

# **NO TRACE OF PUBLIC SPACE?**

**SEARCHING FOR PUBLIC URBAN LIFE IN LILONGWE**





# ABSTRACT

This work is about public spaces in Lilongwe. No, it is not about football fields as I was jokingly asked a number of times. This work assumes that public space is determined by the public urban life being lived in a given context. It is, therefore, strongly shaped by local cultures, lifestyles, and everyday occurrences. As such, public space is less understood as a physical entity but more as a performative practice (Sennett 2017) and a platform for social intersections (Simone 2010). In Lilongwe's formal urban planning, however, public space appears to have no place and, if at all, is much more concerned with its spatial aspects than the nature of its publicness. This lack of discourse around public space subsequently materializes in Lilongwe's urban form - which is troubling. Part of the motivation for this work is driven by the incongruence that when planning fails to accommodate public urban life, it will find its place elsewhere. This is both desirable and problematic. It is problematic because Lilongwe is, in addition, strongly marked by spatial segregation that translates to socioeconomic and racial segregation so that public urban life predominantly unfolds in pre-determined pockets of the city. This, however, goes against the grain of one of the key characteristics of public space which is its openness and inclusion for people of all walks of life. The fact that public urban life still unfolds and finds its ways in Lilongwe's urban fabric represents the desirable aspect of its current state in Lilongwe. This work traces these unacknowledged public spaces by Lilongwe's urban planning sector. I explore and illustrate where the publics in Lilongwe can be found instead and how they create and shape public space in the city. Football fields belong to this category, however, I opted for less visible examples that I encountered during my field research in Lilongwe, including water kiosks,

the Labor Office, Kachere in Chinsapo, WhatsApp groups, a churches square in Kauma, Bawo players at the Craft Market, the Area 13 Market, and a home plot in a high density residential area. The latter three are presented in more in-depth case studies while the other examples serve more as introductory case studies for further research. None of the case studies presented aim to be exhaustive but are utilized to make a point with regard to public urban life and potential interpretations of public space which are, finally, assembled in five *Food For Thoughts*. They aim to inspire future decision-making processes concerned with public urban life or public spaces, especially in Lilongwe's urban planning sector. Moreover, they can, for one, fill up the void created by the absence of public space debates and, secondly, not only fill it up but fill it up with ideas of public space that are deeply connected to local public urban life and not imported from other, foreign, or EuroAmerican practices. In this manner, this work further aims to show how the legacy of colonial town planning and dominant global practices in urban planning can be challenged by adopting a southern perspective that is based on truly local insights (De Boeck 2016; Myers 2011; Roy 2009; Watson 2009). Looking at local public urban life can subsequently also serve as a foundation for a more grounded understanding of Lilongwe's urbanity (Jenkins 2013). What kind of city is Lilongwe, after all? The answer most likely lies somewhere between neatly collected statistics as well as everyday practices that do not fit into single digits or words. But one can assume that the answer does not lie in any of the currently circulating master plans, land use plans, and zoning schemes as neither addresses Lilongwe's publics although it so profoundly determines a city's urbanity.

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INITIAL SITUATION

1

**TAKULANDIRANI:  
WELCOME TO LILONGWE**

TO THE NON-MALAWIAN AUDIENCE

What images you might have of Malawi, do not mistake them with images you have seen from other parts of Africa. Malawi is not like Mali, neither is Lilongwe like Nairobi, Johannesburg or Lusaka. Each city of Africa is as unique as is Paris, London, New York, Buenos Aires, and Tokyo. Lilongwe differs from these cities in so far as it rarely triggers a specific image in people's minds unless one is already familiar with it. Fueling the imaginary machines of our minds with fodder that stems from Malawi and less from stereotypical associations and assumptions, I begin this work with a fairly elaborate introduction in order to elucidate my field of research. Yet this can only be understood as a cursory introduction to life in Malawi and Lilongwe.

TO THE MALAWIAN AUDIENCE

You already know Malawi better than I do and perhaps ever will. This work is based on my lens, my view of Malawi. Please be kind and keep in mind that I have tried to free myself from Western biases by opening my ears and eyes rather than opening my mouth when I visited your country. The following pages are an account of what I have heard and seen but as a European I will never be able to entirely shake off my European lens. *Pepani*, my sincere apologies. Therefore, do not (only) pick on mistakes I might have made (though please do express them to me) and, instead, use my work as a medium to understand Western minds in Malawian contexts. While Western scholars carry the additional burden of an exploitative colonial past (and present), I believe both the global north and south must find means to arrive at a common discursive ground. I hope my work can contribute to this.

**Note** Words marked with a star\* signal that they are listed and explained further in the *Glossary*. All images depicted are my own unless otherwise indicated under *Notes*.

- Page 12 Aerial view of Lilongwe
- Page 13 Aerial view of a low density [Area 3] and high density [Area 36] residential area
- Page 14 Makeshift bridge to the Tsoka Market in Old Town
- Page 15 Bird's eye view from the Memorial Tower
- Page 16 Tea room and restaurant in Chinsapo [Area 57]
- Page 17 Gemini House in City Center
- Page 18 View from the Labor Office towards the Bus Depot
- Page 19 Outdoor seating area at the Game Complex











