The Notion of Ubuntu and its Implications for Sustainable Cities in Africa. The Case of Kinshasa

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Abstract

Ubuntu as an African philosophy and culture is very important for the transformation of many cities. In this paper, I will show how the notion of Ubuntu can lead to sustainability in African cities especially in Kinshasa, characterized by poverty, marginality, exclusion, and the degradation of the environment.I will begin with an introduction to give an essay on the comprehension of the notion of Ubuntu and sustain cities. My second point will be the explanation of the methodology used in this paper, the third point will be a brief diagnosis of Kinshasa city, the next point underlines how Ubuntu has many implications in the transformation of Kinshasa, and the fifth point will be the conclusion.

Keywords: Ubuntu, sustain cities, Kinshasa, urban planning, urban management, ecology, social justice

1.   Introduction

What is Ubuntu? Ubuntu is based on the idea of common humanity, group solidarity, reconciliation; its key belief is that "motho ke motho ba batho babangwe/umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" meaning that a human being can only be a human through others persons (Mokgoro, 1999) in one of South Africa languages called Nguni. I am so you are. The "cogito ergo sum" constituting the base of the rationalism philosophy elaborated by the French philosopher Rene Descartes which insists in the I is its opposite: the mark of egoism. Karegeye quotes a bishop of Rwanda who criticizes this conception by: "Njye, Njewe, Njenyine" (I, myself, only me) (2015). The ego constitutes the center of all things and the universe. Western worldview is not the same with the worldview of Africans. The philosophy of Ubuntu is present in many Africa's

communities. "Mundu ni mundu ni undu wa andu"in Kikuyu (Kenya), meaning a human being is a person because of the other people. In Sotho and Shona. "Izandla ziyagezana" is a Zulu expression meaning that the left-hand washes the right hand and the opposite is also true (Mashau T.D and Kgatle M.S., 2019; JY Mokgoro, 1999).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the philosopher Tshiamalenga Ntumba elaborated the notion of bisoite. From Lingala "Biso" meaning the personal pronoun We, Bisoism or bisoite is the attitude which gives the primacy of consists in posing not in terms of Cartesian I, but in terms of We: We think that, We recommend that ... The subject I does not disappearance , drowned in we, it is a force, a union of many "I's" capable of assuming the conjugation of multiple efforts in a communicational process, where the correctness of words and attitudes favors a true consensus. This consensus is said to be true when it can promote the development of each "I", evolving as a link in a long chain (humanity, group of men, fraternity, families, or any other human institution). In the field of politics, it becomes a bisocracy, the power of us (Ngubu, 2014). A shift in the philosophy language and the perception of power.

Respect for individuality, not individualism is recognized and competition for the well- being of the community is not excluded.

In this context, perpetual dialog, consultation of others, and accountability are required (Moleka, 2021a). Some words are equivalent to Ubuntu such as compassion, generosity , sympathy, compassion, benevolence, solidarity, hospitality, openness, affirming, available, kindness, caring, sharing , harmony, interdependence, collectivity and consensus. Ubuntu is the opposite to vengeance and confrontation (Mugumbate & Nyanguru , 2013). For the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, Ubuntu can be understood as community, citizenship, brotherhood, reconciliation (2004).

Among the weakness of Ubuntu philosophy, Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) note the openness to new ideas and the respect for authority which are among factors that contributed to the colonization of Africa by Europe, and its lack of universality.

What is a sustainable city?

The notion of sustain city draws its origins in the notion of sustainable development which is a tri-dimensional concept, showing the interdependence between environment, economic and social sustainability, but in the beginning the focus was on the preservation of the environment. This paradigm with the concept of development is seen as a Western conception (2012). So, a cultural dimension is necessary for its contextualization.

The sustainable city or what is also called sustainable urban development designates a political horizon of far-reaching scope, it also serves as a prospective reference frame, while sustainable

urban development refers to the process of internalization of sustainable development in urban planning, according to modalities more professional than political (Emelianoff, 2007).

The concept of sustainability generally has three pillars which are according to Brundtland Commission: ecological, economic and social (Voetmann, nd). Social equity has a vertical or intergenerational and intragenerational dimension, and a horizontal dimension, that is, between the different societies concerned and in each society (Blanchon, Moream, and Veyret, 2009).

A fourth dimension of sustainabilityis in discussion among scholars. Culture is seen as the fourth pillar of sustainability. It provides qualities such as innovation, inventiveness, the spirit of creativity, critical thinking but also empathy, mutual trust, very important elements to the existence of any society and to its development or social progress, what constitutes sustainability (Voetmann, nd). Ubuntu in this context is a cultural dimension of sustainability.

2. Method

In this work I use ecological approach to see the interaction between the environment and men, and the urban psychoanalysis approach to establish a diagnosis of the sustainability of this city and see the impact of the environment in the mind of population.

