

Chapter 12

Metropolitan Councils: An Emerging Paradigm for Urban, Regional Planning, and Development in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Although no traction in the envisioned direction has been observed since the adoption of the concept of “metropolitan councils” in the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No. 20 of 2013), there is much potential, scope, and sense in the idea to spur urban and regional development under the impact of urbanization in the country and beyond. In the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Section 269, Harare and Bulawayo Metropolitan are the only regions due for metropolitan councils. The present study seeks to unravel three critical aspects surrounding the concept metropolitan councils as a new paradigm for urban and regional planning and development in Zimbabwe. The study is based on archival methods, which make use of existing documents including the Constitution of Zimbabwe amendment No.20, media reports, reports and plans, by local authorities, among others. Textual and content analysis have been applied to decipher and pigeonhole into different issues towards clustering them into meaningful themes, hence molding the debate of the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Critically highlighted for development and regional planning in the current constitution of Zimbabwe is devolution of power from the central authorities to the local tiers. This factor is emphasised by the introduction of Metropolitan Councils in Section 170 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment Number 20 of 2013). In the constitution, the only Metropolitan Councils recognised are Harare Metropolitan Council and Bulawayo Metropolitan Council. The constitution only establishes the legal framework for the designation of the metropolitan councils. In this view, however, this framework has to be supported by carefully designed policies, legislation and institutions tailored to achieve the desired objectives. This is not the case in Zimbabwe, there are no policies or action on the ground towards metropolitanism. Although one appreciates the nobility of the notion of decentralization alluded to in the constitution, it remains to be seen if this will transcend the realm of theoretical idealism to practical reality. In this light, this paper seeks to unravel 3 critical aspects surrounding the concept of metropolitan councils. The first aspect is to reveal the reasons why there is a lag between the written policy and its implementation; the neglect of a noble metropolitan concept in spurring and sustaining urban and regional development in Harare and Bulawayo is detrimental. The second aspect is to use evidence (or lack thereof) on urbanisation in the country and beyond justifying why urgency and attention are central to metropolitan planning and development. The last aspect is to demonstrate the extent to which various tools and mechanisms that are emerging (like crowdfunding, land value capture, participatory budgeting and strategic environmental assessment) can be useful in spurring metropolitan regional planning and development. The paper is structured to include the following headings, Theoretical and Analytical Framework; Literature Review; Research Methodology; Results and Discussion and Conclusion.

THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This section explains, in detail, the concepts that shape the metropolitanisation ideals to spur regional socio-economic development of regions.

The Concept of Region

The concept of region is relatively broad depending on one's perception and inherent line of argument. A region can be defined as a homogeneous area with physical and cultural characteristics distinct from those of neighbouring areas (Vance & Henderson, 1968: 377). According to Vitkovsky and Kolossov (1980: 539), a region is a complex, spatial socioeconomic system, characterized by a stable combination of political forces and possessing a specific complex of features. In this regard, the most critical issue in conceptualizing a region may revolve around the requirement of geographical congruence and proximity. Thus, this creates a question whether a region is geographically bounded or it can as well consist of areas that are spatially discontinuous. According to Russett (1967: 2-7) most analysts reject a simple geographic definition of a region in favour of some criterion of economic and social homogeneity. Consequently, this paper would regard the concept of region as referring to areas, which are relatively bound both geographically and socio-economically (Dube, 2017: 100). The study is of the view that metropolitan areas are regions which, when developed, would help in resuscitation of cultural oneness and socio-economic recovery in the areas concerned.

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