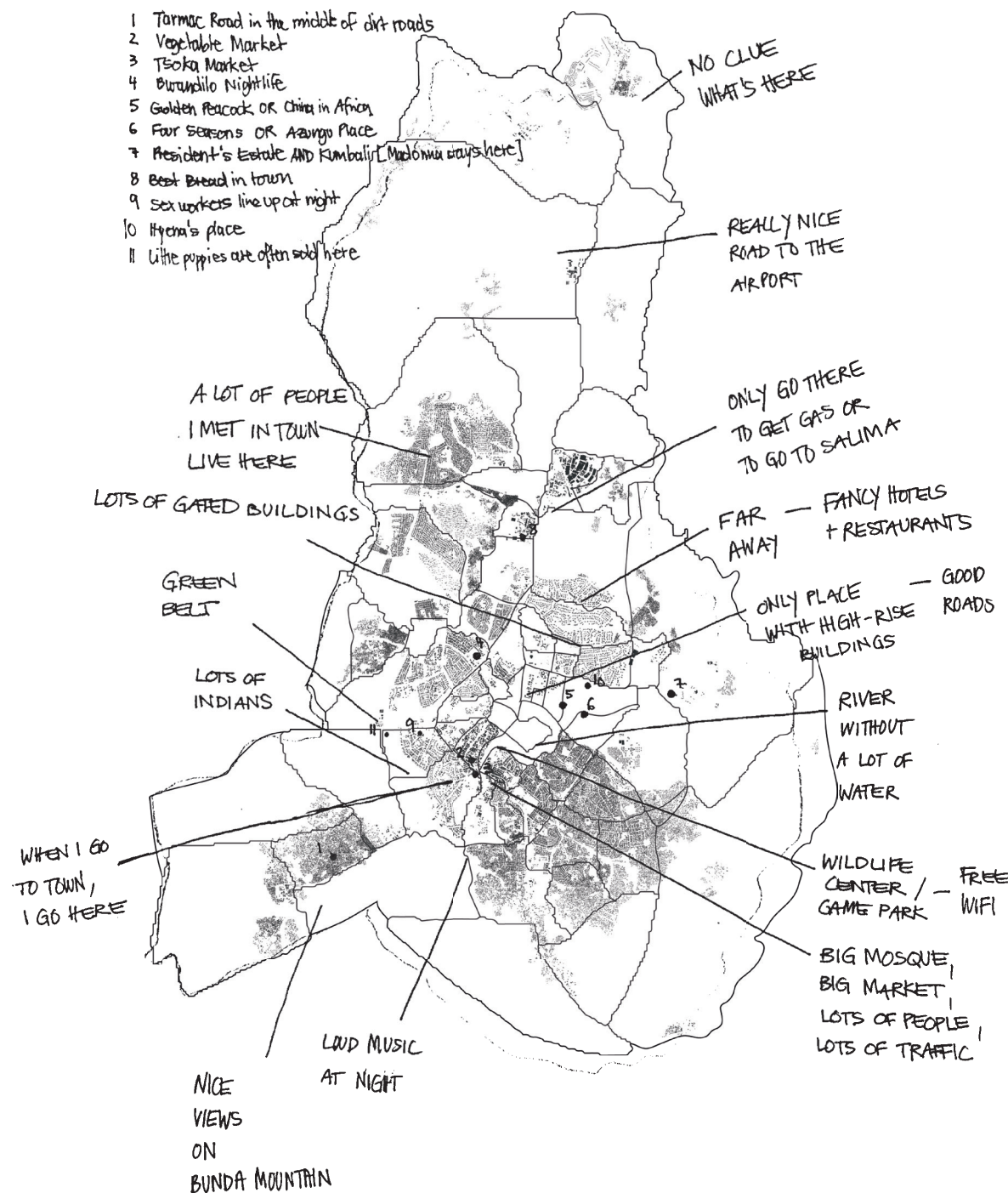
# TEA ROOM & RESTAUNT











Mental map of Lilongwe

” BO? I’M HUNGRY.  
SHARP! AZUNGU, AZUNGU! BOSSMAN WE ENJOY HARDSHIPS.  
LILONGWE IS AN APARTHEID TOWN.  
I WALK A LOT, I MEAN A LOT LOT.  
WE KNOW EVERYONE IN THIS AREA  
AND WE SAY HELLO AND BRING  
FOOD FROM THE MARKET.  
15 YEARS AGO, THINGS WERE  
SLOOOOOW, NOW THINGS GO FASTER.  
IF YOU DON’T MAKE THIS FENCE, THE  
GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE IT FROM YOU.  
YOU KNOW, CORRUPTION IS EVERYWHERE.  
YOU THINK THERE ARE NO  
INDIAN WOMEN IN THIS TOWN  
BUT ON INDIAN HOLIDAYS  
THEY ALL COME OUT AND YOU  
WONDER WHERE THEY HAVE  
BEEN HIDING ALL THE TIME.  
IN THE LAST SIX WEEKS, SINCE I MOVED TO  
LILONGWE, I HAVE BEEN SPENDING THREE  
OUT OF SIX WEEKENDS AWAY. - THIS IS PRE-  
CISELY HOW MY PAST THREE YEARS IN LI-  
LONGWE HAVE PRETTY MUCH LOOKED LIKE.  
PROVIDED YOU HAVE AN OKAY, YOU CAN DO  
EVERYTHING. YOU BRING YOUR OWN PLANS.  
SO YOU ARE GOING BACK TO HIM?...OR HER?  
THESE DAYS IT IS OKAY TO ASK SUCH QUESTIONS.  
I WOULD LIKE LILONGWE TO HAVE MORE GREEN SPACE  
LIKE MULANJE, LESS LITTER AND LESS SOIL AND DIRT.  
NEXT TIME YOU MUST EAT AND COME WITH THE INTENTION TO CHAT.  
I’VE SEEN IT ON TV. WHEN THE SUN COMES OUT, EVERYONE IS OUTSIDE.  
WE SEE THE SUN EVERY DAY. WE DON’T CARE SO MUCH.  
IF YOU ARE PREGNANT, YOU MUST MARRY THE MAN WHO IMPREGNATED YOU.  
THIS IS AFRICA. LIFE IS TOUGH WHEN YOU ARE POOR.  
PROMISES CAN BE BROKEN. BREAK-INS OR ASSAULTS – WHAT’S WORSE? –  
PANG’ONO PANG’ONO\*, BREAK-INS. ASSAULTS ONLY HURT THE HUMAN BODY.  
SLOWLY SLOWLY MALAWIANS ARE VERY FRI-  
ENDLY BUT THEY ARE NOT  
NECESSARILY YOUR FRIENDS.  
YOU ARE MOST WELCOME.”

## Important and useful expressions

bodza	lie(s), false
zowona	true
chonde	please
pepani	Sorry
palibe vuto	there is no problem
Zimachitika	it happens
Osadandaula	do not worry
ndathokoza	I am grateful
ndatopa	I am tired
ndakhuta	I am full
ujeni	whatcamacallit
dikirani pang'ono	wait a minute
Sindikudziwa/kaya	hold on
Sindikumvetsa	I do not know
Zili bwino	I do not understand
Chabwino	Things are going on well
Sizili bwino	Okay, that is good
Sivuto	Things are not going on well
basi eti?	Not a problem, not at all, do not mention it
	That is enough, okay, done
	Isn't it? not so?

Important and useful expressions by a Chichewa teacher

## SLICE OF LIFE FROM LILONGWE

It is rainy season in Malawi. The landscape blooms in deep green colors sprinkled with the occasional yellow flower. Red dust clouds fly through the air whenever a car passes by. As I cycle down on the sides of a road, the dust stings in my eyes. The road itself is paved while the leftover space to the right and left of the road is not and reserved for pedestrians, cyclists, a green stretch of grass, a drainage canal, and the occasional street vendor. I stop to buy a *mandasi* for 50 MK (around 0.50 Euros) from one of the women who is selling them in a large, see-through plastic bucket at a small intersection. Essentially, it is a large ball of dough fried in hot oil with a hint of sweet. I would not consider it my favorite pastry but for some reason I keep returning to it as so many other Malawians do. I decline the blue plastic bag she wants to give me with the *mandasi* and eat it right away.

I am on my way to town. But when I say I am going into town in Lilongwe, it is not entirely clear where exactly I am going to. Technically, I stay in town so where else would I be? I need to run a few errands. Buy phone credit and a data bundle, for instance, which allows me to use the internet on my phone at lower price rates. My phone credit would run out very quickly otherwise. To buy a bundle, I go to one of the two national service providers' shops. Their nearest office is located in Old Town at the Game Complex so this is where I am heading to this time when I say I am going into town. On my very first day in Lilongwe, the parking lot of the Game Complex was introduced to me as the city center and I remember wondering if we were only parking the car to go to the city center. Only later it dawned on me that this was it and why wouldn't it be? The parking lot is a lot more than just parking. So many things happen here, so many people meet here, and so many places can easily be reached from here. Big rallies with loud PA-systems use the parking space to find a large

audience. Informal Forex traders wait for customers in the shade of a low-hanging tree. Even fashion photo shoots take place in the parking lot as it forms the backdrop to a life many Malawians may aspire to but know very little of. Like a fortress, the parking lot is surrounded by a number of shops, one of which is the GAME shop and name patron of this place. It is a chain from South Africa and it might as well be the most expensive shop in town. But you can probably find anything there what an *azungu*\* heart desires and which you will have a hard time finding anywhere else in Lilongwe. *Azungu* is the general name for white people, no matter if they are Europeans, Asians, or Latinos. If you are not black, you are considered white. The many Indians in town might be the only exception. They are „Indians“ (often born and raised in Malawi) and run many of Malawi's commercial enterprises.

Once I have bought my phone credit after spending much time with standing in line to wait my turn, I walk to the Tsoka Market. The market is just behind the complex across the Lilongwe River. To cross, I can choose between the many makeshift wooden pedestrian bridges (for a small fee) or a concrete bridge that carries the M1 main road. I opt for the concrete bridge. Right here, traffic congestion in Lilongwe is at its worst. I know why I left my bike at the complex. Cars, minibuses, the occasional 4x4, TukTuks, and loads of pedestrians are competing with each other to keep a straight line on the road. At the adjacent Tsoka Market, a calmer yet no less clearer view of the surroundings awaits, marked by a maze of wooden stalls and small alleyways. But luckily, they are organized in clusters. Tailors in one corner, shoes in another, second hand clothes all the way in the back, and pool tables every now and then in between. Vegetables and fruits are not sold here. For this I have to cross over the bridge again and walk to the vegetable market.



# THEY SHALL ROT, ROT, ROT!



Malawi's First President [1961-1994]: His Excellency The Life President and Paramount Chief Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, The Ngwazi

## THIS IS MALAWI

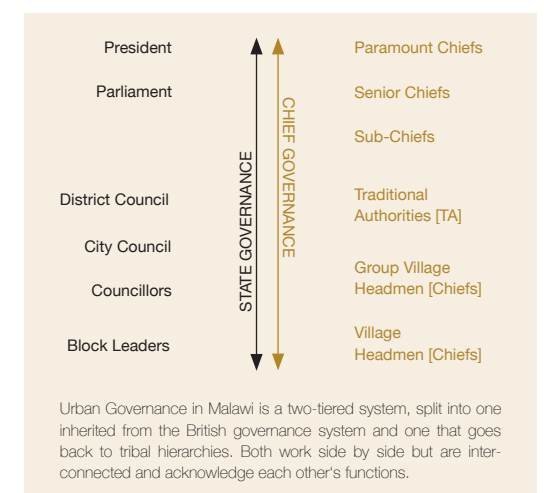
Without undermining its value and relevance, Malawi naturally is more than its hard facts suggest. After all, the Malawi found on paper – think policy papers and country profiles – can merely frame but never fully depict what Malawi means for Malawians. The following paragraphs, therefore, begin with providing a glimpse of what is visible *off* the papers before also turning towards the hard facts *on* paper, both being equally relevant for a better understanding of Malawi as well as this work.

