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KEY TOPICS FOR PLANNING THE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF MOZAMBIKAN *RURAL-TOWNS*.

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ABSTRACT:

Since a few years academic research and development programs underline the important role of small urban centers of Sub-Saharan Africa in promoting the growth of the surrounding rural areas. Anyway, defining the particular nature of these towns, with which the majority of African population gets daily in contact, is still an unsolved issue. The analysis of the relevant transformations that small towns are experiencing and the definition of strategies to address these transformations, are also neglected.

The aim of the paper is to define a conceptual framework to support local administrators of small towns of Africa in planning the sustainable growth of their towns. The paper considers as a case study Sena, a small urban center located in a rural District of central Mozambique along the Zambezi River. The town, as many others vilas rurales of the country, is experiencing relevant transformations, such as rapid urbanization, modernization of urban services and infrastructures, administrative decentralization and growth of commercial activities. These transformations are deeply changing the traditional rural lifestyles of the population and are producing an hybrid settlement pattern, where urban and rural characters melt together. To understand the particular nature of this urban context and to obtain suggestions for the planning activity, a field research was conducted by the author, mainly through a household survey based on a semi-structured qualitative interview. The results of the survey, deepened through the literature review, allowed the identification of the main features of the “rural-town”, as Sena was defined, and the understanding of the effects produced on the physical structure of the town by the radical transformations involving the District. Finally, some principles are proposed for managing the sustainable growth of African rural-towns.

Conference Topic: New Approaches to Urbanisation.

Keywords: rural-town, Africa, spatial planning, urbanisation, sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION:

According to United Nations' projections, one billion households are expected to move in the next 20 years to small and intermediate urban centres of Third World countries and a high percentage of this urbanization wave will be absorbed by small towns of Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, managing the urban growth of these human settlements is a pressing issue and, at the same time, a problematic task under present conditions. In fact, the demographic growth of African small towns is expected to occur mostly in the absence of economic development and as the product of the restructuring and decline of rural activities and the consequent redundancy of agricultural labor. Moreover, providing shelter and urban services and facilities to the new urbanized population will be a major problem especially for local governments, which have become responsible for local development and spatial planning after the adoption of administrative decentralization by almost any Sub-Saharan African country (UN Habitat, 2003). Furthermore, even if small towns demonstrate to have fewer problems than larger cities in terms of social exclusion, informal economies and unhealthy living conditions, local governments also have fewer resources. Many research carried out in Africa - including this one - testify that small towns generally lack of financial resources, urban facilities, development opportunities, technical capacity of local administrators and official information and data gathering systems. Therefore, a rapid urbanization process could bring even more negative consequences on small towns than those experienced in major urban centers and widely documented by scholars, such as *overurbanization* and *urban dualism* (Gugler 1982; Bairoch, 1988, Gilbert and Gugler 1982; Lipton 1977), environmental deterioration (Douglas, 1983, 1986; Hardoy et al. 2001), *favelization* of the majority of the inhabitants (UN Habitat, 2003), social and political exclusion of the poor population from the decision-making process (J. Borja, 2000).

Small towns are generally defined as centers with a population of less than 20.000 inhabitants that perform urban functions (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1986). Most of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa currently lives in small towns or refers to them for economic, social and political transactions. African small towns are essentially towns of farmers, in which "modern" administrative functions, provision of infrastructures and services and the development of strictly "urban" economic activities, are found in a society whose features are typically "rural". This occurs also in Mozambique, where processes like globalization of the economy, modernization of transport and communication infrastructures, rapid urbanization and administrative decentralization are deeply transforming both the physical structure of the *vilas rurales* (literally *rural-towns*) and their socio-economic and cultural characters. This is, indeed a crucial moment for Mozambican *rural-towns*: the above mentioned "modernization" process could destroy the natural, economic and cultural base of the small towns without adequately replacing it and thus leading to (or increasing) environmental degradation, socio-economic polarization, loss of local cultural heritage, social and political exclusion. Or, on the contrary, *rural-towns* could offer the opportunity to experiment more "sustainable" patterns of urban growth, with respect to those that have characterized the expansion of major cities. The search for adequate policy responses and actions related to the management of the urban growth is one of the main declared objectives of national governments of Third World countries, as well as of international organizations. Up to now, urban development projects have centred mainly on *megacities*, while small towns almost completely lack of planning on how to accommodate people moving from surrounding rural areas and to provide them with services. Local administrations and international actors operating in the small towns of Africa generally propose small scale interventions (urban projects) or sectoral programs (i.e. infrastructural improvement, *site-and-services*, upgrading programs), rather than a consistent

