

Contradictions in the governance of environmental mobility: Evidence from African Cities

Achilles Kallergis, Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility,
The New School University

Abstract

Speculative discourses of an imminent climate migration crisis have elevated environmental mobility into a global issue, underlining the need for multi-level governance, international cooperation, the development of norms and processes, and the recognition of migration as an important adaptation strategy. While the role of cities as recipients of mobility is increasingly recognized in the recent environmental migration scholarship, little attention has been given to the contradictions that occur in the governance of mobility present in destination cities. On the one hand, international and regional norm-setting aim to improve and facilitate mobility through the better incorporation of movements due to environmental events; on the other, national and local urban processes seek to slow, restrict, and forcibly reconfigure mobility towards and within rapidly growing cities.

This paper discusses environmental mobility in the context of Africa's urbanization. Distilling from the evidence in the region, we place environmental mobility within the broader context of Africa's urbanization, which we consider as the dominant mobility process in the region. We argue that temporarily and spatially, mobility due to environmental change is manifested and negotiated hyper-locally in low-income urban destination neighborhoods that face environmental risk. The paper explores these contradictions in the context of Accra, Dar es Salaam, Freetown and Monrovia. Drawing evidence from participatory research co-led by the author and organized communities of the urban poor in the four coastal cities, the paper will show how low-income neighborhoods that act as receiving areas for migrants are shaped by intense and recurring mobility due to continuous environmental risk.

The paper's main contribution is to re-focus discussions on the inclusion of those primarily affected by environmental change. It bears importance for environmental mobility, a complex process that is still poorly understood. Given how contextual factors influence migration decisions, mobilizing the knowledge of migrants and hosts in destination communities would provide a much richer understanding that can guide the governance of mobility. In conclusion, the paper argues for more attention to local practices and knowledge that are necessary to inform the implementation of mobility norms, the ways they are translated and embedded in

local contexts, and their interaction with longstanding urban strategies that aim to restrict mobility and spatially reconfigure cities.

Biography

Achilles Kallergis is an Assistant Professor at the New School for Social Research and the Director of the Cities and Migration Project at the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility. His research focuses on urbanization, migration and mobility in rapidly growing cities. Specifically, it explores environmental mobility and how locally generated data can provide new evidence on mobility patterns and contribute to improving living conditions in low-income destination areas through better provision of housing and services. In his research, he has collaborated with transnational community networks Slum/Shack Dwellers International and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights. At Zolberg, he directs the research program on cities and migration and coordinates the Research Platform on Cities and Human Mobility. Previously he was a research scholar at the Marron Institute of Urban Management at New York University. He has taught at the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University and at the New School Graduate Program in International Affairs. His work has been published in academic journals and edited books. He holds a PhD in Urban Policy and an MA in International Affairs from the New School University, and an MA in Political Science from the University of Lausanne.