play basketball and football. An entrance fee was charged to access these spaces, set at five ETB per day.

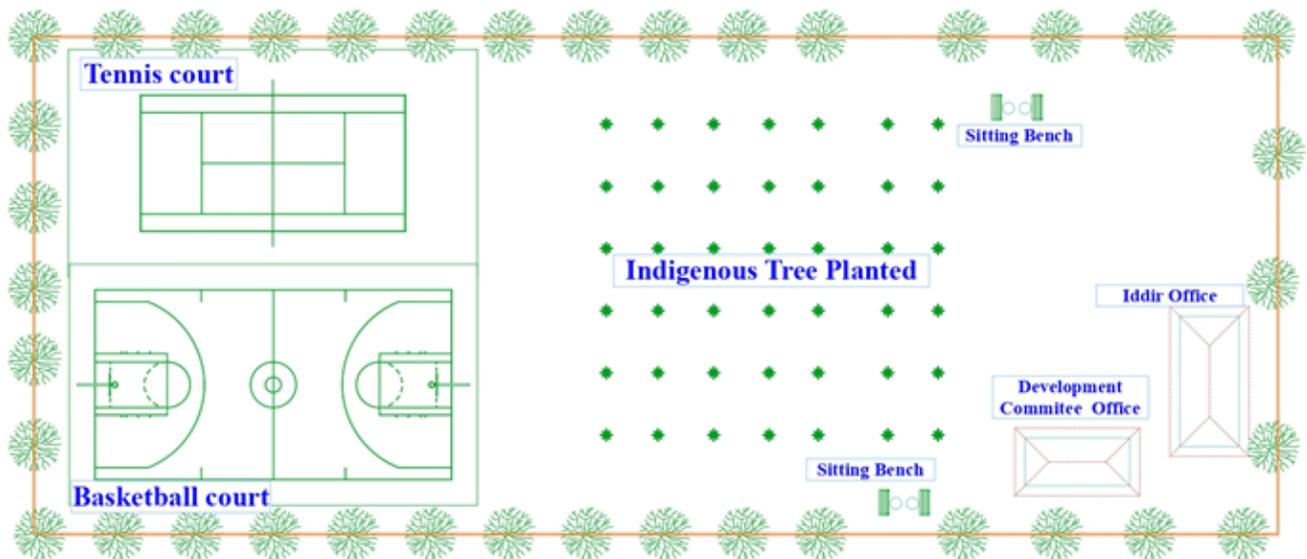


Figure 2: Final outcome of Green Area No. 1

Green Area No. 2 was the second largest of the open spaces in the neighborhood, encompassing 3,750m². This space had previously contained the football field upon which neighborhood and local children and youth had played sports. In the development committee's original proposal to the Woreda, it was to include one small football field, a volleyball court, a changing room, and a parking space for cars. Instead, only a children's playground ended up being built (see Figure 4). This could be accessed by children under the supervision of their parents or a nanny for a daily fee of ten ETB. A permanent female attendant was hired to collect the fees and supervise the children using the space, but in an interview she complained that some parents who brought their children promised to pay the fee later and did not, or simply did not want to pay for a space they felt belonged to their own neighborhood. The attendant had little means to enforce the payment of the fee, since the fee was not posted anywhere. While the area was busy during weekends and after working hours, it often remained empty during the day. As became obvious from the primary author's on-site observations, the Green Area No. 2 was neither well maintained nor safe for children. The ground was uneven and covered by thick grass and the metal playground equipment was unstable and rusty.

