

# Chapter 9

## Qualities of Urban Planning and the Conflict Between Participatory Planning and Planning Standards: Evidence from Ethiopia



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**Abstract** The Ethiopian hybrid planning system applies both top-down and bottom-up planning approaches simultaneously. This causes vague quality measurement indices of the urban plan and is a major obstacle for both the planning team and other stakeholders to measure quality. The chapter examines and dialectically discusses the contradictory measurement indices regarding the quality by taking Bahir Dar City Structural Plan Project as a case study. Both primary and secondary data were collected from the planning team and stakeholders for the study. This chapter argues that challenge arises from the system that uses two, often conflicting, yardsticks to measure quality, i.e. meeting the pre-defined standards and fulfilling the participants' interest. Therefore, it suggests that the quality of an urban plan should be primarily measured in terms of the local planning standard, which is the "public acceptance". Public acceptance here is described, measured and defined as the stakeholder's perception that the plan is of good enough quality for implementation.

**Keywords** Planning approaches · Quality measurements · Simultaneous application

### 9.1 Introduction

Today's urban areas require complex plans to balance all of the different elements that contribute to people's quality of life and the sustainability of their environment. The field of urban planning is as diverse as the communities themselves. Every urban plan uniquely addresses its community's challenges by coordinating the operation and development of the many different components of a city.

The driving force in Ethiopia for the creation of the urban-related policies and regulations has been the need to address the many existing urban development problems. Ethiopian urban development has been facing a range of problems that extend

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across a wide area of concern: lack of good governance and inadequate public participation (Deepa Narayan et al. 2000), expansion of urban areas and sprawl (Terfa et al. 2019) together with its adverse effects; on public health (Frumkin 2002), on native ecosystems (Pauchard et al. 2006), on farmland, on infrastructure and public service costs, on energy efficiency and air quality, on travel and congestion, on industrial activities and infrastructural facilities (Shiferaw 1998); its psychic costs (Ewing 2008), unbalanced distribution of urban population, high level of unemployment, urban poverty and slum habitation (Kassahun and Tiwari 2012), and so forth. Therefore, Ethiopia has attempted to deal with these urban development issues through various planning mechanisms.

### ***9.1.1 Ethiopian Urban Development Policy Framework***

A planning system is typically driven by national policies and related regulations. All of Ethiopia's urban-related policies, regulations, and programmes characterise its planning system as a hybrid form that seeks to optimise both "bottom-up" or "discretionary" or "participatory planning" as well as "top-down" or "regulatory" or "planning standards". It involves simultaneously applying and expecting the best results from both top-down and bottom-up planning approaches. Firstly, the top-down approach must meet the pre-defined planning standards. Planning standards are formulated or endorsed by planning agencies of regional and/or federal governments to achieve the required quality of the urban plan and to meet long-term objectives. They can be in terms of locational, and/or space standards. Secondly, the bottom-up approach aims to attain residents' and stakeholders' satisfaction through participatory planning. Therefore, public participation is necessary to recognise and integrate the views of every stakeholder who has an interest, a voice, and a choice as it is believed that participatory urban planning increases the quality, legitimacy, and overall social, economic and environmental efficiency of planned development. However, there is often a conflict between the application of both top-down and bottom-up approaches when both are applied simultaneously and best results are expected from each of them in measuring the quality of an urban plan.

Consequently, the hybrid planning approach, which was intended to bring about a better quality of the urban plan, has become a major obstacle especially for planning participants and stakeholders to measure the quality of their local plan and achieve a better quality urban plan in Ethiopia. The aim of this study is to examine the conflicting quality measurements of the planning participants by taking the Bahir Dar City Structural Plan Project as a case study.

## 9.1.2 *Urban Planning Approaches*

According to Patchy Healey (1992), two main tendencies have marked the history of urban planning over the past five to six decades. On the one hand, there has been a tendency towards centralised decision-making, as well as increasing the role and power of technical experts. On the other hand, there have been demands for more participation in decision-making (Healey 1992). These two tendencies, very much conflicting with one another, have been labelled as the top-down and bottom-up approaches to planning (Murray et al. 2009).

### 9.1.2.1 **The Top-Down Approach and Planning Standards**

The essence of the top-down approach of planning is well illustrated by Patsy Healey, Glen McDougall, and Michael Thomas (Taylor 1998). According to these scholars, the process of application of planning standards involves five steps: the systematic analysis and definition of the problems, the identification of goals, the logical production of alternative plans/policies, the evaluation of the alternative plans/policies, and the implementation and monitoring of the chosen plan. The rational planning procedure embraces the use of planning standards. Faludi also emphasises the use of planning standards in the core of the rational planning process (Faludi 1973).

Planning standards exist for all urban uses, and they can either describe a projection of their growth at a specific time in the future or set certain limitations for their growth or their location. Planning standards can be broadly classified into locational standards and space standards (Olujimi 2009).

Locational standards are guidelines for assigning uses or facilities to land. They are presented in the form of the appropriate or ideal positioning of uses of land for the basic interaction needs of the users. In the process of development of locational standards, attention is given to safety from danger; nearness or remoteness of one land use from another in time and distance; compatibility and the social implications of the uses to the nearby community; land values and site development cost, etc.