### IT'S A CULTURAL THING

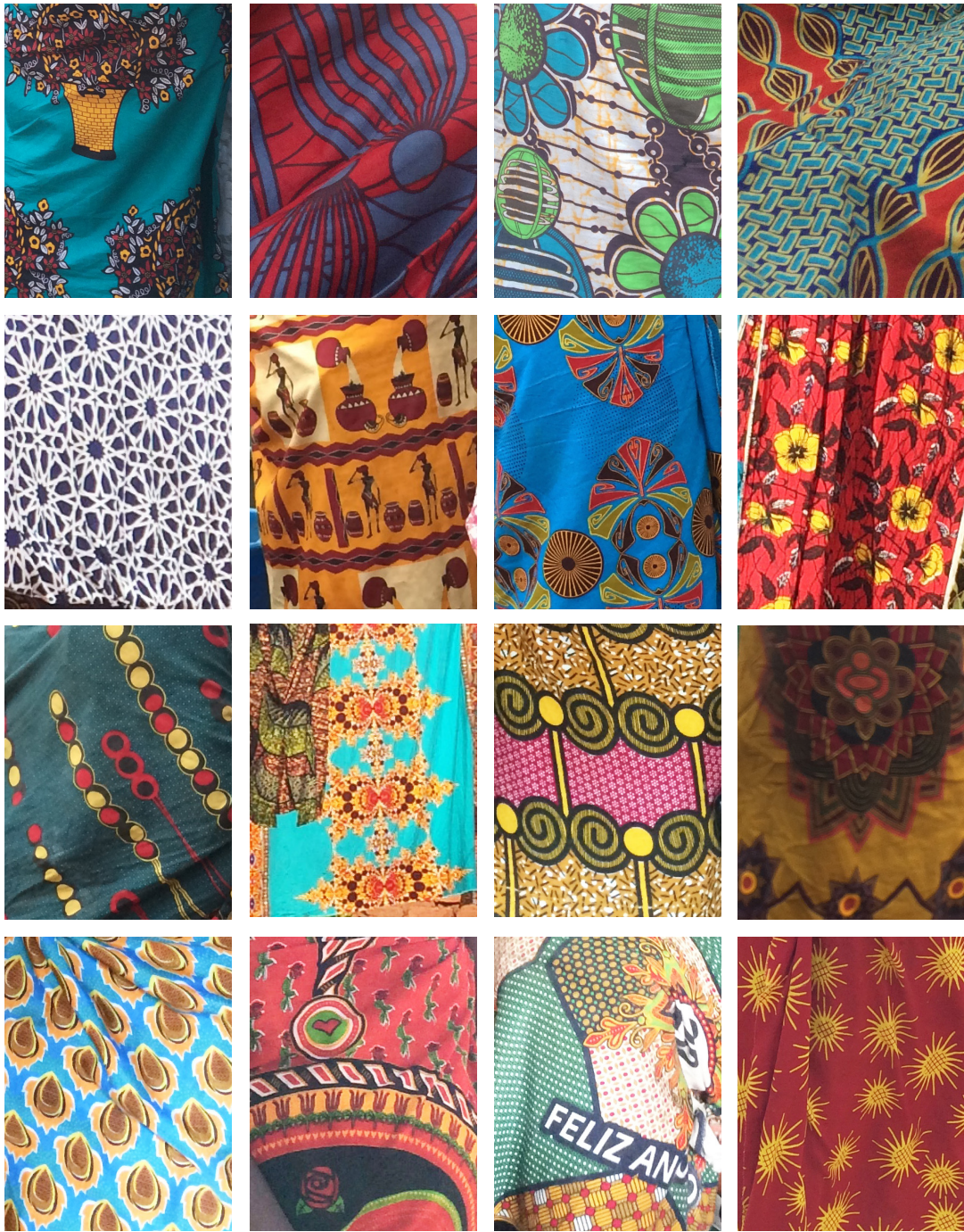
Malawi is often referred to as the “warm heart of Africa”, alluding to the people’s friendliness and welcoming, peaceful character. My very first chat with a Malawian, sitting in the passenger seat of a taxi truck minutes after having crossed the border, might illustrate why this stereotype has come about. Upon my question what he enjoys doing, he responded: “I enjoy making friends”. Surely, this situation paints a very romantic image of Malawi, yet, I cannot recall having had as many encounters like these elsewhere. To better understand today’s Malawi requires knowledge of its more recent history. Malawi gained independence from the British on July 6, 1964 and, subsequently, entered a one-party-system with the Malawian Congress Party (MCP) as the only ruling party and life president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda as their autocratic leader. Banda, who was born a Chewa in Malawi’s Central Region, educated in the USA and UK, and a practicing physician before he entered Malawian politics, ruled the country with a conservative “iron rod” (Myers 2003). Under his regime, all adults were pressured to become MCP members and carry a passcard at all times. Censorship was flourishing, businesses had to display an image of the president, women had to dress conservatively without ever showing their knees in public, all men were made to wear short hair including international visitors, members of the Jehova’s Witness were exiled, Asians had to relocate from rural to urban centers, and so on and so forth. Under the one-party-system, there were many rules to Malawi’s everyday life and breaking any one of them could turn into a life threatening case (see Mapanje 2011 for a vivid account of a dissident’s experiences in Malawi under Banda’s regime). The MALAWI YOUNG PIONEERS, watchdogs of Banda’s autocratic regime, were entrusted with the upkeep of Malawi’s order and to restore order whenever necessary, thus, creating a culture of fear among the Malawian population. Since people would often involuntarily disappear overnight or be “accidentalized”, as the saying goes, while torture and killings were not uncommon, such fears were not unfounded (Mapanje 2011). In 1994, due to international and national pressure, Malawi finally held its first presidential election in which Banda lost his power. After 30 years of a one-party-system, Malawi eventually became a democratic, multi-party nation. Since Banda’s regime only ended little over 20 years ago, many

Malawians still have some kind of memory, both nostalgic and horrific, of life under Banda’s rule. His legacy remains very visible and tangible in many aspects of Malawian life today and, as such, lives on well beyond his death in 1997. It is only the younger generation that starts to distance themselves from his legacy in order to explore new ways of Malawian life.

While different interests and parties have continuously fought over power in Malawi, other powers have kept their stronghold all along - all the way through colonialism, dictatorship, and modernism. To say it in the words of Malawian author William Kamkwamba: “Before I discovered the miracles of science, magic ruled the world” (Kamkwamba and Mealer 2010). He is referring to what one could consider the spiritual or supernatural sphere in Malawian culture. For example, the *Gule Wamkulu*, both a secret cult of the Chewa and a ritual dance with elaborate masks, remain very active and respected by the communities, exemplifying how very much alive traditional beliefs are in Malawi despite its more and more modernizing society. So it comes to no surprise that *sing’anga* or witchdoctors are found everywhere in the country, the consumption of albinos body parts are believed to bring good luck, and killings can be justified by a fear of vampires, if only rarely this is the case. With this in mind, it may not be hard to understand why traditional leaders or chiefs play such an important role in Malawi, also with regard to more mundane aspects of life. So much, in fact, that the traditional system exists parallel to and cooperates with the political system in a codependent relationship. Some might argue that the former is de facto more powerful than the latter. Within the tribal system, each tribe produces their own traditional leaders, following their respective lineages as chiefdom is hereditary. Tribes in Malawi’s northern and central regions tend to follow patrilineal patterns, while the southern region is predominantly matrilineal. This pattern permeates a Mala-







Chitenje patterns in Malawi

wian's life from birth over marriage to the grave and comes with its distinct gender roles and customs. Though the tribal background is not an everyday site of contention as daily life simply goes its ways despite such heterogeneous origins, people acknowledge the fact that there are differences. Therefore, one's origin, the "what village are you from?" question, will precede most conversations. Even in urban areas, where people are more prone to shun tribal traditions, one would usually associate with the parents' background, sometimes be as specific as the respective name of the chief. "You always belong to a village", one resident of Lilongwe emphasizes, even if one had barely ever been to the village itself.

Religious distinctions can be considered just as prevalent as traditional distinctions and since one has not replaced the other, they live side-by-side. The "what church do you go to?" question seems just as important and ubiquitous as the origin question, also assuming that one cannot *not* be a member of a church. Overall, Malawians attach great importance to courtesy. Physically this can entail kneeling, avoidance of eye contact, or, most commonly seen, handshaking with one's right while the left hand touches the other elbow, indicating that one is not armed. Verbally, courteous behavior becomes most obvious in the habitual greeting procedures. Not inquiring about someone's current state, asking „how are you?“, is considered rather rude.

Talking about Malawian culture would be incomplete if there was no mention of *chitenje*\*. *Chitenje* describes the colorful printed cloths found nearly everywhere around Africa under different names. Malawian women wear them as skirts, as dresses, as a head wrap, as a baby sling on the back, to carry luggage, to wrap things, to sit on etc. It is universally applicable, it seems, and the patterns and colors come in a vast variety. Women, no men, wear chitenje to keep away dust and dirt, to show respect during ceremonial occasions like funerals, to convey a message e.g. by displaying their political affiliation, simply for a more fashionable look, or to cover up knees because it is still largely considered offensive to show bare knees in public. In fact, revealing your knees has a similar effect as showing your breasts in public in Western cultures. Ironically, the analogy seems to work reversibly too. Breastfeeding in public is as ordinary a sight as showing your knees in most Western cultures. Another predominantly female domain is the preparing of food, which is most commonly done on portable stoves, usually placed somewhere outdoors as it produces large amounts of smoke. Deforestation is a direct consequence of this practice as meals need to be cooked and cutting wood from the nearest forest is the most economic option as it is for free. To see women and children of all ages carrying sticks and branches or even entire tree trunks to their homes by placing their loads on their heads is therefore no rare sight. A typical Malawian meal eaten for both lunch and dinner consists of nsima\*,



A Gule Wamkulu dancer masked and dressed in ritual clothing

a highly filling pulp of maize flour or a fine-grained polenta, often homegrown or inexpensive to buy, paired with vegetables and, if one can afford it, meat or fish from Lake Malawi. For breakfast, *mandasis* are a popular snack, a sweet pastry which can be purchased by one of the many women lining the side of the main roads with their *mandasi* buckets. Another popular and low-cost street food dish is *chiwaya*, i.e. chips, salad, and an egg, deep-fried on a large metal plate called *chiwaya*, hence the name. A *chiwaya* vendor usually hands out *cholawa*, a „snack-taste“, while a customer watches the vendor prepare their full portion.

Slowly but surely, Malawi's culture of fear, fostered by the previous autocratic regime, is disappearing. Different strands of culture emerge more freely and openly in both desirable and undesirable ways. For instance, there is no dispute that the level of corruption, nepotism and patronage is high. Likewise, ample poverty is paired with a wish and hypothetical ability to align with more cosmopolitan lifestyles. This is intensified by capitalist notions that enter the country through the presence of international organizations, media, and modern technology. The growing number of mobile phones and internet users are further living proof of a wider reception for new flows of ideas and ideals. Among others, they are triggered through projects like *internet.org*, which provides free access to websites like *Facebook*, *Wikipedia*, and *Google* in Malawi since 2015. One could debate that such developments ring in a new form of colonialism but for the moment this debate must find its arena elsewhere as it suffices to say: life in Malawi has changed and it continues to change due to its increasing exposure to other ways of life in the world.