Prior to the open spaces development, a diversity of tree species, some of them indigenous, had already been planted along the outside boundaries of the space which gave it an organic appearance. The project proposal had recommended using an even greater diversity of native plant species to help promote ecosystem resilience in the city. Inside the boundaries of both Green Area No. 1 and Green Area No. 2, however, the additional trees, although indigenous, were all the same species and were now planted in a grid pattern by local gardeners. Some of the new trees were supplied by the Woreda BPCA, while others were bought from local markets. This mismatch between proposal and outcome was the result of a lack of prior planning and knowledge about tree species. At the time of this study, not many people used the spaces and sitting areas; those who did were either from the nearby high school (Bole High School) or other neighboring facilities. One reason was that the grass in Green Area no. 2 had been allowed to grow tall and the space was otherwise not maintained, so nobody could sit there.

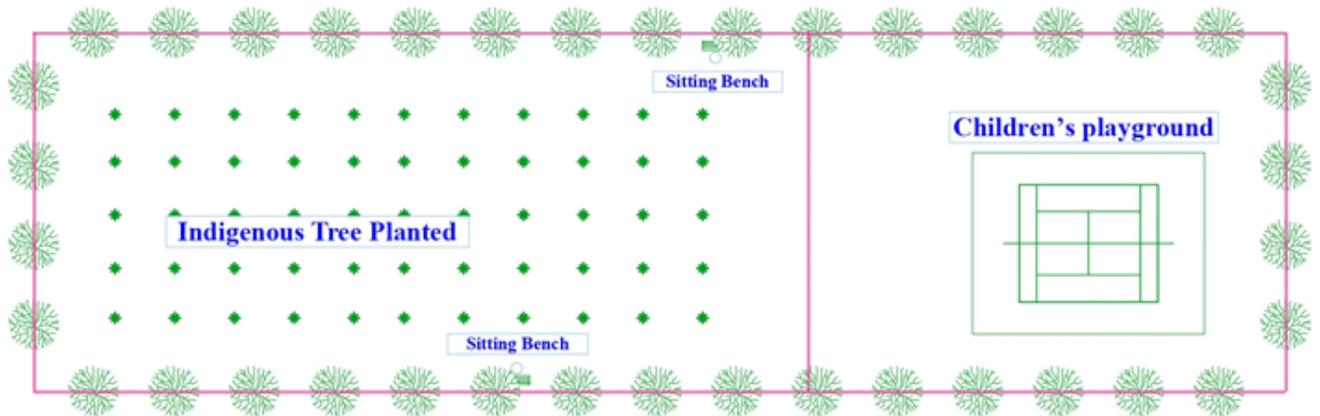


Figure 3: *Final outcome of Green Area No. 2*

Green Areas Nos. 3 and 4 were the smallest of the open spaces in the neighborhood and were located on its periphery. In the project proposal, both these spaces were to have trees planted in them, but by the end of the project, trees had been planted in only one of them (Green Area No. 3; see Figure 5). The development of Green Area No. 4 was still incomplete, as someone had built a non-permanent dwelling on the site prior to the construction of the neighborhood housing. Residents sympathized with the elderly female occupant and allowed her to remain there. When she died, her male relative occupied the dwelling and fortified the structure with more permanent building materials. This gave him a stronger claim to the property, which has been difficult for local authorities to deny merely for the sake of preserving an open space.

During observations, Green Area No. 3 appeared deserted and had no benches. Community members used it only for walking their dogs. Since the development committee had employed only one gardener to take care of all of the four green spaces, not much had been done by way of maintaining and improving them. The sitting spaces in all the green areas were deserted for most of the day and were also untidy. This applied equally to Green Areas Nos. 3 and 4.

Why the project did not succeed as originally planned

Both the original project proposal to develop the open spaces and the agreement entered into by BPCA and the development committee underwent significant changes during implementation. The proposed football field was omitted from the final plan. The basketball and volleyball courts in the original plan were merged into one in order to save space and costs as well as maintain the agreed-upon 20:80 ratio of built-up area versus green areas. The changes and modifications to the original

proposal altered the overall functions of the spaces by leaving out certain facilities and functions meant for parents, children and youth (the tea-drinking area and the Internet café, the football field). Additionally, the fees to use the tennis court had not been in the project proposal, and the Woreda administration claimed that they were not aware that fees were being charged. The diversification of plant life in the green areas still remained to be implemented at the time of writing, and landscape design was completely neglected. The seating areas within the green spaces had been deserted by the local residents.