and organic activity of urban planning. Ordinary management or, at best, upgrading of already existing urban contexts are generally the maximum objectives of local administrations, to whom planning the urban growth represents an unattainable goal under present conditions. Moreover, the training of technicians is neglected, while it should be preliminary to any other intervention. Anyway, empirical research demonstrates that where local administrations are supported with adequate financial resources and technical competences, they are able to face the problems deriving from rapid urbanization. Furthermore, the inadequacy of actual urban planning and management experiences related to small towns of Africa is not the only problem. Academic research also pays poor attention to this argument. Today the role (effective or potential) of small towns of Africa in promoting a more equitable rural development and in reversing the polarization trend of major urban centers is widely recognized (Rondinelli, 1983; Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1986; Baker, 1990). Anyway, small towns have always been considered from the regional development perspective and, more specifically, only through a functionalist approach (Aeroe, 1992). The interest on small towns of Africa is based on their potential as possible *foci* for economic interaction and, consequently, only few efforts have been made so far to define the complex “nature” of this typology of human settlement and the characteristics – also physical – of its urbanization process.

Considering the above mentioned gap in literature and the inadequacy of current urban planning and management strategies, the present research aims to individuate principles for planning the sustainable growth of Mozambican small towns. This should support local administrators and technicians in managing the growth of their small towns, by avoiding the undesirable consequences that have characterized the expansion of major cities.

The paper is structured in four Sections. Section 2 describes the most relevant processes occurring at global level that have a direct influence on the urbanization process of African small towns. Section 3 introduces a case study: *Sena*, a small urban centre located in the rural District of *Caia*, in central Mozambique along the Zambezi River. This town can be considered a representative context where to analyze the main features of Mozambican *vilas rurales* and the effects of the ongoing *ru-urbanization* process. Finally, Section 4 proposes some planning principles, which should be considered by local administrators and technicians in order to plan the sustainable growth of those contexts - the *rural-towns*-, which most of Mozambican population lives in or refers to.

2. SMALL TOWNS OF AFRICA IN A GLOBALIZING CONTEXT: EMERGING PARADIGMS AND KEY TOPICS.

Relevant processes are occurring at a global scale, which are deeply changing the organization of national urban systems and the rural-urban relations. These processes are giving a new centrality to small urban centers and, at the same time, impose the adoption of new paradigms to analyze the role, the nature and the urbanization process of these small towns.

- *Urbanization of poverty.* The world is experiencing an extremely rapid urbanization process, that will almost completely be absorbed by the cities of the developing world. In absolute terms, more than one billion people will move from rural areas to the cities of Third World countries by 2030 and Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the world with the highest urbanization rate. Furthermore, more than 40% of the urban growth will be in small and intermediate towns (UN-Habitat, 2003). This demographic trend

has been verified also in Mozambique through the analysis of national census data, which show that the variation of the population is much higher in small urban centres than in major cities (Diamantini and Nicchia, 2009). Anyway, in the African context, urbanization is generally the consequence of the restructuring and decline of rural activities and of the consequent redundancy of agricultural labour, rather than an effect of economic development. This process, also known as “urbanization without industrialization” or “urbanization of poverty”, is the product of the new economic paradigms: globalisation and neoliberalism.