THE COLOR OF MALAWI'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

THE COLOR OF BLOOD FOR THE STRUGGLE TO INDEPENDENCE

THE COLOR OF MALAWI'S NATURE

HISTORY + ADMINISTRATION

Along with its British colonizers, a number of tribes with different origins and distinct languages, customs, beliefs, and lifestyles left their mark on the landlocked country in South East Africa now known as the REPUBLIC OF MALAWI. It was first united under the Maravi Empire, from which the country derives its name. Upon "discovery" by explorer David Livingstone, British colonizers gained power and declared the land a British protectorate, referring to it as NYASALAND and, later on, as FEDERATION OF RHODESIA AND NYASALAND. After independence from the British in 1964, Malawi received its present name and was ruled by the autocratic life president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Since 1994, Malawi has been governed by a multi-party-democracy, currently headed by president Arthur Peter Mutharika. Malawi is divided into three administrative regions, i.e. Northern, Central, and Southern Region, 28 districts, 193 parliamentary constituencies\* and 462 wards\* (MEC 2014). The dominant tribes found in Malawi are the Chewa, Yao, Lomwe, Ngoni, Tumbuka, Nyanja, Sena, Tonga, and Ngonde. Among these, the Chewa people have and continue to form the ethnic majority and the Bantu-language Chichewa is one of the two official languages spoken all over Malawi along with English.

ECONOMY

The export of tobacco, sugar, and tea dominates the country's economy while maize is the dominant agricultural produce, being the main staple of most Malawians. The country's GDP stands at USD 6.303 billion with a per capita income of USD 338 (World Bank Data 2017b) of which one third is contributed by the agricultural sector. It is one of the highest shares in Africa. Moreover, foreign aid plays a significant role as it makes up 20 to 30% of the GDP (GIZ). Estimates claim that over 90% have less than USD 2 at their disposal per day, making Malawi one of the poorest countries in the world, sometimes even referred to as "Fourth World" country (ibid.). Inequality between the wealthiest and poorest is extremely high as Malawi's iHDI score of 0.328 indicates, ranking 170 out of 188 countries. In comparison, Germany ranks 4th and has an iHDI score of 0.859 (UNDP 2016). Malawi's currency, the Malawian Kwacha [MK], was introduced in 1971 and began trading at a rate of 2 MK for 1 GBP. It has experienced rapid devaluation ever since, somewhat mirroring the country's economic challenges. In 2011, 1GBP was worth 240 MK and at the time of research, in spring 2018, the exchange rate had dropped to 950 MK for 1GBP (Reserve Bank Malawi 2018). Around 40% of government expenditures were financed through foreign aid, but when a massive corruption scandal, commonly referred to as "Cashgate", was uncovered in 2013, donors became more sensitive and suspended much of their spending (GIZ; Raviv et al. 2018). Malawi ranks 122 out of 180 on the CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX as corruption is a widespread practice in Malawi on various scales (Transparency International 2018).

TOPOGRAPHY + CLIMATE

Malawi covers a total area of 118,843 km², roughly a third of the size of Germany, and it shares borders with Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania. About one fifth of the country is covered by water including the Shire River, which provides over 95% of Malawi's electricity through hydropower (ES-COM). More famously, there is Lake Malawi or Lake Nyasa. It is the ninth largest lake in the world and also known as *Calendar Lake* for stretching over 365 miles in length and 52 miles in width. More mystically, it is also referred to as *Lake of Stars* for it is believed that one can see the stars reflected in the lake at night. Malawi's climate tends to be tropical around the lake shores and sub-tropical in higher altitudes. Around 95% of the annual rainfall occurs during rainy season from November to April where mean temperatures average around 25 and 37°C. In the dry season, from May to October, there is nearly no rainfall and mean temperatures range from 17 to 27°C with chances of frost (MET). The landscape of Malawi changes fundamentally with the change of seasons, going from lush greens to dry dust and back every year. Driven by the effects of climate change, the country moreover frequently suffers from floods and droughts. Droughts have even prompted the Malawian Government to declare a state of national disaster when they led to widespread famines. Due to its proximity to the equator, daylight hours in Malawi stay consistent and rotate roughly between 5:30/6:00 AM/PM year-round, determining much of people's daily rhythms.

POPULATION

According to the latest national census, around 13 million people live in Malawi (NSO 2010). However, this number can only be interpreted as a bottom estimate since an unknown number of the population shows up in no official records on top of the fact that the census is fairly outdated. The next national census will be conducted this September. On national average, around 139 people live per km² and the average household has 4.4 people (UN Habitat 2010). 11 million of the total population lives in rural areas and over 90% of the rural population lives off agriculture on small farms and/or subsistence farming. The largest demographic group is between 10 and 29 years old and comprises around 40% of the total population (NSO 2010; GIZ). The average life expectancy is around 55 years while 10.6% live with HIV/AIDS (GIZ). School attendance is compulsory and free for primary education [Standard 1 to 8] but public secondary schools [Form 1 to 4] only have a capacity for 30% of the eligible students. Public universities absorb even less with a maximum of 4% graduates from secondary schools (Mgomezulu 2014). Literacy rate is at 65.4% (GIZ). Religion plays a very important role in the life of most Malawians who either belong to the 83% Christians, a legacy left by the early missionaries who settled in this country, the 13% Muslims mostly found in the Mangochi and Machinga districts, the 2% of other religious groups like Hindus, Rastafarians, and Jews, or the 2% who do not belong to any religion at all (NSO 2010). In 2017, the legal age for marriage was raised from 15 to 18 as child marriage was and still remains common in Malawi, particularly in rural areas. Homosexuality is highly stigmatized and punishable by law.



**SIZE**  
118,483KM<sup>2</sup>

**SOVEREIGNTIES**

- BEFORE 1883 • MARAVI EMPIRE
- 1907 • NYASALAND [BRITISH PROTECTORATE]
- 1950s • FEDERATION OF RHODESIA AND NYASALAND
- 1964 • REPUBLIC OF MALAWI

**WATERS**  
SHIRE RIVER  
LAKE MALAWI  
[LAKE NYASA,  
CALENDAR LAKE,  
OR LAKE OF STARS]

**SEASONS**  
RAINY SEASON: NOV-APRIL [25-37°C]  
DRY SEASON: MAY-OCT [17-27°C]

**TRIBES**  
CHEWA  
YAO  
LOMWE  
NGONI  
TUMBUKA  
NYANJA  
SENA  
TONGA  
NGONDE



**SUNRISE**  
5:30 TO 6:00 AM

**SUNSET**  
5:30 TO 6:00 PM

**INDEPENDENCE DAY**  
JULY 1964  
**6**

**13+ MILLION**  
PEOPLE LIVE IN MALAWI [2008]

**40%**  
OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IS BETWEEN  
10 AND 29 YEARS OLD, MAKING THEM  
THE LARGEST DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP

**CHICHEWA  
+ ENGLISH**  
MALAWI'S OFFICIAL  
LANGUAGES

**\$ 6.303 BILLION**  
GDP \$ 3.677 trillion

**\$ 338**  
PER CAPITA INCOME \$ 44,469

**AT LEAST 90%**  
LIVE ON LESS THAN \$2 PER DAY

**MALAWIAN KWACHA RATES**

**1£** 1£ 1£ 1€  
2 MK 240 MK 950 MK 850 MK  
1,000 MK 1,17 €

**MAIN EXPORT**

TOBACCO SUGAR TEA

**MAIN PRODUCE**

MAIZE

**0.328**  
ON THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX [iHDI]  
0.859

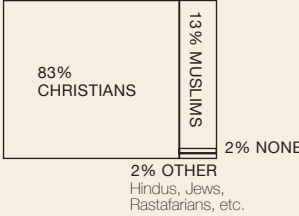
**RANK 122 OUT OF 180**  
ON THE CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX 2017  
Rank 12

**55 YEARS**  
IS THE AVERAGE MALAWIAN LIFE SPAN 80 years

**10.6%**  
ARE SUFFERING FROM HIV/AIDS

**65.4%**  
ARE ABLE TO READ AND WRITE

**RELIGION**



**HOMOSEXUALITY**  
ILLEGAL

**LEGAL AGE FOR MARRIAGE**  
18 SINCE 2017 [BEFORE 15]

**EVERY 5 YEARS**  
GENERAL ELECTIONS

**HEADS OF STATE**

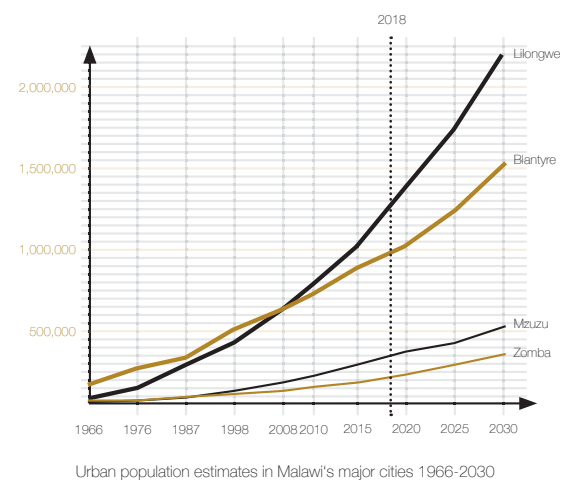
- 1968 • HASTINGS KAMUZU BANDA [MCP]
- 1994 • BAKILI MULUZI [UDF]
- 2004 • BINGU WA MUTHARIKA [UDF/DPP]
- 2012 • JOYCE BANDA [PP]
- 2014 • PETER MUTHARIKA [DPP]