Space standards are sets of planning standards that show the amount (or the extent) of space required to accommodate certain facilities, infrastructure or use. Space standards are defined frameworks by which all space should be allocated to improve space efficiency. They may be in the form of a unit of areas, estimated persons or other features per unit area, and are usually indicated in the form of minimum or maximum standards. Developers are not to go below the minimum standards, and the maximum standards are the upper limit. Space standards help to achieve proper use of land by preventing overcrowding and under-utilisation, and ensuring efficient functioning of various uses, facilities and services.

The use of planning standards has expanded internationally and they now comprise part of the planning practice in most countries (UN-Habitat 1999; Hooper et al. 2018). In most Western European countries, land-use regulations are legally binding and there has been substantial involvement of central government departments in standard

development. However, the flexible and discretionary nature of English land-use planning is not binding, although the standards are used by planners (Gielen and Tasan-Kok 2010; Oxley et al. 2009).

In the Ethiopian urban planning system, the term “standard” is defined as the level and quality of site planning and zoning that conforms with established land-use policies and other regulations that are important to make urban areas comfortable and operational (MUDHC<sup>1</sup> 2014). In 2005, planning standards were formulated at the federal level to standardise urban plan and function across urban centres of the country. However, the implementation of these planning standards at the city level has not always been carried out as required. For example, Fetene et al. (2014) have reported that six out of seven broad land-use categories of Bahir Dar and Hawassa cities did not follow the necessary percentage proportions as per the standard for the respective land uses, and deviated by at least 25%, and at most 75%.

### 9.1.2.2 The Bottom-Up Approaches and Participatory Planning

The bottom-up approach in the planning process involves public participation to attain customers’ satisfaction (Healey 1997). The World Bank (1996) defines public participation as “a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development, initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them”. The Ethiopian participation manual for urban planning also defines public participation as:

any process that strives to inform, gather input or involve the public regarding decision-making processes. Public participation is the umbrella term to describe all levels of ‘public’ information, education, relations... input, involvement and collaboration. (MUDHC 2007)

The importance of public participation in the urban development processes is acknowledged by contemporary planning theories, advising that public participation creates the possibility to attain more sustainable results. Research in this field shows that citizen participation can generate trust, credibility and commitment regarding the implementation of policies (Van Empel 2008). Therefore, public participation in urban planning has become one of the well-known tools used to integrate the interests and requirements of all stakeholders. And it has also become a compulsory way to recognise and integrate the views of every stakeholder who has an interest, a voice and a choice, as it is believed that participatory urban planning improves the quality, legitimacy, and overall social, economic and environmental efficiency of planned development. Participatory planning helps to harmonise views among stakeholders in planning processes, prevents conflicts between parties representing various interests and contributes to a long-term consensus. Implementation-oriented and sustainable land use planning processes need to be participatory, and to involve the urban population which manages the land and natural resources (Betke 1999). According to CNPPAM<sup>2</sup> Benchmarking and Best Practice Program, one benefit of

<sup>1</sup> Ethiopian Ministry of Urban Development, Housing and Construction.

<sup>2</sup> Committee on National Parks and Protected Area Management.

public participation is coming to understand the customers' expectations and needs (PWCNT<sup>3</sup> 2002).

According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), customers should also be involved even in the technical standards development or improvement period. This is very fundamental to ensure that technical standards for the quality of service are as comprehensive as possible and correspond to actual consumer needs. Public participation in standardisation is not only important for standard development but it can also play a crucial role in raising public awareness of the existence of agreed standards. Thereby, it helps the customer to demand the rendered service according to these standards (ISO 2001).

A vast range of public participation is possible with different aims and characteristics. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) (2014) has developed the Spectrum of Public Participation (SPP) to make more comprehensible the role of the public (end users) in planning and decision-making, and the level of power the community or the public has over planning or decision-making. The tool has long been used in different community involvement projects and has remarkable benefits that have been proven by its efficiency for many years in this field. As many practitioners and organisations find the Spectrum very helpful, the IAP2 claims the Spectrum is "quickly becoming an international standard". The Spectrum identifies five levels of public participation (or community engagement). They are described on the Spectrum ranging from no influence (Inform) to total influence (Empower) (IAP2 2014). In Ethiopia, the public participation process may work on the following four levels:

- Information sharing is one-way communication often involving disseminating information about an intended development project, programme, or strategy.
- Consultation is about gaining stakeholder input on proposed activities.
- Collaborative decision-making means engaging groups to decide jointly about development activities and resources that affect them.
- Empowerment is a deeper level of participation, where beneficiaries and other key groups initiate action and take control over development decisions and resources.

### 9.1.2.3 The Hybrid Planning Approach

As there are many weaknesses arising from both planning standard (regulatory) and participatory planning (discretionary or flexible) approaches, countries such as France, the United Kingdom, China, Singapore and Australia have introduced a hybrid planning approach to avoid weaknesses of these two approaches which helps to minimise the degree of certainty and to increase the degree of flexibility of the regulatory approach (Omer 2017; Elliott 2008; Carmona et al. 2003). However, there have not been adequate studies available that show the effectiveness of a hybrid planning approach, especially from the point of view of measuring plan quality and its performance of achievement.

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<sup>3</sup> Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory.