- *Administrative decentralization.* Providing shelter and urban services and facilities to the new urbanized population will be a major problem especially for local governments, which have become responsible for local development and spatial planning after the adoption of administrative decentralization by almost any Sub-Saharan African country. An increased priority is accorded, partly by design and partly as a consequence of funding cuts, to the decentralization of roles and responsibilities to the local level (Tacoli, 1998). As it mostly happens, the relocation of administrative functions at the local level occurs at the same time of the “state withdraw” and without the necessary transfer of economic resources and technical competences, thus often inducing the paralysis of local administrations.
- *Cities as “nodes of reticular urban systems”.* Starting from the 1980s, the development of a strictly integrated world economy and the improvement of transport and communication technologies have produced also in the Third World big changes in the organizational dynamics of cities and territories. Therefore, previous theories and paradigms, such as the “central places” theory (Christaller, 1933), result to be inadequate. It is widely accepted that urban centers are interconnected in a more complex and elastic way, according to a new model of territorial organization: the “reticular urban system” (De Matteis, 1997). Consequently, the traditional definition of “secondary cities”, deriving from the hierarchical model of Christaller, has been replaced by the definition of “small and intermediate urban centers”. This definition stresses the role of “intermediation” that these urban centers play between major cities (national, world and global cities: centers of power, where decisions are taken) and their rural areas of influence (local and/or territorial spaces). According to this paradigm, small towns of sub-Saharan Africa are strategic nodes of the “reticular urban system”, because they connect (or could potentially connect) the majority of the (still rural) population with national and international urban networks and trade flows, facilitating also the diffusion of innovation and ideas.
- *The rural-urban continuum.* Analyzing the relations between small urban centers and their rural hinterland, many authors use the concept of “rural-urban continuum”, which was introduced by Wirth (1939) in opposition to clear-cut distinctions between “urban” and “rural” contexts. The starting statement is that the city is the product of growth rather than a sudden creation and that most of the urbanizing population, which is coming from the countryside, is not supposed to abandon rapidly its ways of life. On the contrary, reminiscences of rural form of existence persist also in the city. On the other side, urbanization must be understood also as the accentuation of urban ways of life even among the population living in areas which cannot be considered as “urban”. Even if in any typology of human settlement of the Third World it is possible to verify the coexistence of “urban” and “rural” elements, it could be said that small towns of Africa are those contexts in which this hybridization is particularly evident.

Different terms, such as *agro-town* (Silitshena, 1990) or *rural-town* (Saxena, 1994), have been adopted in literature as an attempt to underline the hybrid nature of small urban centers situated within rural contexts. Anyway, these terms are generally used without a clear conceptualization, relying rather on their evocative power. So far only few efforts have been made in defining the specific characteristics of African *rural-towns* and the nature of their urbanization processes.

3. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS.

Sena is a small town located in the Caia District, in central Mozambique, along the Zambezi River. The population of the town is approximately 13,000, while the whole District counts 115,000 inhabitants, most of which dispersed over rural areas. The rate of population living below the poverty line in the District is one of the highest in the country. *Sena* is seat of one of the three *Postos Administrativos* of the District and its administrative status is that of *vila rural*. *Caia*, the seat of the District administration, is 60 km away; while *Beira*, the capital city of *Sofala* Province, is more than 500 km away. The town has intense commercial relations with *Blantyre*, which is only 250 km away in Malawi. *Sena* was selected as case study because it is well representative of the general processes that are involving small towns of Africa. This town is experiencing a very rapid urbanization process, which has almost doubled its population in the last ten years. Moreover, this urbanization trend depends more on persisting crisis in the surrounding rural areas than on the development of the urban economy. In fact, this “urbanization of poverty” is mostly due to the Zambezi floods and to the following “Resettlement Programs”, that are transferring the rural population from the flood plain to the small towns of the District (Governo da Província de Sofala, 2007). Furthermore, the phenomenon of rapid demographic growth of small urban centres occurs along with the emerging role of local authorities, started only 10 years ago with the public sector reform and administrative “deconcentration” (Law 8/2003, Law of Local Organs of the State). Districts have been recognized as effective administrative units, with administrative and budgetary autonomy. In this framework, the small towns of the District are placed in an entirely new situation, in which important decisions for the economy and for the living conditions of the population are assumed *in loco*. In addition, the administrative decentralization process has led to the improvement of urban infrastructures and services, so that small towns are now in the position to perform those urban functions that used to be performed only by major towns before. Another global trend observed in *Sena* is the modernization of infrastructures, which is also a consequence of the implementation along the Zambezi River of the “Spatial Development Initiative (SDI)”, an integrated planning tool promoted by South Africa in agreement with neighbouring countries. Some examples are the rehabilitation of the “*Sena* railway-line” and of the *Dona Ana* bridge, the construction of the “*Guebuza*” bridge across the *Zambezi* River, the improvement of road connections and electricity distribution networks. In the last years, several pensions, restaurants and places for entertainment are being built, as a response to the unexpected movement of people.