**POLITICAL PARTIES**

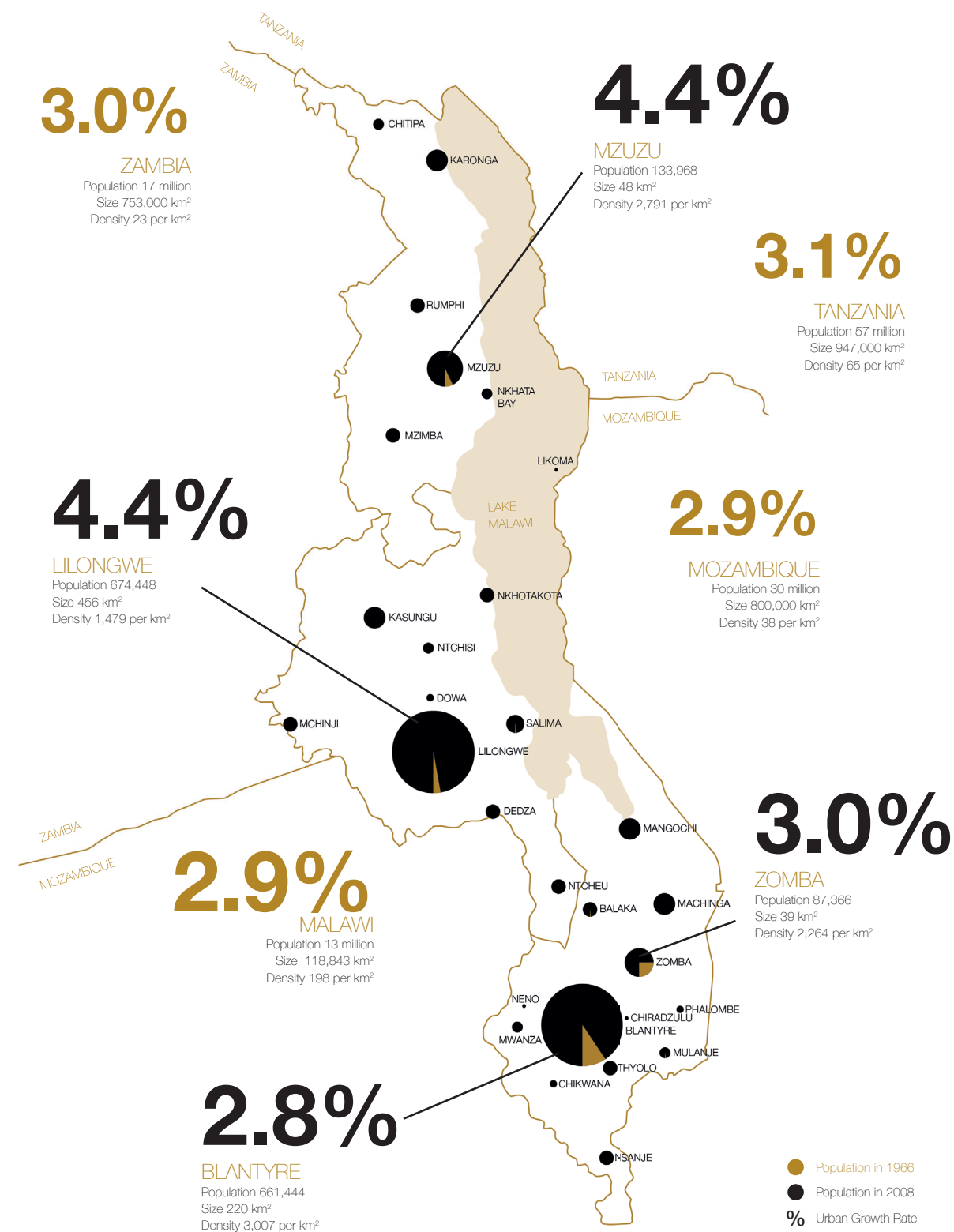
<b>MCP</b> MALAWIAN CONGRESS PARTY	<b>UDF</b> MALAWIAN DEMOCRATIC FRONT
<b>DPP</b> DEMOCRATIC PROGRESSIVE PARTY	<b>PP</b> PEOPLE'S PARTY

Note: Figures are presented in USD unless indicated differently;  
German figures are provided for a greater perspective

URBAN MALAWI



It may appear somewhat off-stranded to talk about cities in a country where the majority of the population lives in rural areas. In Malawi, there are no bustling metropolises or global cities per se and the cities that do exist are still framed by what more resembles village life than city life despite the increasing modern influences coming in. However, as stated above, this is increasingly changing and Malawian selfhood is currently being reconceptualized. Looking at more recent urbanization rates, the numbers show a clear growth in urban centers. To clarify, in 1966, briefly after independence, only 6% of the population lived in urban areas\*. By 2008, it was already 15.3% (NSO 2010). 77% of urbanization, i.e. rural-urban-migration and urban growth, occurs in Malawi's four biggest cities: Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba (Manda 2013). Other cities account for only 3.3% of the urban population. In addition, urban areas in Malawi are estimated to grow with an annual rate of 5.2% while the national growth rate is at 2.8% (ibid.). One must note that these numbers vary depending on the source cited which either use official census data or projected estimates as their population threshold.

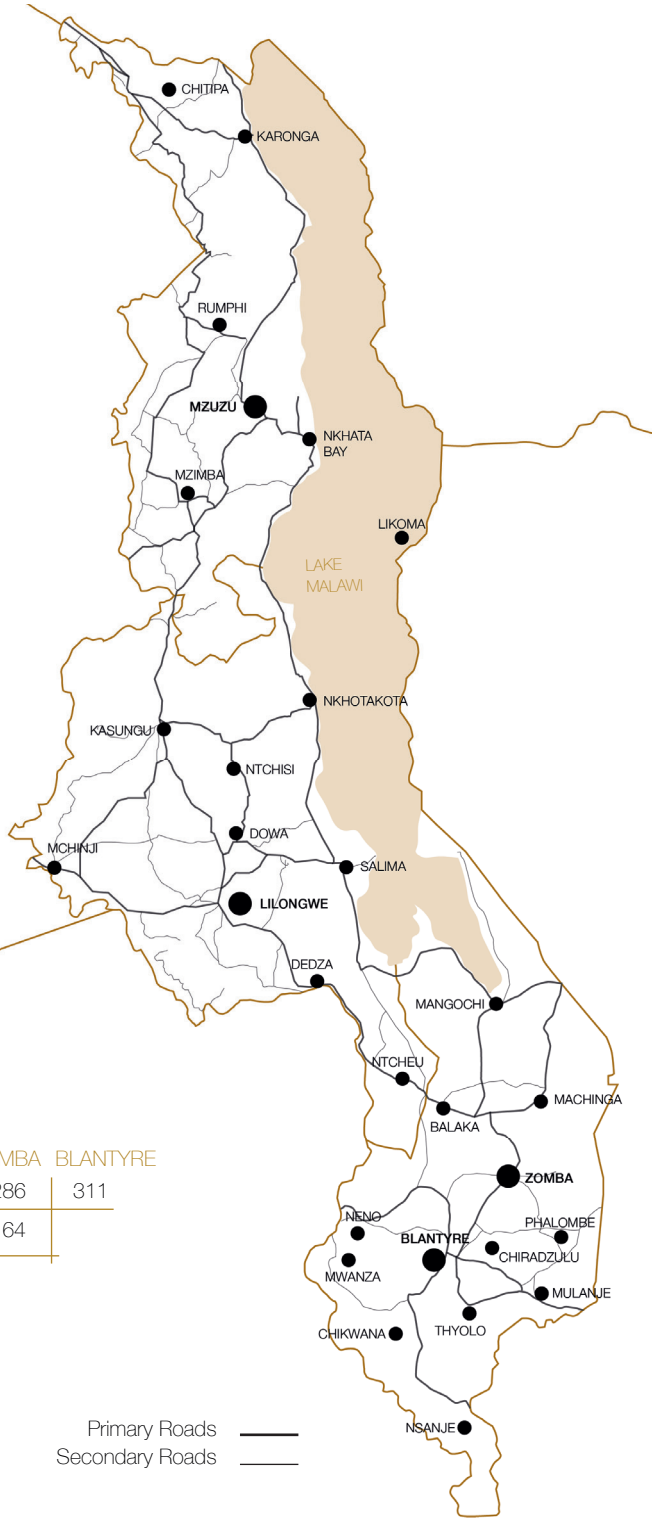


Malawi's urban centers, large and small, are fairly well connected, whereas rural communities are less so. In total, the public road network in Malawi covers nearly 15,000 km of which about 3,000 km of roads are paved (Roads Authority Malawi 2017). The road infrastructure in the south is generally more developed than in the north due to the greater number and significance of urban centers. As in most countries of the Commonwealth, people in Malawi drive on the left. Both in rural and urban areas, roads are shared with a number of traffic users, i.e. vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians, which can become very crowded around markets and during rush hours. Without designated lanes, cyclists and pedestrians are vulnerable to traffic accidents, particularly in the darkness of the night. There is no formal public transport system in Malawi. Instead, within and across urban centers, public transport is run by informally managed minibuses who more often than not are overloaded and therefore frequently stopped by traffic police. In inner-city areas, informal bicycle taxis, called *kabazas*\*, can additionally be hired for a low cost and, as of recent years, *TukTuk*-style vehicles have entered the market. Around bomas\*, police roadblocks control incoming and outgoing vehicles by means of random sampling. Main roads, mostly tarmac roads, are more or less in a good condition. Secondary and tertiary roads, mostly unsealed, can range from fairly moderate and safe to a really bumpy ride and may require specialized or non-motorized transport. During the rainy season, flooding forms a serious obstacle and occasionally renders roads impassable. Additionally, a prevalence for small and large potholes, the occasional cattle crossing, and the almost complete lack of streetlights are part of Malawi's driving experiences.