In the end, Green Area No. 2 was converted from a space that had served children and youth into a space that was functionally useless for most residents. It was, in essence, replaced with a smaller space in Green Area No. 1 that was not safe for playing sports. Although the residents received trees, a playground and a tennis court for which they had to pay entrance fees, they did not receive spaces adequate for team sports or those in which adults could socialize and relax. The spaces did not enhance an experience of community for all.

It is unclear what happened during the decision-making process to change the initial plans for a larger football field in Green Area No. 2, as none of the local actors in the later decision-making processes were willing to discuss this. One reason could have been that decision-makers wanted raise the value of the neighborhood and deter the youth from loitering inside the area. Another reason could have been to prevent the noise caused by football games, which not all residents appreciated.

The development committee's decision to serve soft drinks to visitors in the green areas to raise funds for the maintenance of the open spaces was said to have been reversed due to the illegal activities reported to occur within the spaces, and the sitting areas were then closed off to everyone. Both the sitting chairman of the development committee and a male security guard in his sixties working in the neighborhood open spaces claimed that the people used the spaces to engage in illegal activities such as consuming illicit drugs or alcohol, or playing loud music and otherwise disturbing the residents. A man in his twenties employed in the neighborhood expressed his frustration that the spaces in general were used mostly by outsiders who were not interacting socially with the residents but appeared to be hiding out in the spaces. A young male business owner described how he often saw the open spaces used for illegal uses such as chewing qat, smoking cigarette and doing drugs. Linked to this situation was the disappointment felt by residents at the lack of lighting in the neighborhood open spaces, which meant that it was not safe

to move around in them or spend time in the sitting areas during evening hours. Fifteen neighborhood guards were not sufficient to continually patrol and monitor the whole neighborhood and the open spaces as well. There were no guards assigned specifically to open spaces. Since the spaces were dark at night, according to one young man, they felt unsafe and no one spent time in those areas. Although as mentioned earlier security had been a major issue in the neighborhood before the open spaces development process began, for reasons which were never made clear no streetlights or night lighting had been included in the original plans.

None of the changes introduced by the development committee were presented to the neighborhood residents for review or discussion at the general assembly meeting. The development committee communicated the progress of the project to the general assembly only once. In its meeting towards the end of the implementation period, the project was presented by the chairman of the development committee to the general assembly in the form of an annual report which did not mention the alterations to the planned project implementation. The changes were agreed upon between the development committee and the contractor, and it appears that residents remained largely uninformed until the changes had already been made. Even if they had been informed, many persons had not paid the monthly development fee, and therefore were not considered to have the right to express an opinion on the progress of the project.

Once the modifications had been made to the plan, the development committee hired a local contractor through open bidding to implement the plan. This contractor was a resident of the neighborhood. According to the signed contract, the work was to be completed within one year. The aforementioned 1,000 ETB contribution per person and a monthly fifteen ETB contribution per household were collected to fund the project. According to the chairman of the development committee, it nevertheless took two and a half years to complete the project, and the estimated final cost was more than double the original estimate: 1.4 million rather than 660,000 ETB. Reasons for the inflated price and delays in implementation included an inability to collect the assigned money from neighborhood residents, delays in payment to the contractor, and the fact that the original bid or tender was too low and did not account for the rising cost of materials. The sports court, for instance, still had not been properly drained of rainwater after the first two years, and its surface was not up to standard. As late as the writing of this chapter in 2020, there were still payments outstanding to the contractor and the construction work had not been fully finished.

Given the costs of the entire project, the later stages of decision-making and implementation regarding especially Green Area 2 appear to have been a failure. How did this happen?