All the above mentioned processes, that have occurred in less than ten years, have produced what is here defined as “*ru-urbanization* process”. The population of *Sena* continues relying principally on agricultural activities, and the rural/traditional culture still defines local modes of life, including settlement patterns. Anyway, as a consequence of the above described “modernization” process, *Sena* is rapidly changing. Not only the socio-economic composition of the population, but also the physical structure of the town is being transformed. The result is a hybrid settlement pattern, where urban and rural characters melt together. Different

strategies have been proposed by the District Administration to face ongoing rapid transformations. Among these, a spatial plan for *Sena* (PEU- *Plano de Estrutura Urbano*) has been elaborated with the support of the University of Trento, within a wider decentralized cooperation programme between the Provinces of Trento (Italy) and Sofala (Mozambique). The plan, whose elaboration has seen the direct involvement of the author, is currently being implemented by the *Servicio Obras Publicas* (Public Works Office) of the District.

3.1 Research process:

Understand and describe the main characteristics of the small town of *Sena*, is the first objective of the research. The research process consisted in recollecting already existing official data and documents, which were provided by District authorities. Moreover, different sectoral studies and working papers were at disposal, that had been elaborated by the researchers of the University of *Trento* to support the spatial planning activity in the District. Furthermore, a field research was conducted by the author in Caia District. Direct observation and interviews to relevant institutional and non-institutional actors allowed the direct approach to the socio-economic, cultural and environmental context of the case study. In addition, a household survey was conducted in *Sena*, in order to understand emerging lifestyles and to define parameters of urbanization at household level. The survey considered a sample of 47 households randomly selected within the administrative boundaries of the town, covering the whole built-up area on the basis of demographic density. A structured qualitative interview was chosen as a research tool and proposed to each household. The interview was based on five research themes and related sets of questions. Research themes – all having a stark incidence on the spatial organization of the town - were: 1) housing typology; 2) composition of the household; 3) livelihood strategies; 4) socio-cultural resources access; 5) use of environmental resources. The elaboration of the results consisted first of all in referring answers to categories in order to build a database. Then, an exploratory data analysis was carried out and households were classified in four typologies, each representing a social group. Finally, the spatial distribution of data was analysed.

The research process allowed the main features of the *rural-town* to be identified - these were then summarized in four “key topics” (Section 3.2). The choice of the key topics considers different “scales” of analysis (the urban built up area with its surrounding environment, the *bairros*, the housing compounds) and follows a holistic approach (socio-economic, cultural, environmental and spatial aspects are considered at the same time). Furthermore, main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated to the *ru-urbanization* process of *Sena* have been assessed through a SWOT analysis (Section 3.3). Major trends are considered, which are transforming the socio-economic and physical structure of the town, as well as patterns of use of natural resources and local decision-making processes.

3.2 Key topics to describe Mozambican *rural-towns*.

- *Hybridization of traditional/subsistence and modern/capitalist modes of production.* A relevant feature of the rural-town is the coexistence, within all households, and the hybridization of traditional and modern modes of production. Livelihood diversification is an important characteristic of all social groups in *Sena*: the agricultural activity is an important subsistence base and all households have a *machamba* (family farm); at the same time, agriculture is always accompanied by non-farm activities. Furthermore, the survey points out an emerging socio-economic dualism, that divides the population into two main socio-economic groups. Almost

70% of the interviewed households belong to the “subsistence sector” (economy based principally on agriculture and integrated with odd jobs or low-income non-farm activities; “domestic mode of production”; no savings; monetary income directed only to the satisfaction of basic needs). The remaining 30% of the households, instead, belongs to the “capitalist sector”, whose economy is based on non-farm middle or high-income activities (always integrated with agriculture) and allows profits, savings and investments.