### 9.1.3 *Quality of the Urban Plan*

In Ethiopia, concerned government bodies have exerted much effort into achieving the quality of the urban plan in alignment with the existing planning policies. However, different studies continue to report on the existence of the problem of urban plan quality in Ethiopia. One of the most commonly mentioned factors that affects the quality of the urban plan is related to the basic map of the urban areas, which is an important input for the preparation of an urban plan Digafe and Feleke (2018). The other common factors are:

- replication of experiences and planning standards from other countries with widely different settings,
- obsession with land use and physical infrastructures with little attention to the actual needs of the population, and
- the preparation of urban plan with little or no involvement of the public, being often mentioned as the main and sometimes the only factor (MUDHC 2007).

Quality denotes excellence in service and products, especially to the degree that they conform to standard requirements and satisfy customers' wants. Therefore, quality measurements of services, including urban planning, can be seen from two perspectives: the degree that which they conform to the standard planning requirements and the degree that they satisfy customers' wants. The internal perspective is defined as a zero error rate, zero defect (Hartnett et al. 1988) i.e. the ability to meet all the pre-defined standard requirements (Parasuraman et al. 1985). From this perspective of quality, an urban plan can be evaluated using the pre-defined planning standard, which constitutes the basic features of urban analysis. Whereas, the other perspective sees service quality in terms of customer perception, customer expectation, customer satisfaction, customer attitude and customer delight (Sachdev and Verma 2004).

Hence, the quality measurement of an urban plan involves either or both perspectives of quality that depend on planning approaches. That means, for the top-down planning approach, the degree to the output of an urban plan conforms to the pre-defined planning standards and requirements. For the bottom-up planning approach, one can say that an urban plan is of good quality when it complies with the requirements specified by the local communities and stakeholders who have participated in the project.

However, there continues to be ongoing criticism as to whether channels of participation in the development process are truly in the spirit of the process or merely manipulation, which planning teams attempt in the development and even the collaborative process (Arnstein 1969; Ansell and Gash 2007). Without redistribution of power, participation can be an empty and frustrating process for those who are powerless, particularly for ordinary citizens. Therefore, this chapter will study the acceptance of local plans by participants using the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City Structural Plan Project as a case study from the point of view of the “empower” level of public participation.

As mentioned, the goal of the “empower” level of public participation is to place final decision-making in the hands of the public. Thus, at this level, the customers or stakeholders are considered as being satisfied when all things will be implemented just as they want.

## 9.2 Methodology

The study takes the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City Structural Plan Project as a case study. Both primary data and secondary data were collected from the planning team and stakeholders’ representatives for the study. The primary data were collected to identify quality measurement indices of the two parties through questionnaire and focus group discussion. The key stakeholders that participated were:

- Community (Ketena<sup>4</sup> level) representatives,
- Officials, politicians, professionals and staff members of concerned regional institutions and the city administration,
- Elders, knowledgeable persons, and professionals from the community,
- Investors, developers, and private firms, and
- NGOs, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), social organisations and associations.

Secondary data were also collected mainly to analyse the system established to maintain the quality of the urban land-use plan. Therefore, documents of national policies, strategies, laws, regulations, manuals and standards were reviewed. In addition to these, planning reports of the project office were examined.

The collected data are dialectically discussed. The discussion focuses on only some relevant, nationally pre-defined planning standards which were challenged by the stakeholders during the preparation process of the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City Structural Plan. Therefore, the Urban Population Density Planning Standard, the Urban Land-use Proportion Planning Standard, the Standards for Right of Way (ROW) and the Spacing of Streets in City Centres and Built-up Areas are the only planning standards examined under this study.

Aiming to address the difficulty of measuring the quality of an urban plan, this study attempts to answer the question: “how are the quality measurement indices of each approach contradicted?”.

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<sup>4</sup> Ketena is the smallest geographical hierarchy (lower than kebele) that is introduced informally for easement of administrative purpose in Bahir Dar by the local administrative body without appointed leaders. Normally a ketena can accommodate 2,000–3,000 people.

### 9.2.1 Case Study—The 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City Structure Plan (SP)

Bahir Dar is one of the nine regional capital cities of Ethiopia located at the geographic co-ordinates of 11° 38' N latitude and 37° 15' E longitude, with a population size of over 500,000 in 2020 (BDCSPPO 2020). Based on the planning law of the country, Bahir Dar Structure Plan Preparation Project (BDSPPP) office was established and staffed with over 90 professionals who had different educational backgrounds and fields of specialisation for the revision work of the city plan. The 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP preparation process used two major approaches to achieve the qualities of the outputs of the city plan: participatory planning (bottom-up approach) and planning standards (top-down approach). The simultaneous application of these approaches resulted from the Urban Planning Proclamation 574/2008, which states in its preamble:

It is vital to create a favourable and an enabling condition for public and private stakeholders to fully participate in the process of urban plan initiation, preparation and implementation on the basis of national standards. (FDRE<sup>5</sup> 2008a)

On the one hand, the urban planning proclamation 574/2008 of article 5 number 5 makes participatory planning an obligatory method in Ethiopia to ensure the satisfaction of the needs of society through public participation. Furthermore, article 15 of the proclamation, states that public hearings are mandatory before the approval of plans. As a result, the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP preparation process has tried to be transparent and adequately communicate with the public at large, public institutions and the kebele<sup>6</sup> councils, and take relevant suggestions and objections as inputs.