The development committee's initial proposal was the basis of an agreement made between the development committee and the Beautification, Parks and Cemetery Agency (BPCA). This meant that the development committee became the 'developer' in the eyes of the state, working on behalf of the city. Whereas the *woreda* administration later made little or no effort to review this process and its outcomes, the BPCA office, which had joined the project in 2010, was mandated to monitor and evaluate the agreed-upon project. According to the agreement, the expectation was that the BPCA should have gone to inspect the work on the open spaces every three years, or the contract would be revoked. But no formal monitoring or evaluation of the project was ever carried out by the BPCA. Had the BPCA conducted evaluations during the project's implementation in the neighborhood, they would have noticed the changes that the development committee had undertaken on their own.

The BPCA had no answers for why the plans were changed, and admitted that they could not monitor the development process because their staff were not architects or urban planners. The staff lacked not only funds and skills but also guidelines, checklists, contact information, or any way to truly enforce rules even if they had checked. The sitting chairman of the development committee, for his part, noted that

the only way the local government and especially the [BPCA] agency have been involved is by giving us trees for planting. Other than that, they have not provided any assistance in the development of these open spaces, subsequent to the signing of the agreement. The [Woreda and Bole subcity] government officials are political appointees and do not have the ability to run this kind of development program, which require technical expertise. Therefore there is a clear gap in the way we collaborate, and there is mistrust on our side as to the role and capability of the agency... (Conversation with male chairman in his seventies, January 2013).

On the one hand, it was clear from interviews that the development committee felt they had been left on their own to carry out a set of tasks for which they would have needed assistance from the higher-level local government administration. On the other hand, the BPCA had few means of

enforcing compliance with original agreements, even if it does monitor them, as has happened when some open spaces in Addis Ababa designated for green area development in the city have been converted instead into spaces for car washes and vending stalls. This lack of any legally enforced structure of rights and responsibilities for all actors affected every phase of the development project. People were expected to participate voluntarily and committees were expected to inform them of all relevant issues, but these were difficult to enforce due to a lack of clearly defined rules, roles or basis in solid arguments (for instance reference to existing legislation).

The exclusion of the youth in the open spaces development process

During the open spaces project, assumptions were made about whose well-being should be facilitated, namely that of adult owners and residents. This left out some groups altogether such as children, youth, and the disabled. Although the playground for children has provided them with an opportunity to play in a nearby place and their parents to be in close proximity, the fees, limited opening hours and unsafe equipment in these spaces could hinder visitors from coming often and ultimately discourage users.

The largest group ignored during the implementation was the youth, who expressed their disappointment at the lack of a football field. In Ethiopia as in most countries, football is an essential activity in how children and youth relate to their peers. Formerly, mini-championships during summer breaks had been held in Green Area 2, and had brought not only children and youth from the immediate neighborhood but also from other neighborhoods to play. By the end of the project, however, what had formerly been the football field on which youth and children played was no longer available for this purpose, since it had been planted with trees. Consequently, children and youth had moved to a small part of Green Area 1, which was paved with hard concrete and therefore was not a safe surface on which to play sports. Green Area No. 1 was busy particularly during after-school hours and weekends. In the morning hours on Saturday and Sunday, the basketball court became a football field or was used partly for basketball, partly for football. One male high school student under the age of 18 reported that he did not like playing on the new concrete surface because it was too hard, and another male high school student less than eighteen years of age said that while he played on it, he wished for a standard size football field. A male college student in his 20s used the concrete space on Saturday mornings to play football

with others, but felt that the football games had lost their former atmosphere, their ‘culture’ when compared to previous times, when neighborhood youth had played friendly games with youth from other neighborhoods. At some point after the open spaces transformation, however, the development committee to forbid anyone to play football on the concrete-paved basketball court – the only remaining space for playing sports – due to the greater risk of injury from the hard surface. The development committee chairman argued that the children and youth should instead go to other neighborhoods to play:

... no one should play on the football field since it is clearly not built for such a purpose and it could be very dangerous when they fall down. The football field planned [for this space] was changed because the space is small, therefore the children can go to nearby areas to play football, and otherwise we will take strict measures against those found playing. (Conversation with male chairman in his seventies, January 2013).