- *Dependence on natural resources.* Another specific feature of the rural-town is that most of its population strictly depend on natural resources. This is particularly true for households belonging to the subsistence sector. Almost 70% of the families in *Sena* are provided with a monetary income that is too low even to satisfy the food supply. Anyway, they are able to survive owing to the free access to water, land for agriculture and cattle breeding, firewood, healing plants and constructing materials. Furthermore, most odd jobs consist in selling materials that are recollected directly in the surroundings by the occasional seller. The result is substantially a symbiosis between the town and the natural elements surrounding the built up area. It is possible, then, to underline the “multifunctionality” of the *rural-town* environment (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2007), which together with the recreational and ecological functions, has also the productive one.
- *Persistence and transformation of traditional settlement patterns.* A further characteristic of the *rural-town* is the persistence of rural/traditional settlement patterns, housing typologies and building technologies, which are widely dominant in the landscape. Anyway, the survey shows that the traditional housing culture is evolving towards the model of the “conventional house”. This model is adopted by the population with a middle or high-income and exemplifies the aspiration to an “urban” lifestyle. The survey highlights how the housing typology can be considered a reliable indicator of the household’s lifestyle and socio-economic level: families belonging to the subsistence sector live in vernacular rural housing compounds (*mudzi*), while households of the capitalist sector invest their savings principally in the improvement of the housing conditions. In some cases, some traditional constructions are substituted with “modern” ones (*hybrid mudzi*), while in other cases (i.e. the traders, the economic élite of the town) a new modern house is built, which reminds, in terms of shape and building technologies, to those of Mozambican cities’ peripheries.
- *Coexistence of formal institutions and traditional authorities.* All typologies of households seem not to distinguish between traditional authorities (*regulo*, *‘nfumo* and *sapanda*) and formal institutions (*secretarios de bairro*), both of which are consulted to obtain land use rights and to solve various neighbourhood issues. Both institutions participate in governing the town with almost the same functions, since the D.L. 15/2000 has homologated traditional authorities, now defined “community authorities”, to *secretarios de bairro*. Furthermore, traditional authorities are invited to participate in local decision-making processes through the *Conselho Consultivo do Distrito*, *Conselhos Consultivos dos Postos Administrativos* and *Local Forums*, which are advisory organs of the formal institutions of the District. Furthermore, some urban management activities, such as water provision and “*bairro*” up-grading programmes, rely on a wider and more direct participation of local communities and on the leading role of “community authorities”.