On the other hand, as stated in the Urban Planning Proclamation 574/2008 article 5 number 2, national standards must be maintained in any urban plan preparation project in the country, because they are considered vital to:

- bring about coordinated, efficient, transparent urban plan preparation and implementation throughout the country,
- help prepare uniform plans in urban areas,
- serve as a guide for building a better quality of urban areas,
- facilitate and ensure the planning, design and implementation of good coverage, sustainable, well served, resilient, comfortable, green and beautiful urban environment,
- address local practical issues facing professionals engaged in urban planning, design, construction and improvement,
- implement government development policies, strategies and programmes within this understanding to bring about sustained developments, and thereby realise economic development goals in urban centres of the country (FDRE 2008a).

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<sup>5</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

<sup>6</sup> *Kebele*: the lowest hierarchical level of governmental administrative body in Bahir Dar City. Normally a Kebele can accommodate population of 5,000–10,000.



Consequently, meeting the pre-defined planning standards becomes well-thought-out as some criteria for the good quality of a plan by the in-charge governmental bodies is to follow up and supervise the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP preparation process. Therefore, as a major method of analysis, they have required urban areas to compare the facts and figures of their existing situation with the pre-defined standards set at national and regional levels. However, there are many contradictions even among the planning standards: on the same subjects issued in a different year of publication by the same planning agencies and/or on the same subjects issued in the same year of publication by different planning agencies.

However, the differentiation and contradictions of these Ethiopian urban planning standards are not within the scope of this chapter. For the case study only three recently issued national planning standards are purposefully selected to examine the conflicting yardsticks used by those involved in the preparation process to measure the quality of urban plans.

## 9.3 Results and Discussion

### 9.3.1 *Participatory Planning and the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP*

The 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP preparation project office tried to identify and involve the key stakeholders based on the structure plan preparation manual developed by the Federal Urban Planning Institute (MWUD<sup>7</sup> 2006). Table 9.1 shows the identified key stakeholders who have participated in the project, including their potential interests. According to the collected data from the project office, the decision-making role is only given to the Community (Ketena level) representatives. This means that a planning standard can never be applied, and neither can the structure plan ever be approved for implementation unless the ketena representatives give their consent.

### 9.3.2 *Planning Standards and the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP*

Data from the project office shows that the planning team was trying to apply all urban planning standards to the plan for the ketena representatives to give their consent. The following three tables demonstrate those which are selected for this study: The Urban Population Density Planning Standard, the Urban Land-use Proportion Planning Standard, and ROW and Spacing of Streets in City Centres and Built-up Areas.

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Works and Urban Development.

**Table 9.1** Key stakeholders and their potential interests

Key stakeholders	Potential interests
Community (Ketena level) representatives	Provision of alternative strategies and solutions
	Reaching consensus and decision-making
Professionals and Staff Members of: Regional Urban Planning Institutions, The City Administration	Identification of planning issues, cause-effect relation of problems, and opportunities and constraints
	Maintenance of pre-defined planning standards
	Facilitation of the planning process to reach consensus among stakeholders and thereby to address all the identified planning issues
Officials of Sector offices—and institutions, and politicians	Ensuring the proper public participation
	Identification of problems and city potentials
	Identification of government and political interests
	Harmonising with different local interests
	Provision of alternative strategies and solutions
Knowledgeable Persons such as professionals and elders	Provision of relevant information
	Identification of city’s basic problems and potentials
	Formulation of strategies to address the identified issues
	Preservation of culture, history, heritage, and identities of the city
Private Firms such as investors and developers	Identification of development constraints
	Provision of alternative strategies and solutions
	Creation of favourable conditions for investment and development
Social—Organisations and Associations such as NGOs and CBOs	Identification of social problems, development constraints, and other basic problems and potentials of the city
	Provision of alternative strategies and solutions
	Facilitating the proper public participation Identification of social problems, development constraints, and other basic problems and potentials of the city

Source Adopted from the structure plan preparation manual (MWUD 2006)

They, including all other pre-defined planning standards set at national and regional levels, were required to be implemented in the structural plan by governmental planning agencies (professionals and staff of relevant urban institutions, city administration, regional bureaus and institutions). However, all these parties, including the planning team, were challenged by other stakeholders, including the Ketena level representatives, not to apply the standards to the plan.

**9.3.2.1 The Urban Population Density Planning Standard**

The plan of Bahir Dar, which was prepared to serve for 50 years (1965–2015) proposed a population density (total population per total built-up area) of 1,393 inhabitants per hectare. However, the plan was revised in 1996 before it reached the end of its planning period. The plan (1996–2006) proposed a population density of 122 inhabitants per hectare. The following (2006–2016) plan proposed a population density for Bahir Dar of 1,402 inhabitants per hectare. However, in fact, the population density of Bahir Dar in 2006, was 91 inhabitants per hectare (MWUD 2006). By 2017 the population size of the city of Bahir Dar was 362,290 (BDCSPPO 2019) and the total existing built up area was 6,348.49 hectares (BDCSPPO 2017), which means the population density then was 57 inhabitants per hectare. The 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP was supposed to be prepared according to the national population density standard, as it has a direct impact on the total amount of spatial expansion of the city.

Table 9.2 shows the urban population density standard set by the Ethiopian Ministry of Urban Development and Construction in 2012 for all urban areas of the country. This density standard is the first selected standard among many other urban planning standards that the planning team of Bahir Dar and different governmental planning agencies tried to apply to the plan. As can be seen in the table, the population size of urban areas at the end of their planning period has to be above 1 million to have an average population density of 500 inhabitants per hectare (MUDHC 2012).