	MZUZU	ZOMBA	BLANTYRE
LILONGWE	367	286	311
BLANTYRE	676	64	
ZOMBA	650		

Driving distances in km

Primary Roads    —  
Secondary Roads    —



**MZUZU**  
Mzuzu is the most significant urban center in the north of Malawi, catering to the entire Northern Region and parts of the Central Region. It is the third biggest city in the country, main territory of the Tumbuka tribe, and it also functions as a gateway to and from Tanzania.



**LILONGWE**  
Lilongwe became Malawi's political capital in 1975 after its independence from British rule. Since then, it has grown to the country's largest city. It is located in the Central Region that is dominated by the Chewa tribe.



**ZOMBA**  
Zomba is the former capital of Nvasaland. This colonial city is a particular magnet to those seeking higher education at the CHANCELLOR COLLEGE of the UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI. Due to its proximity to the ZOMBA PLATEAU, it is marked by a fairly temperate climate.



**BLANTYRE**  
Blantyre is Malawi's commercial and industrial center and second biggest city. It was named after David Livingston's birthplace in Scotland and predates African cities like Nairobi, Harare, and Johannesburg. As Malawi's economic powerhouse, it is particular attractive for businesses.







1850

1960

1990

2000

1904  
The Lilongwe District  
is established

1965  
Kamuzu Banda wishes to move  
the capital from the Southern to the  
Central region

1968  
W.J.C. Gerke and C.J.Viljoen, two  
South African urban planners, are  
commissioned to design the new  
Lilongwe

1970  
South Africa provides a  
loan of 8 million ZAR for  
the construction of the  
new capital Lilongwe

1975  
The capital of Malawi is  
relocated from Zomba to  
Lilongwe

2005  
Erection of the KAMUZU  
BANDA MAUSOLEUM

2010  
JICA introduces a  
new master plan

2015  
UMODZI PARK opens

2017  
BINGU NATIONAL STADIUM  
opens

2017  
Dr. Desmond W. Bikoko  
(MCP) becomes Mayor  
of Lilongwe

1859  
Scottish missionary  
David Livingstone  
reaches Lake Malawi  
with the aim to end  
African slavery  
through „Christianity,  
Commerce and Civil-  
ization“ and lays the  
path for the subse-  
quent construction  
of missionaries as  
well as the SCRAMBLE  
FOR AFRICA

1889  
Proclamation of the  
BRITISH CENTRAL AFRICA  
PROTECTORATE; British  
consul Harry John-  
ston is sent to prevent  
Portuguese occupa-  
tion

1907  
The BRITISH CENTRAL  
AFRICA PROTECTORATE is  
renamed NYASALAND

1953  
Nyasaland  
is linked with  
Northern and  
Southern Ro-  
desia, forming  
the FEDERATION  
OF RHODESIA AND  
NYASALAND, also  
called CENTRAL  
AFRICAN FEDERATION  
(CAF)

6 JULY 1964  
NYASALAND becomes inde-  
pendant from British rule,  
is renamed REPUBLIC OF  
MALAWI and is formally made  
a one-party state with the  
MCP as the only legal party

AUGUST 1964  
Cabinet Crisis after Kamuzu  
Banda dismisses four ministers  
who tried to limit his powers and  
others resigned in sympathy

1971  
Kamuzu  
Banda is  
declared  
president-for-  
life and stays the  
autocratic ruler of  
Malawi for nearly  
30 years

1993  
In a referendum, Malawi votes  
for a multi-party democracy;  
a new constitution is intro-  
duced and Kamuzu Banda's  
rule is abolished

1994  
Malawi's first multi-party  
election take place and Bakili  
Muluzi becomes the new pre-  
sident

1999  
Bakili Muluzi is re-elected

2004  
Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika  
becomes president

2009  
Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika is  
re-elected

JULY 2011  
Anti-regime protests  
leave 18 people  
dead and at least 44  
victims of gunshots

APRIL 2012  
Mutharika dies of a heart  
attack and Joyce Banda  
temporarily becomes pre-  
sident

2013  
CAPITAL HILL CASHGATE  
SCANDAL is reported

2014  
Arthur Peter Mutharika,  
the ex-president's brother,  
becomes president

1870s  
Around 10%  
of the African  
continent is  
controlled  
by European  
powers

BY 1914  
All of Africa,  
except Ethiopia  
and Liberia, has  
fallen under Euro-  
pean control

1951  
Kamuzu Banda  
moves to Ghana  
and works as a  
physician as he  
did before in Lon-  
don and Liverpool

6 MARCH 1957  
Gold Coast gains  
independence from  
British rule and is  
renamed Ghana;  
Kwame Nkrumah  
becomes Ghana's  
first president

9 DEC 1961  
Tanzania gains  
independence with  
Julius Nyerere as  
their leader who  
introduces socialism  
or *Ujamaa* to the  
country

12 DEC 1963  
Kenya gains in-  
dependence from  
British rule and  
Jomo Kenyatta  
becomes Kenya's  
first president

1992  
Mozambique's  
Civil War ends  
after 15 years

27 APRIL 1994  
End of Apartheid regime in South Africa;  
Nelson Mandela becomes president

25 NOV 1997  
Kamuzu Banda dies a natural  
death in Johannesburg

1884  
As part of the so-called  
SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA, the  
BERLIN CONFERENCE takes  
place to regulate Europe-  
an colonization and trade  
in Africa

1903  
Ebenezer Howard  
publishes his trea-  
tise GARDEN CITIES  
OF TO-MORROW

1914-1918  
World War I  
  
1939-1945  
World War II

1933  
Le Corbusier  
publishes THE  
RADIANT CITY

1902-1964  
Malawians fight in the  
KING'S AFRICAN RIFLES

1947-1991  
Cold War

1 DEC 1964  
Malawi becomes  
a member state of  
the United Nations  
along with Zambia

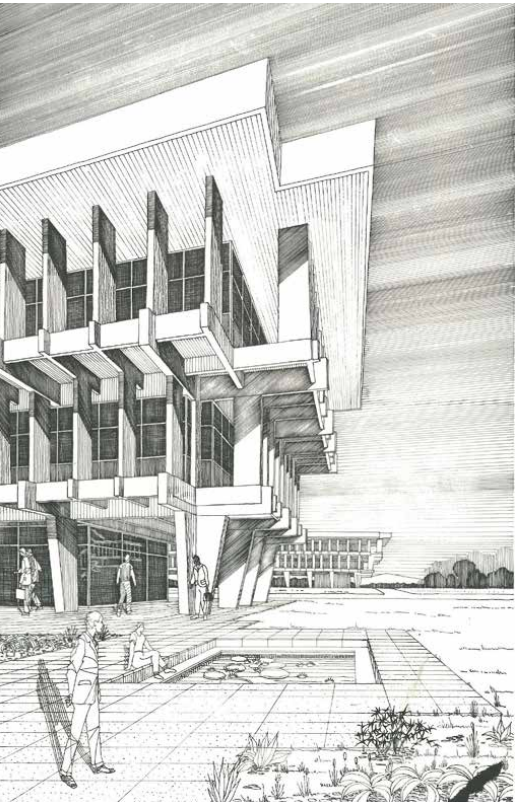
MARCH 1989  
British prime minister  
Margaret Thatcher pays  
Malawi a friendly visit  
upon an invitation by  
Kamuzu Banda

2013  
After Cashgate,  
several foreign  
donors discont-  
inue or limit their  
funding

2016  
HABITAT III takes  
place in Quito,  
Ecuador and the  
NEW URBAN AGENDA  
is introduced

# LILONGWE: EMERGING CITY

In order to make sense of present-day Lilongwe, it is necessary to take a look at Lilongwe's urban planning history. Much of the built environment one sees today has its roots in the last few decades when a small town was turned into the country's capital. Yet, its spatial and social makeup goes as far back as the colonial era. Today, people who are unfamiliar with Lilongwe's urban layout will have difficulties to navigate through the city in the beginning as Lilongwe's logic of planning does not follow a center-to-periphery model. Instead, the city's urban form appears as if several city parts were linearly scrambled together to make a whole, connected through thin lines of road infrastructure. As part of the Central Region, Lilongwe is located 1,050 m above sea level on the Central African Plateau. The Lilongwe River runs through the city to which Malawi's capital owes its name. "Topographically the site is difficult", the two town planners remarked who had designed the master plan in the 1960s on which much of today's Lilongwe is based on. A large forest, the Lingadzi Forest Reserve, along with a heavily rugged hill side, steep rock slopes and a deeply indented river valley mark the city's natural environment, essentially splitting the city into "two isolated towns" that are linked through a few main and auxiliary roads (Gerke and Viljoen 1986; Bose 2017).