3.3 Analyzing the *ru-urbanization* process.

- *Socio-economic aspects.* One of the major strengths of the *rural-town* is livelihood diversification, that is allowed by its “hybrid” settlement pattern. *Machambas* are located within the built up area or in its immediate surroundings, each household has the right to a family farm and agriculture is the most important subsistence base of the population. At the same time, the “modernization process” has led in the last ten years to the development of many different economic –typically “urban”- activities and employments. The possibility of livelihood diversification, together with connections to national and international urban networks and trade flows, gives the *rural-town* a clear comparative advantage with respect to the rural areas of the District, where the very bad road network make them almost isolated. As already seen, the “modernization process” involving the *rural-towns* is producing also an increasing socio-economic dualism. This dualism is reflecting also in an emerging socio-spatial separation of the population. Households belonging to the subsistence sector live mostly in the peripheral areas of the town, characterized by rural/traditional settlement patterns, while households belonging to the capitalist sector live in the central area (*bairro cimento*), where urban services and infrastructures are concentrated. This trend has increased constantly over the last years and, even if the common “rural” culture is still an important element of social cohesion, these early signs of urban dualism should be seriously taken into consideration. The ongoing trend is particularly risky in a context characterized by the “urbanization of poverty”. If the development of the local economy remains much slower than the demographic growth, the newly urbanized population could experience the same processes of “*favelization*” observed in major urban centres. Furthermore, exogenous factors, such as the improvement of transport and communication infrastructures, may represent an opportunity for socio-economic development, by facilitating the circulation of people, goods and ideas. On the other hand however these *mega-projects*, planned “top-down” at an over-national level and inspired by neoliberal policies, represent also a threat. *Mega-projects* in Mozambique have demonstrated to have a very low impact on local development and poverty reduction (Republic of Mozambique and European Union, 2007), leading rather to the exploitation of local human and natural resources.
- *Environment.* The *rural-town* has grown in symbiosis with the natural resources present on the territory, by adapting to them and including them rather than by irrevocably altering the environment, as it happened in major urban centres. Natural resources are widely present both within the *rural-town* (water sources, humid areas, fruit trees, vegetation) and in its immediate surroundings (agricultural land, forests, rivers, lagoons), having - at least potentially – the function of providing ecological corridors and protecting biodiversity. Furthermore, as already seen, an important strength of the *rural-town* is that it lets people have free access to natural resources. Anyway, the growing anthropic pressure - determined by rapid urbanization- and the uncontrolled use of natural resources is leading to serious environmental damages and, consequently, to the worsening of life conditions of the poor population. An opportunity to address the natural resources’ management within the *rural-towns* has been recently given by the creation of a new Ministry for the coordination of policies related to the environment (*MICOA- Ministério para a Coordenação da Acção Ambiental*) and by the adoption of a new legislation and planning instruments, which include also environmental management (*Lei de Ordenamento Territorial*, 2007;

Regulamento de Ordenamento Territorial, 2008). Anyway, the new legislation could be inadequate to face one major threat to the sustainable management of the *rural-towns*, which is represented by the phenomenon generally known as “land grab”. This term is used to describe the growing acquisitions or long-term leases of large portions of agricultural land in developing countries by private investors. In Mozambique, from 1997 to mid 2005 over 3 million hectares were leased to the investors (IIED, 2006). This trend is expected to increase, as also the demand for agricultural land will grow in the nearest future, for both food production by importing countries and for cultivations oriented at the production of energy (*biofuels*). Speaking at the opening of “Conclave on India/Africa Project Partnership 2007” in Maputo, Mozambique's Minister of Energy, Salvador Namburete, said that only 9% of the country's arable land is currently under use and that further 41.2 million ha of land are suitable for agriculture. Anyway, the allocation of big portions of agricultural land to private investors - fostered by the national government - may threaten ecosystem health and integrity, put at risk small scale farmers' food security, as well as the access to the natural resources on which they depend (UNEP, 2009). Finally, another threat to the natural environment of *rural-towns* comes from the “climate change”, which is expected to produce the most devastating effects in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as increasing droughts and diminishing water sources.

- *Physical settlement*. An important indicator of “urbanity” in Mozambican *rural-towns* is the presence of basic infrastructures and services, such as hospital, primary and secondary schools, administration offices and directorates, markets, places for entertainment, transports, electric network, aqueduct. Anyway, the “urban structure” of *Sena* is weak. Urban services and infrastructures do not satisfy the local population's demand and are mainly concentrated in the “*bairro cimento*”, while most urban areas remind more to rural/traditional settlements and give to the *rural-town* its particular character of a big rural village. The vernacular housing compound (*mudzi*) is the only affordable option for most of the population, since it is constituted by small buildings made of materials that are freely recollected in nature (i.e. mud, wood and straw). Anyway, the traditional housing culture is evolving towards the model of the “conventional house”. However, “urban” housing typologies present some drawbacks, starting from the high costs of the construction process. These typologies, then, do not take into account the local housing culture, such as the polygamous family composition, which relies on more than one housing unit, and the need to integrate in the compound different subsistence activities. Furthermore, the use of materials such as cement, steel, iron-sheets and other prefabricated elements proved to have worse performances than traditional ones with respect to climate control and provision of indoor comfort in tropical countries (Fathy, 1986). The actual trend is not only determined by the spontaneous action of middle and high-income social groups, but it is also induced by the Resettlement Programs, which subsidize and offer technical support only if a “conventional house” is built. Anyway, these programs, financed by the provincial administration and international aid agencies, represent an opportunity to invest a large amount of financial resources in managing the rapid urban growth. With respect to this issue, a further strength of the *rural-town* settlement pattern is the availability of land for urban expansion, including agricultural land. Anyway, it must be underlined that *machambas* are sometimes too far away (up to 2-3 hours on foot) and this represents a considerable problem for the productivity, since the majority of the population is not provided of any transportation mean. Furthermore, another important strength of Mozambican *rural-towns* is the

