

Revue *Flux*

At the edges of major transport infrastructures: African mobilities and circulations in the context of modernity

Call for expressions of interest - Call for papers

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1. Context

This issue of the journal Flux aims to examine the permanent gap between major transport infrastructure financed in recent decades on the African continent and the actual needs and practices of mobility expressed and employed by populations, traders, and transport actors.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, after structural adjustment put everything on hold, the return of large transport infrastructure, whether it be corridors, airport platforms, bus stations, port and logistics terminals, has been considered to be part of contemporary urban development in the countries of the Global South, especially in capital cities (Lombard and Steck, 2004; Oliete Josa and Magrinyà, 2018). However, in 2018, Paul Nugent wondered whether the large infrastructure projects observed in many African contexts would not end up as “white elephants”, like many post-independence projects that were not successful or appropriated by populations.

The image of a modern Africa connected to global flows, which has become an integral part of the agendas of states and international donors, is spreading in the imaginations of local populations and actors, primarily in governments and in the business world. The emblematic figure of the “infrastructure metropolis” (Prelorenzo and Rouillard, 2009), whose future is presented as being linked to major projects, fascinates people as much as, if not more than, it helps to solve the problems of daily travel. In this context, international transport corridors are put forward as a means of reorganizing metropolitan territories and polarizing exchanges (Debric, 2012; Söderbaum and Taylor, 2008). They seem to take precedence over all other spatial figures, as can be seen between Lagos and Abidjan (Choplin, 2019), bringing about the emergence of the “goods metropolis”, following the example of the logistics metropolises of the Global North (Dablanc and Frémont, 2015). Infrastructure is seen as a modern project, without which 'emerging Africa' cannot happen, according to popular expressions across the continent (Giovalucchi and Samuel, 2019).

While projects tend to overemphasize the search for fluidity in the movement of people and goods (Quet, 2022), while polarizing routes to access urban amenities, making transport users dependent

on digital technology, and privileging hypermobile populations over less mobile ones, we wish here to understand African transport infrastructure through the prism of the circulation regimes studied by Blaszkiewicz (2019). The question is whether the fluidity embodied by infrastructure only benefits globalized actors or whether, through appropriation, adaptation, and circumvention (Chauvin et al., 2017), it also spreads to ordinary transport populations and actors.

2. Expected contributions

Three areas of work may guide contributors:

Putting infrastructure projects on the political agenda. This first line of work raises the question of the place and role of African states, but also of decision-makers, ministers, entrepreneurial mayors, as well as steering and governing mechanisms, in the evolution of the policies underlying the development of transport infrastructure. What do these actors tell us about the 'instituting powers' held by infrastructure in Africa (Jarrige et al., 2018), which structure people's mobilities (particularly those of people who emigrate), and constrain them through prohibitions or the erection of new borders (via tolls, controls, airlocks), and surveillance systems? Do these infrastructure projects allow for the deployment of a diversity of practices, or do they format them, relying on the import of ready-made models promoted by international funders (Holzbauer, 2014), and duplicating what is done elsewhere?

The materiality of uses. This second area focuses on showing the materiality of mobility itself that takes place on these transport infrastructures (Bennett and Joyce, 2013). Understood as a complex social and technological process (Graham and McFarlane, 2014; Beck et al., 2017), transport infrastructures become the object through which we can grasp changes in people's relationships to space and power, particularly in contemporary modes of transport (tramways and other types of transport with dedicated lanes, toll motorways: Diop, 2020; Hussen, 2016). Do they actually promote travel and boost commercial sectors or activity zones, opening up and connecting new areas? Following the work of Boutueil and Lesteven (2021), we can interrogate whether the multiplication of possibilities made possible by communications technologies accelerates the modernization so desired by African states.

Different modalities of exclusion or circumvention. The third line of work seeks to chart access inequalities, tunnel effects, conflicts of use, as well as the way populations and actors bypass transport infrastructure, according to a circulation regime known as off-roading, and how they contravene surveillance systems. Populations and transport operators divert these major infrastructures from their primary functions (speed, fluidity, modernity), to the benefit of daily travel and supplies as well as local trade. More specifically, how do discrete market sectors (see Choplin and Pliez, 2016) adapt to the modernization of transport infrastructure, going beyond a supposed duality in systems to invent new ones, born out of transport hybridization and logistics practices (in the sense given by Mareš and Savy, 2021)?

Transversally, the questions of relevant scales to apprehend circulation and mobility, and the stakes of public policies and the convergences/divergences between territories of populations and territories of projects, will be debated.

This call for papers will accept proposals from the fields of geography, urban and spatial planning, history, socio-anthropology, and spatial economics.

3. How to apply

➤ *A summary for 29 August 2022*

Authors should send a paper proposal (not exceeding 750 words), together with the name(s) of the author(s) and their institutional affiliation(s) by 29 August 2022 to Nora Mareï nora.marei@cnrs.fr and Jérôme Lombard jerome.lombard@ird.fr. Authors will receive feedback on their abstract by 26 September 2022.

➤ *Full article for 1 February 2023*

On the basis of the abstracts pre-validated by *Flux*, authors will have until 1 February 2023 to send the full version of their paper. It will be expected to meet Flux's standards, i.e., a text of 6,000 – 8,000 words, an abstract of 200 – 250 words both in French and in English, and a short bio of the author(s) of approximately 100 words.

Please check the recommendations to authors accessible via the link: <http://revue-flux.cairn.info/recommandations-aux-auteurs/>

The thematic issue is scheduled for publication in early 2024.

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