According to the information collected from both the planning team and the secondary data, the major justifications for this standard are similar to those in the reviewed literature. The standard addresses the excessive spatial growth of cities and helps to prevent urban sprawl as it is recognised as having a detrimental effect

**Table 9.2** The urban population density planning standard

Range of total population size	Average population density standards
2,001–20,000	100 in/ha
20,001–50,000	200 in/ha
50,001–100,000	300 in/ha
100,001–1,000,000	400 in/ha
Above 1,000,000	500 in/ha

Source MUDHC (2014)

on sustainable development (Brueckner 2000). Furthermore, numerous researchers agree on most of the interrelated adverse effects of urban sprawl—on public health (Frumkin 2002); on native ecosystems (Pauchard et al. 2006); on farmland, on infrastructure, and public service costs, on energy efficiency, and air quality, travel and congestion and psychic costs (Ewing 2008). Based on the above-mentioned density standard of the country and the current population size of the city, the population density of Bahir Dar is proposed by the planning team to be at least 400 inhabitants per hectare within the coming ten years of the planning period.

However, according to the primary data collected from the key stakeholders that participated, they could not reach an agreement on the density standard. One of their arguments against maintaining this density standard hinged on the existing lack of financial capacity of both the city administration and the inhabitants. On the one hand, the cost of compensation, relocation and resettlement of the many already existing low-density built structures would make maintaining the standard unaffordable to the city administration. On the other hand, the citizens themselves do not have the financial capacity to build multi-storey buildings that can accommodate the required number of inhabitants within the specified limited space. The other argument against maintaining the density standard that was presented by the stakeholders was the preference of most people for low-density housing and the demand to have a large plot of land with a detached house and a garden that is in touch with nature, reserved lifestyles, together with the existing low awareness about how to live in multi-story buildings.

### 9.3.2.2 The Urban Land-Use Proportion Planning Standard

Table 9.3 shows the Urban Land-use Proportion Planning Standard set by the MUDHC in 2014 for all urban areas of the country. This land-use proportion standard is the second selected standard among many other urban planning standards that the

**Table 9.3** The Urban Land-Use Proportion Planning Standard

Proportion	Land-use types to be included
30%	Road and related infrastructure within a road right of way including pedestrian ways and crossings, vehicular ways (major, collector and local), bikeways, green areas along (side and in the middle) roadways, utility lines (water, drainage, electricity, water, etc.) along with roadways, road junctions and roundabout areas, car parking and bus stop areas, street market areas;
40–45%	Built-up (Building) areas for Housing, working, and production, worshiping, etc.
25–30%	Natural environment Parks, garden/agriculture, and green areas (publicly and privately owned), recreational areas, playgrounds, urban forest, wetland areas, grass and bush areas, quarry (rock and other minerals) sites, river and stream areas, sports areas, cemeteries and open worshiping areas, open market areas, plazas and squares

Source MUDHC (2014)

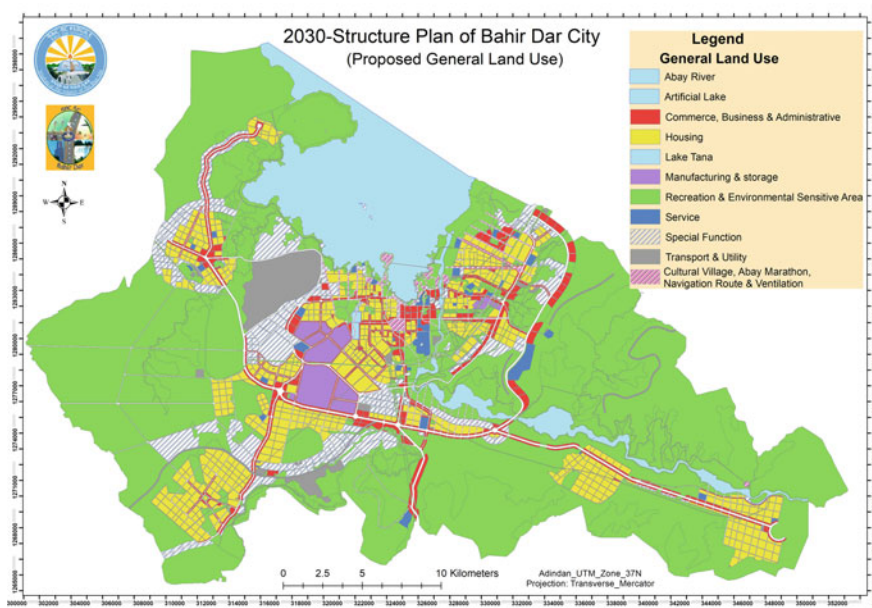
planning team of Bahir Dar and different governmental planning agencies have tried to apply to the plan. In accordance with the standard, every urban area in Ethiopia should have either a land-use proportion of 30%, 40%, 30% if they are comparatively new with few historic features and developments, or a land-use proportion of 30%, 45%, 25% if they are comparatively old with many historic features and developments (MUDHC 2014).

According to the information collected from the planning team and secondary data, the rationale behind this standard is the aim to address the existing urban development problems of the country and to balance the important development types (road and related infrastructure, built-up areas, and natural environment) through which, they believe, sustainable development can be brought about.