3. Diagnosis of Kinshasa city

- The morphocartography:

Patrick Melé (1998) explains that the model of Spanish colonial towns had a central downtown where all was centralized: the great construction, the cathedrals, the great residences of the notables, a market called *tianguis* (farmer's market). The creation of the city shows how man can dominate the environment and give an orientation in the space (industry, business, culture); there is also a symbolic and spiritual dimension in relation of divinities.

According to Marchal and Stébé (2014) and Laterrasse (2018), the plan and urban form of many towns or cities are in two geometric figures: the circle and the square. The circular towns and checkered towns are an expression of sacred. In old Egypt, the hieroglyph had the symbols of circle and cross for the city. The circle is the representation of the cosmos, divinity, and eternity. When a circular plan seeks to have an ideal city the checkered plan like the roman camp has a military vision for the defense of the territory for the potential attacks and the will to control territory. The same checkered scheme was applied to build Kinshasa. This city has a checkered plan, and surrounded by military camps in colonial and pre-independence period to

protect the whites, the colonizer for revolts of indigenous. The plan gives the message of violence and intimidation, to scare the population. It shows that this population is under oppression and domination but they cannot change situation.

If we take only the west part of Kinshasa we can count in a distance of near 20.2 to 23.2 kilometers depending of route according to Google map, we find 2 police camps and 14 military camps (Moleka, 2021b). What a large number?

 As if Kinshasa was afraid of terrorist attack or an invasion of a foreign army.

I think this is made to protect the dictatorship of Mobutu against revolt or invasion of population. Again, the message is oppression and domination. It also made to protect colonial superstructure and rich people but with time it created a feeling of insecurity and violence. In what mental and stress state such population could be?

Different movements of delinquency among Kinshasa youth is an essay to break this domination, as long as this colonial military town will remain the revolt will remain. If we make cartography of young called *Kuluna (*delinquents) in the West part of Kinshasa, we find that all these military and police camps are the stronghold of *Kuluna*. These camps are residencies and serve also as places of refuge when they commit a crime; the policemen are not able to pursue them inside military camps. In the morphocartography of Kinshasa, we see also exclusion and marginalization. There is only one center (Gombe) and the rest of the city is periphery resulting from the colonial town where Kalina was the municipality of whites and indigenous cannot go there without permission. Every day millions of people go to Gombe, the center of all: central administration, central market, and shops, headquarters of public and privates enterprises.

 With the difficulties of transportation and traffic jams, we can imagine the stress of the population.

 There is a marginalization in creating the greatest university in the periphery of Kinshasa called "colline inspirée" in English "inspired hill" to make marginality, a separation between intellectual elites and the mass. There are spatial marginality and social marginality.

     According to the World Bank Kinshasa Multisector Development and Urban Resilience Project (2019), in Kinshasa, there is social exclusion which is caused by spatial segregation and a bad relation between state and citizen. Delinquency among youth is caused especially by a lack of urban planning in new and poor neighborhoods, the exclusion and high levels of unemployment, anarchic construction, and topography of insecure neighborhoods make them natural havens for kuluna. The presence of ravines, narrow streets, erosions, and a lack of pathways limits the effectiveness of the police who lack the means for their work. The level of crime in the city is high due to poor economic conditions and high rates of unemployment and exacerbated by alcohol and substance abuse. More than 10 percent of children (10 to 18 years old) work in various jobs on the street, and 20,000 street children are living in Kinshasa, of whom 40 percent are girls. Brazzaville and Pointe noire have also the same problem of street children and delinquents called Ninja, cobra…

- Environmental degradation: Kinshasa has a tropical climate and therefore humid and hot, a climate of type AW4 according to the Koppen classification where the rainy season is longer than the dry season (Katalay, 2014). Kinshasa is a megacity area of 9,965 square kilometers, only 600 are urbanized. The abundance of rains causes many problems such as erosions because of lack of infrastructures and water pipelines, isolating quarters and therefore serving of lair for members of gangs.

Research devoted to the determination of metallic trace elements (or TME) in water or the sediments of the N'djili river (one of the two biggest rivers in this city) show that this water is not suitable for irrigation since its cadmium and Co (carbone monoxide) contents are too high.

The origins of ETM pollution are numerous such as the disposal of sewage sludge by the water treatment plant installed on the N'djili River, in the same river. The effect of these releases on the TME content did not been measured, but they still remain a potential source of pollution.

The discharge of untreated industrial effluents, waste household and hospital waste in rivers, the mixing of the waters of the N'djili with those of the Congo River, which are at the level of the malebo pool, the pesticides used by farmers, the mineralization of plants growing in swamps (Falasi, 2018).

-Economical and social situation: For Lingandu (2006) the situation of the economy of Kinshasa is essentially informal. The informal economy is divided into some categories such as informal trading, informal manufacturing, informal construction, informal transport, and informal service. In Kinshasa, informal is the main source of employment and income generation for the urban population since the formal sector has failed to absorb the urban unemployed residents, the informal economy is a strategy of survival for these people working in the streets and earning a profit of between US$ 2 and US$ 5 a day (Iyenda, 2005).