“equitable land owning structure”, that is generally considered an important precondition for the sustainable development of the small towns (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1987). The *Lei da terra* (1997) affirms that land property exclusively belongs to the State and recognizes traditional land management systems. In the *rural-town*, customary and good faith occupation continue to be the principal means by which households obtain access to land. Anyway, this favourable situation could disappear in the next years, as the ongoing land privatization process increases. Finally, Mozambican government has recently approved a new legislation for territorial management (*Lei de Ordenamento Territorial*, 2007; *Regulamento de Ordenamento Territorial*, 2008). These laws provide a legal framework to the planning activity also in the *rural-towns* and testify an important cultural change, since urban planning and management are recognized to be strategic issues and are regulated through specific planning instruments.

- *Local government.* Administrative *deconcentration* is one of the most important innovations of the public sector reform. Relevant decisions related to the living conditions of the population - and among them also urban planning and management strategies - are now taken “in loco”. A relevant problem in the *rural-towns*, anyway, is the low monetary budget, that is partly due to inadequate allocations of financial resources from national and provincial levels, and partly depends on the low tax revenue power of local administrations. Moreover, if at the “higher” political levels the District administration can count on high-skilled personnel, which generally come from major urban centres, the educational level of the technicians is low. Local technicians receive - at best - occasional professional training by NGOs and international aid organizations. Specific training programmes are also provided by Mozambican government, but they are not able to cover the whole national territory at the moment and priority is generally given to major urban centres. An important step towards a more inclusive *governance* in *rural-towns* is represented by the recognition of both formal institutions and traditional authorities not only by the people, but recently also by the Law. The role played by traditional authorities in local government has been stimulating a huge debate in Mozambique since the end of the civil war (West and Kloeck-Jenson, 1999). This debate has led to the approval of D.L. 15/2000, which included for the first time after the war of independence the *regulos* into the administrative structure of the State. Anyway, as testified by interviews to stakeholders, there is still a lot to do to achieve this objective in practice and the current situation rather presents the risk of overlapping and conflict between “traditional” and “modern” institutions. For example, local administration adopted a subdivision of the *rural-town* in *bairros*, each under the jurisdiction of a *secretario de bairro*, that overlaps the traditional division of the territory in *regulados*, each of which is under the responsibility of a *regulo*. Boundaries of *bairros* and *regulados* do not dovetail and this often produces problems in urban management. Furthermore, needs and requirements of the poor population – and in particular the recently urbanized one - are not directly represented in any official decision-making process. An important opportunity to improve local *governance* mechanisms is given by the recent - and still ongoing - “administrative decentralization” process (Law 2/97- *Lei de Bases das Autarquias*). This process has included up to this time only 47 municipalities, but it is expanding gradually and the objective is to involve all *vilas rurales* of Mozambique. Anyway, one major threat to the *rural-towns*’ democratic process is represented by the national government’s compliance to market-based development strategies, that could determine that important decisions are taken by the

“market” and not by local administrations and population. Furthermore “emergency programs”, such as those rapidly planned and implemented in case of natural disasters (i.e. Zambezi floods), generally bypass the democratic decision-making and control levels. Anyway, if there is an effective direction by local authorities and needs and priorities are clearly indicated by the local population, the wide range of international donors and NGOs present in the *rural-towns* represents an opportunity to receive financial and technical support.