Architectural drawings of ministry buildings as envisioned in the 1968 MASTER PLAN

## HISTORY OF URBAN PLANNING IN LILONGWE

Right after independence in 1964, then president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda decided to relocate Malawi's capital from Zomba to Lilongwe. A number of theories attempt to explain Banda's reasoning. For one, Zomba was the center of the British colonizers. In order to affect a clean break from the colonial past, the new capital had to be relocated. Further, moving the capital from the south to a more central location would ensure better accessibility for Malawians from all regions and induce a more balanced distribution of trade and powers. Historically, the southern region used to receive more investments than much of the rest of the country and, therefore, appears much more developed. Moving to Lilongwe would strategically counter this imbalance in political, economic and social terms. Lastly, some would argue, Lilongwe was to become the new capital because it was much closer to Kasungu, Banda's birthplace, which was Chewa territory and home to most of Banda's political supporters (Bose 2017). Turning the small trading town into a representative capital, cannot exactly be described as an easy task. Malawi did not have sufficient funds to finance the relocation and Britain declined to financially support this endeavor. In search of alternative options, the South African apartheid regime eventually stepped in and provided an initial loan of ZAR 8 million (roughly USD 7 million), 60% of it as a grant and 40% as a loan with an interest of 4% (Bose 2017). Why South Africa had agreed to support Malawi is unclear. Perhaps to find an ally in "black ruled Southern Africa" or to see "South African companies...among the first new industries" in Malawi (Potts 1985; Connell 1972).

Profound changes that followed the logic of modernist apartheid town planning principles and a "clinical degree of orderliness" subsequently marked Lilongwe's urban development in the late 1960s and thereafter (Potts 1986:226). One could argue that the applied spatial "en-framing" tactics, which derived from colonial logics but carried on in postcolonial Lilongwe, laid the groundwork for what would turn Lilongwe's inhabitants into "inmates of their own villages" (Mitchell 1991[1988]: 34). Even if there rests some truth in this statement, referring to Lilongwe's inhabitants as potential "inmates" might be slightly too crass. Deborah Potts argues that, though, it was a highly influential factor, one should not read too much into South Africa's influence in the making of the new capital. The urban form of the new Lilongwe was just as much made in Malawi, which then was equivalent to Kamuzu Banda and his regime (1986:229). In reference to Mitchell's "en-framing" tactics, Garth Myers summarizes: "[n]eocolonial Lilongwe ... was laid out as a segmented plan to replace an order without framework, depended upon containerization into insides and outsides at a number of spatial scales, and was characterized by an architecture of surveillance



Entrance to government offices at Capital Hill

and observation" (2003: 138). Only in 2010, a new master plan was introduced to Lilongwe's planning sector, providing a new, updated direction that currently obscurely is valid while it still waits for its legal green light.

In what ways and to what extent Banda's vision of a truly Malawian capital was achieved, after all, can be disputed. Surely it appears to be at odds with the fact that it was the South African government, the apartheid regime, who made this vision possible. Even more so, that it was South African planners who envisioned how the new capital would look like. One cannot help but wonder why a fighter for independence from colonial oppression would turn to

those for support who have institutionalized racial oppression of blacks and coloreds by whites. "He was culturally European and uncertain about his African roots", it says in Banda's obituary in an English newspaper (Dowden 1997). Looking at Banda's biography and the fact that he likened to present himself wearing a Homburg hat and a three-piece English-style suit, the obituary seems to be closest to what could have reflected Banda's inner workings. And, though, it still cannot provide a full explanation to why Lilongwe came about the way it did, it does provide an alternative justification to the fact that Malawi was simply unable to undertake the relocation on its own, neither financially nor professionally.



Construction of  
HOTEL HALIMA in Nouakchott  
in 1988. The hotel is still  
running its business.

## POST-INDEPENDENCE CAPITAL RELOCATIONS

Lilongwe represents only one city in a number of post-independence capital relocations in Africa which were intended to create geographical as well as symbolic distance to former colonial ties and came along with modernist utopian visions for the new capitals. Between 1957 and 1966, nearly two thirds of African nations gained independence, beginning with Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah and including Malawi under his friend Kamuzu Banda.

After Africa's independence movements in the 1960s and 1970s, it was largely *Big Men* who took over power over the liberated nation and ruled the country with „despotism, clientelism, and corruption“ and a strong „personality cult“ (Herz et. al. 2015: 7). It was also the *Big Men* who would steer their new capitals towards modernization with the aim to “develop” their “underdeveloped” nations without receiving much opposition. The new capitals were then designed after dominant circulating architecture and urban planning models. Thus, modernist architecture entered the realm of many African cities. It was an environment that was increasingly leaning towards rational infrastructures, aiming to „develop“ and to attract international donors. But generally, urban development in post-independent Africa was also much spurred by a desire to be seen „by other nations at eye level“ (ibid. 9).

**1958**  
**Mauritania:**  
Saint Louis to Nouakchott

**1965**  
**Botswana:**  
Mafeking to Gaborone

**1974**  
**Tanzania:**  
Dar es Salaam to Dodoma

**1975**  
**Malawi:**  
Zomba to Lilongwe

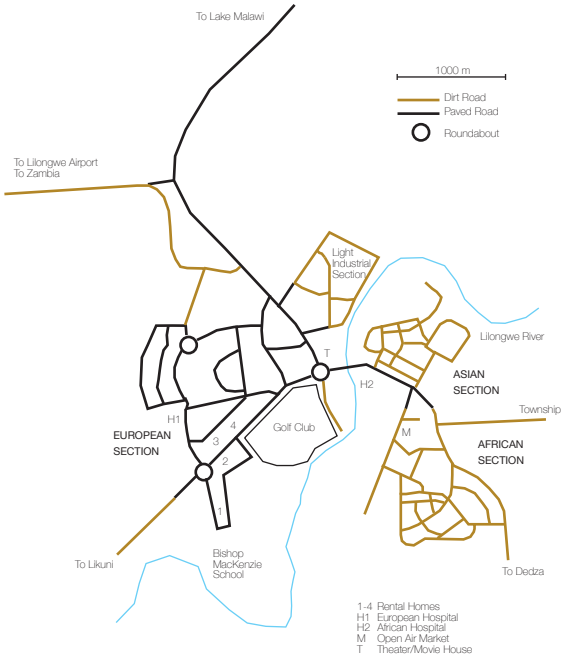
**1983**  
**Ivory Coast:**  
Abidjan to Yamoussoukro

**1991**  
**Nigeria:**  
Lagos to Abuja

**Under Construction**  
Equatorial Guinea plans to move  
its capital from Malabo to Oyala,  
which was renamed Ciudad de la  
Paz („City of Peace“)



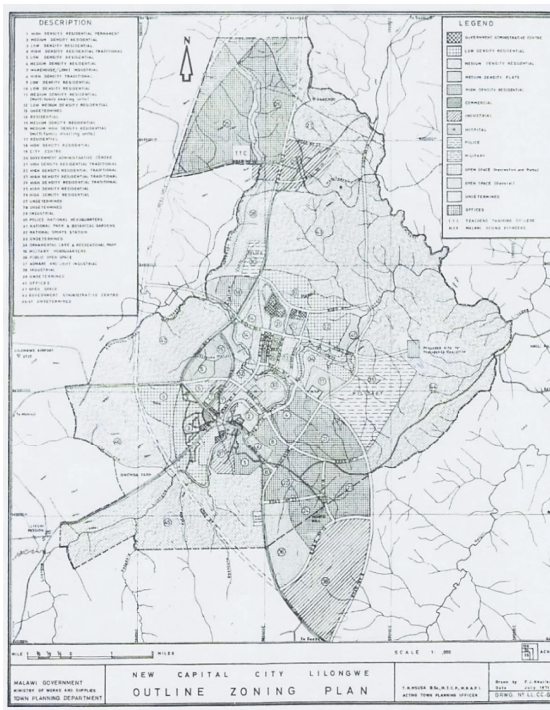




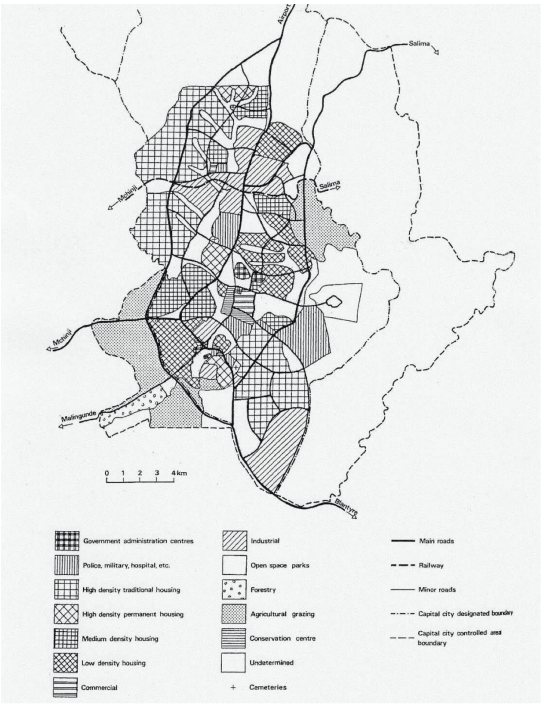
Lilongwe in the early to mid-1960s  
[basis for the OUTLINE ZONING SCHEME 1955]



MASTER PLAN 1968



OUTLINE ZONING SCHEME 1969/71



LILONGWE URBAN STRUCTURE PLAN 1978

# 1955

When Lilongwe was founded in 1904, the small town primarily served the interests of its British colonizers, which came along with laws that e.g. forbid the presence of "Africans" within urban areas. It is roughly estimated that about 7,000 Africans, 600 Europeans and 700 Asians occupied a respective section of the city, today's Old Town, when Lilongwe's very first OUTLINE ZONING SCHEME (OZS) was drawn up by a town planner from Salisbury, Zimbabwe (now Harare) in 1955. Though subsequent planning no longer made racial segregation as explicit, the spatial and social composition of today's Old Town still very much resembles its colonial predecessor since much effort went into building a new capital, less on restructuring the then existing city.