However, the key participatory stakeholders could not agree with the land-use proportion standard. As reported by them, the first justification was the difficulty of applicability. As they stated, it is very difficult to measure the amount of land dedicated to the “natural environment” land-use type, separate from the built-up (building) areas in the case study area, and reserve accurately the required proportion; to measure the small-scale green areas, the structure plan would require detailed survey works that demand a great deal of time, money, and specialised human resources, which is directly incompatible with structure plan but similar to the lower level and detailed type of urban plan (i.e. Neighbourhood Development Plan). For this reason, the standard could not apply in the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP project.

The second justification was related to the financial and technical capacities of the city. The existence of built structures would result in compensation costs, which exacerbate the shortage of finance. Poor enforcement capacity of the city was also presented as justification for not agreeing with the application of the land-use proportion standard. In short, they were advocating a strategy that the standard should apply only to prevent the city from emerging related problems in the future rather than cure the city of the already existing related problems. Otherwise, insensitive universal application of the standard could bring about additional adverse effects on both the inhabitants and the city administration.

The third justification was related to a mismatch with the context. According to them, the city is already home to two major, large, water bodies, namely Lake Tana and Abay (Nile) River. Together with their tributaries and the large space of the green area, 71% of the total planning area is currently the natural environment (environmental sensitive area); green buffer areas, wetlands, mountain green areas and urban agriculture, resulting in a land-use proportion that exceeds the maximum limit of the standard. Consequently, the stakeholders were not willing to reduce the natural environment as per the standard, and due to this, it could not be applied in the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP project. For better insight see the land-use proposal of the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP (Fig. 9.1—natural environment areas are coloured light green and water bodies are coloured light blue).



**Fig. 9.1** The proposed general land use of the 2020–2030 Structural Plan of Bahir Dar City (Source BDCSPPO 2020)

**Table 9.4** The standards for right of way (ROW) and spacing of streets in city centres and built-up areas

Category of streets	ROW (street width)	Spacing
Principal arterial street (PAS)	30–60 m	1,000–2,000 m
Sub-arterial street (SAS)	20–60 m	500–1,000 m
Collector street (CS)	15–20 m	250–500 m
Local street (LS)	6–12 m	30–250 m

Source MUDHC (2017)

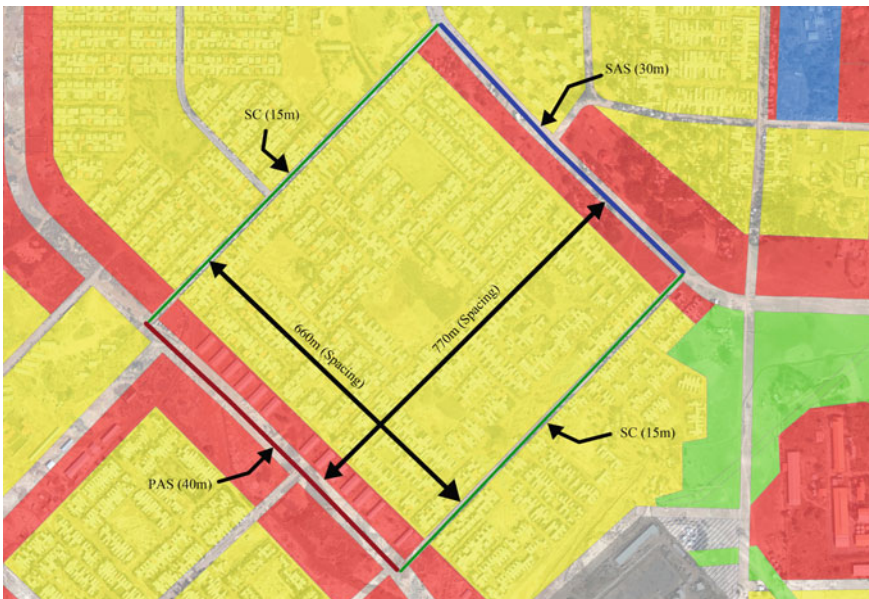
### 9.3.2.3 The Standards for Right of Way (ROW) and Spacing of Streets in City Centres and Built-Up Areas

Table 9.4 shows the Standards for Right of Way (ROW) and Spacing of Streets in City Centres and Built-Up Areas set by the Ethiopian MUDHC in 2017. This street standard is the third selected standard among many other urban planning standards that the planning team of Bahir Dar and different governmental planning agencies have tried to apply to the plan. Based on the standard, the spacing between two similar categories of streets cannot be below or beyond the range shown in Table 9.4.

According to the information collected from the planning team and secondary data, the standards have many objectives. These are: to improve the quality of existing

streets in urban areas of the country; facilitate and ensure the planning, design and implementation of green coverage, and sustainable, well served, resilient, comfortable, green and beautiful streets; implement street designs uniformly in urban areas of Ethiopia; address local practical issues facing professionals engaged in street planning, design, construction and improvement; help implementers, actors, agencies, institutions, community, private and public organisations to understand the significance, challenges, design criteria and standards, geometric designs, applicability, and sustainability opportunities of street planning and design; implement government development policies, strategies and programs; bring about sustained developments and thereby realise economic development goals in urban centres.