4. Conclusion: principles for planning the sustainable growth of Mozambican *rural-towns*.

Rural-towns of Africa are contexts characterized by great instability due to exogenous factors. The long civil war ended only in 1994 and social and political tensions do exist still today and reflect also in local decision-making processes. Market-based development strategies make fluctuations of local economies a rule rather than an exception (i.e. prices of agricultural products varying highly from one year to the other). Environmental vulnerability is high, which is determined by both climate change and human activity. Anyway, from the analysis of the *ru-urbanization* process, it emerges that *rural-towns* provide real opportunities to reduce risks related to these exogenous threats, thanks to characteristics which are inherent to its hybrid nature. First of all, livelihood diversification is a very important adaptive strategy in a context characterized by high economic and environmental instability, and it is allowed principally by the availability of natural resources within the *rural-towns* and in its immediate surroundings. Moreover, the decision-making process takes place at the local level, with the involvement of both formal institutions and traditional authorities and with the participation of particular categories of the population. This mechanism could represent the way towards effective conflicts' management and, therefore, political stability and social cohesion. Finally, in the *rural-town* there is still a lively material culture, that is exemplified by vernacular settlement patterns, housing typologies and building technologies. These are an important cultural heritage, that expresses a strong connection with rural/traditional values and ways of life. The existence of large-scale vernacular settlements offers the opportunity to experiment urban development patterns that are more appropriate to local material culture and endogenous resources, with respect to those proposed in Mozambican major cities, which follow generally western cultural models.

Anyway, it has also been analysed how the *ru-urbanization* process shows some alarming trends, such as an emerging socio-spatial separation of the population, increasing pressure on natural resources and environmental vulnerability, adoption of housing typologies and building technologies inappropriate to the local context, overlapping of formal and traditional authorities and exclusion of the poor population from the decision-making process. These trends are the product of the very rapid and spontaneous growth of the *rural-towns* and demonstrate the need to govern the *ru-urbanization* process with adequate integrated policies. In particular, the above analysed trends underline how the “spatial” component of these policies has a strategic importance. Therefore, identifying urban planning principles, which are appropriate to the specific nature of the *rural-town* and to the relevant processes that small towns are actually experiencing, is a fundamental operation to experiment in these contexts “sustainable” patterns of urban growth. Considering possible principles for the urban planning activity in the *rural-towns*, more “sustainable” should mean:

- *More equitable*. The integration of “subsistence” settlement patterns with modern ones, within a urban system in which services and infrastructures are equally

distributed, could avoid that the emerging socio-spatial separation of the population develops towards urban dualism.

- *More respectful of the environment.* Environmental management should guarantee the use of natural resources by the population, whose survival strategies strictly depend on them. At the same time the overexploitation of natural resources should be avoided and, subsequently, the risk of environmental deterioration reduced.
- *More appropriate to the local context.* To avoid the risk of *favelization*, settlement patterns should be promoted that are appropriate to local contexts and refer to local material culture. Housing typologies and building technologies should be affordable to subsistence economies, respectful of local housing culture and traditional building processes, suitable to tropical climatic and environmental conditions, easy to be realized.
- *More inclusive.* Local *governance* strategies should involve - theoretically and practically - both formal institutions and traditional authorities and, moreover, they should also include the poor population. Objectives should be to ensure democratic decision-making processes, to pursue social cohesion, to make decisions more effective at the time they are implemented and to avoid social and political exclusion of the poor population.

In African small towns, defined in this paper as *rural-towns*, it would be possible to experiment patterns of urban growth more “sustainable” than those experienced by major urban centers, in terms of a more equitable socio-spatial organization, a more sustainable relationship between the anthropic activity and the environment, more inclusive governance mechanisms, the valorization of local human, cultural and material resources. Planning the sustainable growth of the *rural-towns* is a pressing issue, whose positive effects could involve the majority of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa. Anyway, the final assumption of this paper implies the need for a coherent and integrated urban planning activity. In Mozambique, both “decentralization” and “deconcentration” processes have involved local administrations on this task, without providing them with adequate financial and technical resources. In the future, a stronger support to local urban planning and management processes is required by national and provincial governments, international aid organizations and NGOs.

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