



Tema New Village and New Town, Ghana: The Vicissitudes of an Urban Model (1951-1970)

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Within the potent framework of grandiose territorial reconfigurations characterizing the developmentalist agenda of the post-war and Cold War decades, the Volta River Project in Ghana ambitiously aspired to modernize Sub-Saharan Africa's first independent country in the space of merely one generation. The scheme included the construction of large-scale infrastructures such as highways, harbors and dams, and resettled more than 70,000 Ghanaians to a multitude of novel settlements of different scales and types.

As part of the venture, the New Village of Tema Manhean (1951-1960) and the New Town of Tema (1959 - 1970) were significant attempts of modern city design produced under the complex shift from colonial to post-colonial conditions in an African nation that heralded an exemplary path towards progress. A collection of 'development experts' and modern architects - ranging from Charles Abrams and Otto H.Koenigsberger to Maxwell Fry and Constantinos A. Doxiadis - contributed to the radical transformation of Ghana and its territory. As one of the precursor experiments of developmentalist urbanism, the New Village of Tema Manhean and the New Town of Tema provided the testing ground for experiments at various scale levels coalescing disciplines such as economics, anthropology, sociology, physical planning and architecture.

If Tema Manhean was a first instance of resettlement that attempted to consider local specificities and reflect them in housing layouts and typologies, Constantinos Doxiadis' New Town of Tema was instead the application of a model the Greek architect-planner had conceived for and would continue to propose for global application in a number of various so-called developing countries. In the former case, the attempt to preserve - or reproduce - original compound lifestyle would drive the design for Tema Manhean. The layouts of communities in Tema New Town would instead essentialize cultural motifs such as verandah housing and palaver grounds and integrate them within modernist architecture and planning, re-negotiating their terms of reference in the complex panorama of the United Nations' First Development Decade.

By analyzing both planning episodes, the contribution aims to shed light on a period of paradigmatic shift during which the debate on context and indigenous culture was blended with the massive [and innovative?] implementation of modernistic principles. While each case is distinctly indicative of the dynamic interplay between exported urban models and local specificities, the two planning endeavors at a more general scale allow speculation on the capacity to generate a particular idea of 'urbanity' through form. They concomitantly reflect the change of scale and approach that the shift from transitional to post-independence, post-colonial conditions engendered, as the seeds for a global planning opening urban environment to the free flow of goods and people were being sown.

KEY WORDS: Urbanism transfers, development, third world, colonial and post-colonial planning, Ghana.