The 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP proposed a superblock with major land use and street network (Fig. 9.2). The superblock is defined by major streets: two 15 m wide Collector Streets (CSs), a 30 m wide Sub Arterial Street (SAS), and a 40 m wide Principal Street which is subdivided by many small blocks with 10 m wide Local Streets (LS). But its size is about 660 m × 770 m exceeding the street spacing standard meaning that at least two CSs that connect the two opposite sides should be introduced into the superblock as per the spacing standard demand. However, the participating stakeholders of the project could not accept this standard and challenged the application of the standard in the structural plan of Bahir Dar with the following arguments. According to them, meeting the national planning standard or reserving appropriate width (right of way) for streets in the SP would



**Fig. 9.2** A zoomed-in image of a super block of the 2020–2030 Structural Plan of Bahir Dar City: proposed major land use (major road network) (Source BDCSPPO 2020)

be difficult because of the existence of built structures and environmentally sensitive areas, shortage of financial resources for compensation, relocation, and resettlement from existing developments, and low technical capacity for enforcing and managing the urban plans and designs. Moreover, the existing large coverage of wetlands, flood areas, fertile ground, swampy areas, lakeshore areas, riverbank areas, and streams, are required to be protected for environmental benefits. Yet streets demand a huge amount of finance as they need extra structure to make them stable or extra length to get more suitable space, making it difficult to implement the standards. For this reason, the standard could not be applied in the 2020–2030 Bahir Dar City SP project. (For further insight, see Fig. 9.1: The Proposed Land Use of the 2020–2030 Structural Plan of Bahir Dar City).

### ***9.3.3 The Conflict Between Participatory Planning and Planning Standards During Bahir Dar City SP Preparation***

The study reveals that the hybrid planning approach created conflicts between two groups of stakeholders. The first group of stakeholders included the planning team and staffs of different governmental planning related agencies, such as city administration, regional bureaus and institutes, while the second group was comprised of stakeholders from the general public, NGOs, CBOs, the private sector and the like (see Table 9.1). The first group advocated the top-down planning approach, which is in favour of the application of planning standards to the plan. Their major justifications are based on existing urban planning law and widely used imported criteria. Consequently, they measure the quality of a plan by the degree of conformance to the pre-defined planning standards. Thus, according to these proponents of standards, an urban plan that does not meet these standards is considered poor quality. As a result, they rejected interests that were not compatible with the pre-defined planning standard, as they believed the interests were not useful for sustainable development.

The second group advocated for the bottom-up planning approach, which is in favour of stakeholders' participation. Their major justifications were based on their legal right to make an ultimate decision on any local development activity and the practical context. Consequently, they measured the quality of a plan by its degree of acceptance by the local community. Thus, according to these proponents of participation, an urban plan that does not gain acceptance from the stakeholders or local communities is considered poor quality. In this case, they rejected some of the pre-defined national planning standards, as they believed the standards were not useful for their context.

In other words, the study reveals that the hybrid planning approach initiates disagreements among planning participants with conflicting ideas: because it allows for the simultaneous application of two, often conflicting yardsticks used by those involved in the process to measure the quality of urban plans, i.e. meeting the pre-defined standards and fulfilling the participants' interest. Therefore, it exacerbates dispute rather than serving as a platform for resolution.



Standards are criticised by the proponents of participation as they limit local ideas and ways of thinking; underestimate the preferences of local communities; fail to recognise their own specific context and urban development dynamism, and attempt to treat Bahir Dar as having uniform needs and expectations with other different urban centres. Therefore, these stakeholders see the standards as adversely affecting the city's features which have existed over time; a factor in losing the city's own identity (Oktay 2002); a force abolishing the decision-making power of local communities and replacing them with the knowledge of experts who have not been involved in the structure plan preparation project. Moreover, these standards have also been viewed as inappropriate and inefficient by the stakeholders because they bring about many unwelcome consequences, such as leading to huge distractions from existing development and cumbersome technical and administrative procedures.

Participation at "empower level" was criticised by proponents of standards as most of the participatory residents were found unqualified to make good decisions in urban development activities compared to good practices of participatory planning in other areas. For example, some participants expressed a personal interest to be included in the planning. However, this was very difficult for the professionals to fulfil because of the resources and capacity the city has. This alone can lead to disagreement among the participants. Therefore, some of the political elite and participating planners argued that such people were not well educated enough to determine their own fate. Thus, the bottom-up approach through public participation is not welcomed by the elite (Dimitrova 2014).

Moreover, the planning approach of the country was criticised by proponents of the standard for deconstructing any well-established planning system without replacing it with a better or, at least, another defined method of urban intervention.

For the proponents of standards, the strong attachment to planning standards over time would be an adequate reason to keep them in use. However, this was not a good reason for the opponents to accept the usefulness of the standards, because they are too rigid to accommodate the emergence of new and better tools or methods of planning practice. Proponents of standards were also arguing that standards are proposed with a range to which the characteristic studied should be conformed and this elasticity allows freedom of choice in planning. However, for the opponents, this value range still imposed certain limits and it could not accommodate the needs of the planning participants. Thus, it reduced the planning possibilities of the city's community (Healey 1997).

## 9.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The hybrid planning approach of the country becomes a major obstacle to planning participants reaching a consensus regarding the quality of their local plan; because, according to the approach, the quality of the plan is gauged using two contradictory measurement indices, i.e. meeting the pre-defined standards and fulfilling the participants' interest. Since this chapter is being considered an introduction to the

dialectical debate, it describes the conflicts between the measurement indices used by the planning participants of the Bahir Dar city plan, the case study.