In reality, youth and children continued to play basketball and football on the hard concrete. Although the original proposal allocated spaces for a football field and volleyball court, these were never built. According to a security guard who was working in the open spaces,

the football field had been just perfect for the neighborhood kids, since they all came from different age groups but they all played the game with passion. Even people from other neighborhoods came here, to either play on their own or have a match with the kids from this neighborhood. However, now that [Green Area No. 2] has become different with the sitting area being put there instead, no one comes around anymore, and if anyone comes, it’s either to smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol. No one comes just to have a rest and enjoy doing nothing, and if somebody comes, it’s people from other neighborhoods, and even they are not that many, really. But because these spaces have been abused and the development committee wants to strongly discourage activities like smoking and drinking, we have to tell even those people not to come in and do that there. However, we cannot really manage handling that task on top of our other tasks like having to patrol the housing areas. (Conversation with male security guard in his sixties, April 2013).

A male college student in his 20s reported that he would have loved to be part of the design process of the open spaces project and wished that he could have contributed something to make the spaces more appealing. A female resident in her fifties said that it was difficult to get the youth involved in the community projects because the content of the meetings tended to be boring for them. She was worried about the future of the neighborhood if youth were not somehow recruited to participate in the decision-making, and would have loved to see young people taking positions in committees and executing projects in the future.

Partly because of the lack of enthusiasm among the youth, by the end of the development process the members of the general assembly and some development committee members felt that the largest problem facing them was the transfer of power to future members of the development committee. By that time, the development committee members had served for seven years, when a normal term should have been 2–3 years. New development committee members were not elected until 2017 because of the low turnout and therefore insufficient quora at the general assembly meetings. Outgoing committee members needed to nominate new persons to take their place, but there was little interest among residents in joining neighborhood committees.

Conclusions

In Addis Ababa, the development and protection of urban open spaces face several challenges, including lack of adequate financing, lack of coordination among different executive agencies within the city administration, and lack of awareness among the public and other actors (Forum for Social Studies 2013). The current construction boom in and around the city centre also threatens the remaining forests and green areas within the city limits.

The open spaces development in the neighborhood studied here was initiated by female residents who were already self-organized into voluntary *iddir* funeral savings groups. However, these women – busy with work, families, and social commitments – did not have the time to take on the management of the entire project, and therefore it was turned over to the housing cooperative’s development committee for planning and implementation. The high tenant/owner ratio in the area, however, complicated the mobilizing of interest and collection of monetary contributions from residents to pay for the construction, which was finished behind schedule and over budget.

Some residents felt that overall, the development of the open spaces was beneficial in that it achieved the primary aim of the homeowners: the neighborhood was able to retain its open spaces rather than lose them to private developers. In a congested city such as Addis, having green open spaces in a central urban area raised the property value of the whole neighborhood. The open space development in this neighborhood was therefore an important achievement.

Yet there were also serious problems. The project took more than two years to complete, and ended up costing roughly twice the original estimate, yet without achieving the quality and standards originally aimed for. Both of the larger open areas in the neighborhood were transformed into areas that were relatively useless to most residents, could not be accessed without paying fee, and led to a situation even worse in terms of recreation possibilities than what had been offered by the pre-development open spaces. This occurred because the original plans were modified during implementation and the actual *users* of the spaces were overlooked in these modifications.

Co-production of neighborhood open spaces in the case studied here meant an alliance between the community and the local government agency, BPCA, which prevented other branches of the city government from appropriating the land for sale to private developers. However, there were blind spots and dysfunctions within both the alliance and the community which meant that the developed open spaces were not useful for all members of the community. First, institutionalization of the co-production process did not guarantee its success. Although the broad terms of community-city cooperation are spelled out in Ethiopian law, adapting these terms to realities on the ground proved difficult. There were clear problems of communication among the different levels from planning to final implementation. Not all members of the community had full awareness of the planning phases or the possibility to voice dissatisfaction.