All these data show that Kinshasa is not a sustainable city.

How the philosophy of Ubuntu can help to move toward sustainability?

4. Implications of Ubuntu

- The first path is education (formal and no formal) so that Ubuntu becomes a culture, not only a political or scientific discourse. In the educational system of African countries, this notion must be incorporated into different curricula. With the same idea, some scholars propose the usefulness of engaging art-based methods in the process of capacity building and community building to bring a spirit of novelty and promote engagement.

The use of storytelling could be a useful vehicle in the social construction of meaning and good to bring an aesthetic perspective to organizational research, practice, or learning (Iwowo, 2016). Educating for sustainability must be in all levels of schools' curricula. As the great African historian Ki-zerbo noted it, education is the mainframe software that programs the future of societies (1990).

Education here will take also the form of empowerment, capacity building and community building.

-        City governance and leadership

The notion of Ubuntu implies a shift in the governance of African cities, and communityship is to be considered. Here, a bottom-up approach is necessary, and not only do leaders have something to say, but all the population participates in the management of the city by their delegates even the marginalized such as children in street.

Here the public participation is required; the top-down model must be avoided but bottom-up approach is required to create complicity with the public, the population, its involvement, the necessity of community mobilization.

This requires certain democratic governance in the implementation of policies, plans, programs, and public projects. All the responsibility, in this case, would not be upon the state, all stakeholders will be concerned.

There is an Ubuntu strategic leadership model developed by Madei et Moleka (2021) enabling creativity and innovation that create competitiveness in a society and transforming inputs into outputs, value addition into wealth.

- Ubuntu implies a new way of elaborating and implementing public policy and organize urban solidarity which is destroyed by modernity. Churches and other organizations of civil society can play a leadership role here.

-     At the economic level, a paradigm shift is required. Instead of state capitalism established since the colonialism, where an oligarchy has all the richness of the DR Congo, a new economic model must be established, a social economy where everyone is included, an economy with social justice.

- As noted by Lesley Le Grange (2012), Ubuntu brings a deconstruction in the anthropocentric and ecocentric distinction which has characterized discussions among specialists. Ubuntu does not mean only caring for the self or other men and women but also for the entire environment. At the ecological level, a public policy that regulates pollution and other causes of environmental degradation are necessary, but social marketing to change the way see and do things is important and ecological activism. In urban planning, access to nature, green spaces, are important, and a new way of mobility to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

- Environmental justice: The notion of environmental justice is strongly rooted in Ubuntu praxis because everyone is seen as responsible for the relationships and interactions with the biophysical environment that surrounds them. This leads to the responsible use of natural resources as well as land, water, and forests. In Ubuntu praxis, all individuals and groups are called upon to leave the environment such as agricultural land in a better condition than they found it to be. Ubuntu is at odds with charitable and humanitarian approaches that rely on

alleviating extreme hardship after the event, rather than equipping people to transcend conditions of hardship as a matter of course. Approaches that don't attack the cause or root of the problems, but Ubuntu builds collective coping mechanisms to minimize the damage, working together to break down the social, psychological, and structural barriers of inclusion for everyone's development, the emphasis on rights being constantly taken into account or reconsidered as social situations evolve. In practice, Ubuntu requires placing particular emphasis on the responsibility of ensuring the collective well-being, therefore of others and not just the individual. Others including future generations, hence a link with sustainability (Mayaka and Truell, 2021).

Blanchon, Moream, and Veyret (2009) note about four inequality in an environmental perspective: territorial inequalities, inequalities in access to urbanity and the living environment, inequalities in relation to nuisances and risks, and inequalities in the capacity for action and questioning of public authorities for the transformation of the living environment. Gelobter (1994) notes some environmental justice problems in urban areas in addition to what is mentioned above: health problems and economic or structural problems. By environmental injustice related to health, he talks about the causes of urban environmental diseases such as heart disease, respiratory diseases, cancer, which are more and more frequent in cities due to chemicals, bad smells, temperature, high, stress, overpopulation ... With the rural exodus, for example, there is an abandonment of land and the loss of local traditions in the way of using them. Urban crimes and violence are on the rise due to the growing need for housing, schools, and hospitals. --

-Social justice: For Mbigi and Maree (1995), Ubuntu is characterized by the sense of solidarity or brotherhood toward the groups which are excluded and marginalized.

For David Harvey (, social justice is by no means universal; it depended rather on the Spatio-temporal contexts in which it is situated. He is in a Marxist paradigm where the cities are presented in a binary opposition or "contradictory interplay between rapid, explosive processes of urbanization and various forms of stagnation, shrinkage and marginalization" (Brenner and Schmid, 151-152).

Practical solutions and actions must be adopted to reduce inequalities.

5. Conclusion

Ubuntu can help many African cities to shift the paradigm from exclusion, marginality, and poverty to sustainability. This requires a new way of thinking and acting which can be possible if Ubuntu becomes a culture in all African cities, and Kinshasa city is concerned first.

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