Although standards should normally be developed based on the consensus of different concerned parties (Xie et al. 2015), the hybrid approach does not allow the local communities, to whom the standards are applied, to be involved in standards development. Therefore, the standards being applied become a source of conflict as they are imposed on those parties without their consent. Hence, the study confirms that standards cannot be as efficient as expected if their development process follows a top-down approach rather than a bottom-up one (Aim 2021).

These contradictory measurement indices of the hybrid approach threw the planning participants into confusion. And the quality attributes became vague and difficult to measure. The study identifies two major issues that cause confusion and vagueness regarding the quality measurement indices of the urban plan in Ethiopia.

Firstly, the hybrid approach considers the urban communities as different conflicting actors in a single urban planning project. Therefore, the relationship of the local communities to the planning authority is simultaneously as clients, customers and stakeholders. On the one hand, as clients or customers, they are meant to be part of the ultimate decision-making body regarding the quality of the plan. Here, they may not have the authority to develop or change the pre-defined planning standards. However, they should express their satisfaction with the service outcomes and components of the plan through different mechanisms, such as final approval of the plan for implementation. On the other hand, as stakeholders, they are intended to be part of the entire plan-making process. Here, the local community can even have the authority to develop or change the planning standards, which totally contradicts their formerly mentioned role. Therefore, they, finally, may not be needed to approve the plan for implementation, as they have already been involved in the entire process. Such conflicting roles of the local community create confusion regarding urban plan quality indices.

Secondly, the hybrid approach gives the planners conflicting roles during the plan preparation process. On the one hand, planners must play their role as the government agent, to serve policymakers and the administrative bodies. Here, they are responsible for maintaining the pre-determined planning standards. On the other hand, they must also play their role as local community agents, to serve the urban community. Here, they are responsible for communicating and protecting the interests of the local community. Therefore, if the local community has a problem with pre-determined planning standards, they must see what to change and adapt to the local context, which conflicts completely with their formerly mentioned role that is simply to maintain the standards. Such conflicting roles of the planners create confusion regarding the urban plan quality indices.

Aiming to address these aforementioned issues, the study forwarded the following possible mechanisms. Clearly, it becomes impossible to be productive if individual planning parties work only towards their own interests (Fewster-Thuente 2011). Furthermore, the hybrid planning approach could not help the urban communities to agree on common goals that would unite them and encourage them to strive for clear results. Thus, the study confirms that collaborative activities without a common goal

can never be successful. Therefore, helping the local community to agree on common planning goals should be the most important role of an urban planning system.

The study recommends that the common goal in urban planning should be primarily to benefit the local community, but not others (Rodela and Udovč 2008; Sachdev and Verma 2004). And others cannot determine benefits without the consent of the beneficiaries themselves. Therefore, the quality of an urban plan should be measured primarily in terms of whether the local community is satisfied with the decisions made regarding the plan.

Satisfaction should be measured by the acceptance of the ultimate decisions by the beneficiaries or the local community (Hilchey and Hurych 1985). Here, community acceptance is only concerned with the participants' (stakeholders' representatives') attitude and opinion towards believing in the decision. And it is measured as the stakeholders' perception of the decision to be acceptable (approved) or not acceptable (rejected) for implementation. This is because, according to the planning law of the country, any urban plan must be approved by the local administrative council which is made up of representatives of the local communities (FDRE 2008b).

As a result, the roles of all planning participants would be clear and no longer confusing, and centrally developed planning standards would not be considered as criteria to measure the quality of a local plan. Instead, they would serve merely as a guideline for a local planning process. Meaning, they should not be too detailed so as not to have the power to override local common or majority interest. In other words, the centrally developed standards should be advisory but not obligatory or should set only the basic elements to create room for open choices and more options for local interests in dealing with regulations.

In short, the participatory planning approach with little modifications should be, therefore, the dominant approach that should replace the hybrid planning approach of the country. As a result, the ultimate decision-making as to the quality of an urban plan would be given only to the local community. To address the aforementioned major issues, obligatory but regularly updatable local detailed standards should be developed for every urban centre uniquely; because standards that are centrally developed are often time-consuming and then become rigid. Therefore, they should not be developed at the central government level (at large scale), but at the immediate higher local government level (at small scale). This scale can allow room for the required level of participation (empower) with the local community. Local communities are to be mainly those that can directly affect the decisions and can be affected by them (MUDHC 2007). Therefore, the local obligatory standards would consider the capacity of every urban centre that is supposed to be responsible for implementing the standards in terms of technical, financial, and other resources' capacities.

Updating and revision work on obligatory local standards should at least be done at the beginning of every planning period of an urban plan to incorporate each urban centre's recent and dynamic conditions and needs. In addition, all urban plan preparation and revision project work should provide feedback on these standards. The feedback should show how the standards are compatible with the existing general

context. It must also be provided in such a way so as to update it (if necessary) regularly to incorporate the unique and dynamic social, economic, and environmental requirements of the specific urban centre.

Finally, the local community should be well informed about the advantages of conforming to and disadvantages of deviating from the widely used common standards before they make a unique and final decision regarding the local (specific) obligatory standards. One of the major responsibilities of the planning professionals should be to make all of the participating bodies aware of the ideas and intentions behind the various planning standards that are widely used in other urban centres. Maintaining the commonly known planning standards should never be the responsibility of the planners. In conclusion, unless the local community accepts these standards as relevant to and useful for their specific cases, no standards should be applied in the name of wide acceptability.

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