Existing literature on co-production at the community level rarely traces out the complex structures necessary for participation, including clear procedural guidelines for all, a concrete means of enforcing rules, and the explicit communication of how participants will benefit. Community development committees often evolve from need, but they lack the necessary skills, professional consultants, and funds to be full co-producers with city or state governments. They rely on the work of volunteers from whom not much can be demanded, since they have full-time jobs and/or family responsibilities. In order to succeed fully, the project outlined here would have needed interaction and integration between many persons. One can speculate that stronger leadership might have been needed at the community level, but such leadership would have

required strict procedures that all community participants were familiar with. Moreover, there are no legal means currently in place to hold decision-makers to account at both community and city/state levels so that actual implementation would not deviate from plans already agreed upon.

Although the BPCA's main task was to monitor and evaluate the development of neighborhood open spaces following the signing of stakeholder agreements, the BPCA clearly needed more skilled labor, funds, and legal recourse to prevent violations. The Woreda BPCA was the point of contact between the community and the city government, but it was unable to monitor the actual implementation or enforce conformity with approved plans. This raises the question of the role of the state in these kinds of co-production processes and how it can maintain its relevance in urban environmental development. If procedures have no actual accountability or consequences, then implementation will be flawed and the groups with the least power at the community level will be excluded.

Another major problem was the lack of clear and well-defined ownership of the neighborhood open spaces. The dispute between the land bank administration and community representatives was a clear sign of the absence of proper coordination in the management of these spaces. Third, the project was initiated primarily to combat the possibility of the land bank's developing the open spaces for commercial purposes. The participation of the community was mobilized only narrowly to secure the success of this particular open spaces development project, instead of addressing more critical issues related to the interaction between local communities and local governance. These included citizens' lack of awareness about environmental protection and community development, which formed a major bottleneck to the participatory process according to the community leaders with whom the primary author spoke. There was poor coordination between the woreda BPCA and the higher levels of government tasked with dealing with environmental issues. Neighborhood open spaces failed to become part of the overall green infrastructure development program, but were, rather, left for unprepared community developers to manage together with poorly funded *woreda* and subcity administrations. Decentralized efforts to protect the environment could thus not be fully implemented due to a shortage of both financial resources and skilled labor.

Community volunteers were indispensable assets during the project initiation and implementation periods, with female *iddir* group members in particular being critical to catalyzing project negotiations and disseminating information to local residents. However, end users of the

neighborhood open spaces such as children and youth did not take part in the planning of their own neighborhood's open-space development. Greater efforts to make participation interesting for the youth and involve them in decision-making would be needed in the future.

The following recommendations for future open spaces projects are indicated: first, there is a need for greater clarity in both ownership of neighborhood open spaces and the roles of various government agencies in the protection and development of these spaces. Second, trust in the institutions that plan and implement development is vital in encouraging participation in the development process. There is a need for organized neighborhood associations to include end users such as youth and children in the processes of decision-making, not only for the project at hand, but also to facilitate their later participation in such associations as adults. This requires not only willingness from parents and committees to share development responsibilities with the youth, but for the *content of communication* to be as clear and interesting for youth as possible. Youth and children should have a *clear channel of communication* to decision-makers in all projects in which they are to feature as beneficiaries. Finally, for more sustainable policy and practice, current policy processes should learn from ongoing practices and trends regarding open spaces development.

At a broader level, when planning and implementing co-production, there is a constant need to reflect on the local power structures of daily life, because no matter how important the achievement, it is much less of an achievement if the majority of the population is consequently marginalized and the transformation is robbed of its usefulness. This makes it important to examine the power relationships between various stakeholders to understand how they interact and why, and to map and understand the motivations of the various participants, which are themselves influenced by less-visible factors that may be contradictory. In the present case, the existence of grassroots organizations and local women's associations was initially helpful in allowing actors to navigate through complex relationships with the local government. It is therefore important to identify the best ways for community associations to organize, lead, and manage themselves. Legalizing their status within co-production processes would promote residents' sense of ownership in and commitment to development projects.

