

Reimagining Kampala

By Caroline Knowles

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Programme Highlight

It is impossible to imagine the experience of getting around Kampala until you are trying to push your way along one of the city's main streets. Kampala has a population of 1.5 million¹ and it feels as though they are all on its main street at the same time.

The Dangerous Roads of Kampala

A jumble of motorised vehicles – trucks delivering merchandise, private cars, 14 seater collective taxis, busses, literally thousands of motor cycles, many of them working as taxis, known as Boda-Bodas, some of them organised by Uber – literally tangle with pedestrians forced off the narrow pavements as they navigate parked vehicles; piles of plastic shoes, rat traps and clothes heaped on potholed pavements as informal hawkers and traders try to make ends meet. The boundaries between road and pavement are fuzzy at best, as drivers and walkers struggle to get through the most congested street imaginable: the pavement is impossible, the road is dangerous, road discipline is, well, flexible.

The Kampala Capital City Authority estimates that 48% of Kampala daily commutes are on foot, 33% are by taxi, 10% by Boda-Bodas and 9% by private car.² Other estimates suggest walking accounts for 60% of daily commutes. Either way, walkers predominate and yet there is no clearly defined space in which to walk. Neither is there a public transport system: all of the city's transport is in private hands. Infrastructures of circulation are a vital part of a city's economic health and the social well-being of its residents. Yet, a more organised and less dangerous system of city transportation remains an aspiration.

Improving Road Safety

Enter the Non-Motorised Transport Area – a small area of the city reserved for walking and cycling – which will cut off one of Kampala's main streets to motorised traffic. This is an experiment in place-making funded by the World Bank and supported by the Kampala City Authority – a doubly top-down initiative that will improve road safety and air quality in one of the city's central

¹ <https://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/2014CensusProfiles/KAMPALA-KCCA.pdf>

² *'Development of a Public Transport System for Kampala'* (Ministry of Works and Transport, 2014). Other estimates of commutes on foot put this figure at 60%.

commercial streets. The models and mock-ups reveal green and ordered urban public space replacing the existing chaos and congestion.

Many people like the new ordered city that planners imagine emerging from the chaos, but not everyone is impressed. Shop owners are concerned about how their merchandise will be delivered if trucks are banned. Boda-Boda drivers are concerned that traffic restrictions will impact their trade. Hawkers and street vendors are opposed to being moved on to areas with lower footfall outside of the city's main commercial artery. We know about these objections because of the work of a multi-disciplinary research team led by Steve Cinderby of York University's Stockholm Institute and funded by the British Academy's *Cities and Infrastructure* Programme.³ Cinderby's team comprises a strong Kampala component led by Amanda Ngabirano at Makerere University and a contingent of artists and filmmakers who are developing a creative methods toolkit that can underpin public consultation and input into the city's plans. Kampala's citizens are to be presented with a re-imagined city – but until now they have not been consulted or even informed about what the authorities plan.

Including Citizens in the Research Project

Building capacity to conduct public consultation is one of the impacts of this city place-making project. The creative methods toolkit devised and honed by the local team can be scaled up and rolled out to underpin other initiatives, and bridge the gap between top-down and bottom-up priorities in urban planning. They serve an important role in liaising between the city authorities and its residents. In the end, projects like this only work if people are convinced they will make the city better or more habitable. The team has made a number of TV news programmes⁴ about the proposed changes.

A second impact is that people feel listened to and involved in city decision-making. Even on a small scale, someone has bothered to ask them what they think and listened to their views. Hawkers, walkers and Boda-Boda drivers are rarely consulted on anything: they may in future consider that their views count and their lives matter, if in small ways, to city authorities.

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³ *Implementing Creative Methodological Innovations for Inclusive, Sustainable Transport Planning.*

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05IM4i7jNzk>



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