In conclusion, while co-production that promotes participatory development is a worthwhile goal, it can face obstacles in planning and implementation that need to be openly addressed by all stakeholders. In this case study, local governments would have fared better in their project undertakings had they tackled questions surrounding the long-term sustainability of the protection

and development of neighborhood open spaces. This would have involved ensuring equal and fair involvement of all community members, a process in which all voices were heard and everyone's rights and responsibilities were recognized in advance.

Notes

¹ United Nations World Urbanization Prospects, The 2018 Revision.

<https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Report.pdf>; also

<https://population.un.org/wup/>.

² A well-known Swiss-French architect, one of the pioneers of modern architecture.

³ *Iddir* groups are voluntary burial associations helping their members during not just bereavement but also in other emergency situations.

⁴ Especially the *Climate Resilient Green Economy* (CRGE) initiative.

⁵ Found in the *Ethiopian National Urban Green Infrastructure Standard* (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing 2015) and the government manual *Development of Amenity Green Space in Residential Areas* (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing 2016).

References

Addis Ababa City Administration (2012b), *Addis Ababa City Administration*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.addisababa.gov.et/bpc>

Alemayehu, E. Y. (2018), ‘Addis Ababa: A Collage of Cities’, in E. Y. Alemayehu and L. Stark (eds), *The Transformation of Addis Ababa: a Multiform African City*, 21–76, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Banks, N., Lombard, M. and Mitlin, D. (2020), ‘Urban Informality as a Site of Critical Analysis’, *The Journal of Development Studies*, 56 (2): 223–238. DOI:10.1080/00220388.2019.1577384

Bole Subcity Communication Affairs Office (2012) *Bole Yearly Report*, Bole Subcity Communication Affairs Office, Addis Ababa.

Cleaver, F. (2002) ‘Institutions, Agency and Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development,’ in B. Cooke & U. Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny*, Zed Books, New York, pp. 36–55.

Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. (2002) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* Zed Books, New York.

Environment Protection Authority of Ethiopia (2007) *Ethiopia Environment Outlook: Environment for Development*, Federal Environmental Protection Authority, Addis Ababa.

Forum for Social Studies (2013) *A Public Dialogue on Addis Ababa’s Green Areas and Parks*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.fssethiopia.org/newsdetail.php?id=42#>

Mohan, G. & Stoeke, K. (2000) ‘Participatory Development: The Dangers of Localism,’ *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 247–268.

Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Ethiopia (2015) *Ethiopian National Urban Green Infrastructure Standard*, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.

- Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Ethiopia (2016) *Development of Amenity Green Space in Residential Areas Manual No.15/2016*, Urban Planning, Sanitation and Beautification Bureau, Addis Ababa.
- Rahnema, M. (1992) 'Participation,' in W. Sachs (ed.), *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, Zed Books, London, pp. 116–131.
- Serdar, Y. & Varsha, V. (2008) *Local Government Discretion and Accountability in Ethiopia*, The Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Atlanta, pp. 8–38.
- Tadesse, A. (2010), 'Review of Urban Environment in Ethiopia,'. In Edwards, Sue (ed), *Ethiopian Environment Review 1*. Addis Ababa: Forum for Environment, pp. 61–78.
- Tegegne, E.G. (1998) 'The Influence of Decentralization on Some Aspects of Local and Regional Development Planning in Ethiopia,' *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*, 14(1), pp. 33–63.
- Tesfamariam, S. (2015) *Environment protection and development in Addis Ababa: The case of revitalized neighborhood open spaces in housing cooperative*. Master's thesis, Development Studies, Addis Ababa University.