# 1968

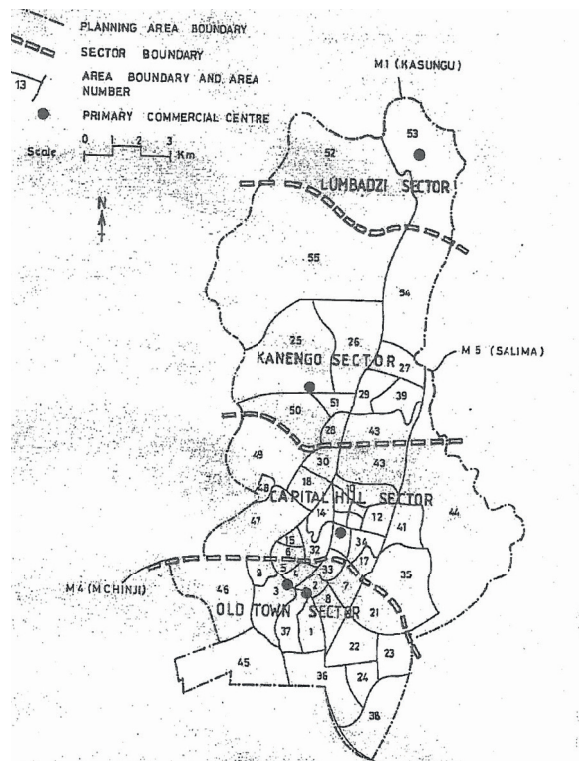
After independence from the British in 1964, W.J. Gerke and C.J. Viljoen, two South African town planners, designed the master plan for the geographic and symbolic move. According to their final plans, Lilongwe would develop after a modified linear city with separate central business districts (CBDs), one in Old Town and one in New Town/City Center. In modernist fashion, monofunctional areas and a car-based infrastructure dominated the new urban fabric. Moreover, the new capital was to have an „open and spacious appearance" which is reminiscent of a Garden City. The plan laid the foundation for income-related spatial segregation as there was no provision for mixing of high and low density residential areas. Already when the master plan was presented in 1968 the planners had expressed their concerns with regard to topography, social segregation, and housing. In the end, the new capital attracted more people than the master plan had accommodated for.

# 1969/71

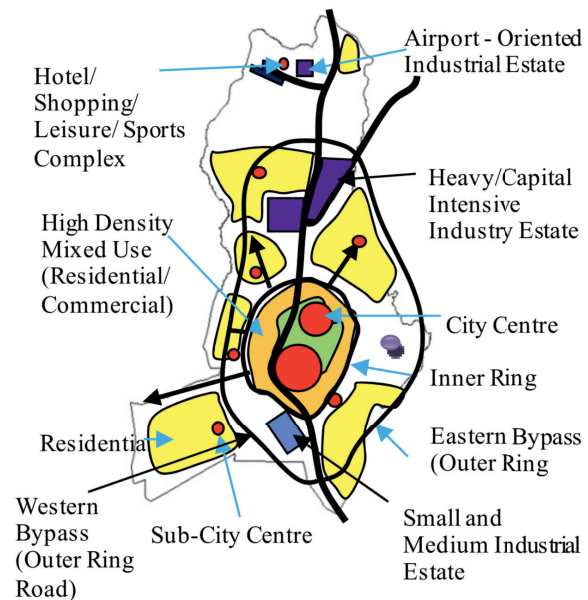
The 1968 MASTER PLAN was accompanied by an outline zoning scheme but then president Kamuzu Banda altered the original version for reasons of political prestige as well as South African donor interests. Most significantly, he a) added two more CBDs to the north, intensifying the city's linear model and b) moved the Traditional Housing Areas (THAs) in the City Center to a large area in the south eastern periphery, congruent with the colonial African section. The more affordable THAs in the City Center were originally meant to vitalize the brand new part of town, being also of higher density than other closeby residential areas. However, neither did this fit the prosperous and modern image of the new independent Malawi, nor was it very profitable. When Malawi's capital finally moved from Zomba to Lilongwe in 1975, urban development was oriented towards the 1971 OZS. Consequently, contrary to popular belief, it was much more the new OZS and less the master plan that intensified social segregation.

# 1978

By 1978, it had become very clear that a widespread housing shortage as well as insufficient infrastructure in the form of schools, clinics and designated areas for firewood cultivation demanded a rethinking of Lilongwe's urban development. When it was evident that the city was not expanding to both the north and south but more to the south and south west, a new residential category was introduced: high density traditional housing. Simultaneously, a zero tolerance policy towards squatting in the City Center was adopted which had begun to grow around the mid-1970s. Further, the new construction of the Kamuzu International Airport was incorporated into the new plan.



OUTLINE ZONING SCHEME 1986



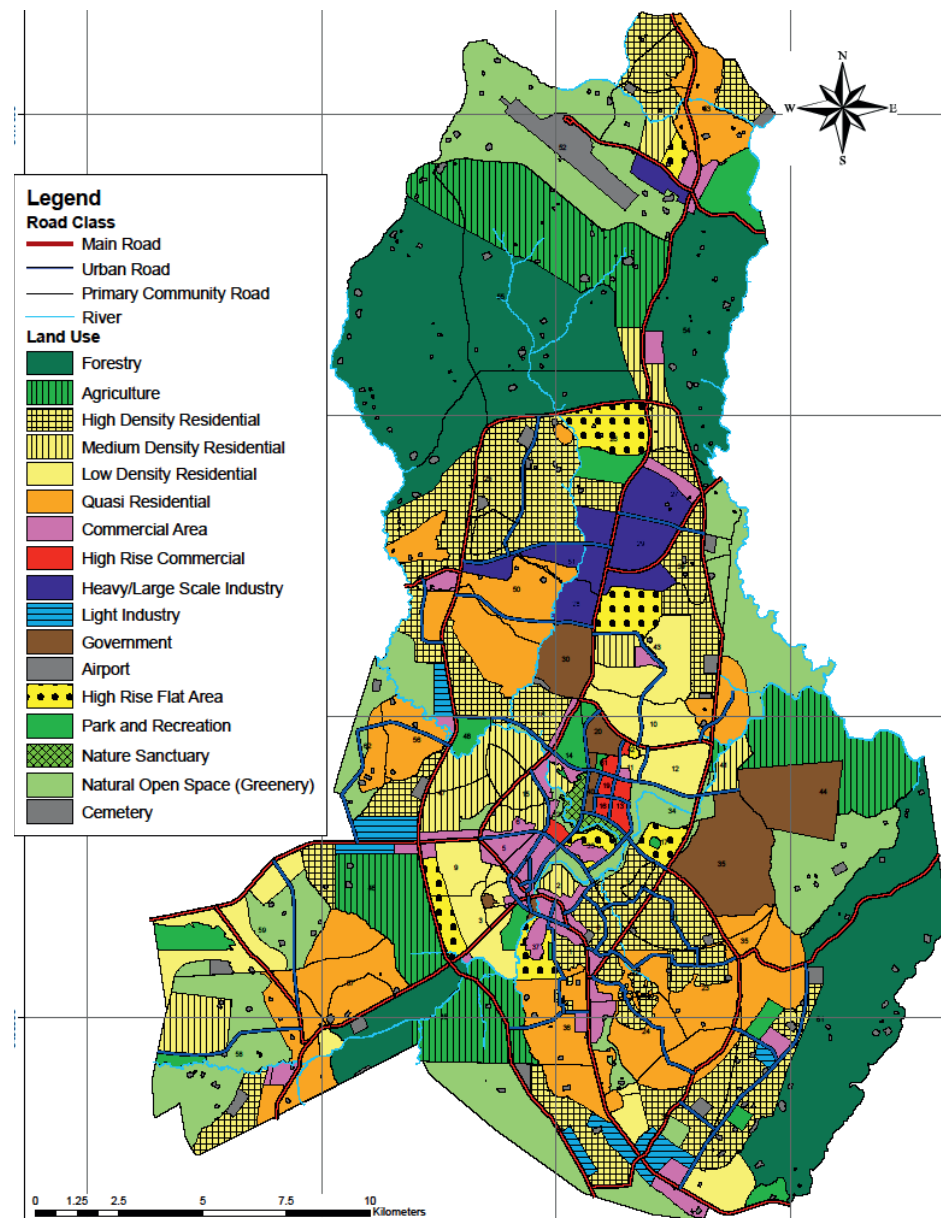
JICA's proposed cluster shape development for  
LILONGWE'S URBAN DEVELOPMENT MASTERPLAN 2010-2030

## 1986

The OZS 1986 was less motivated by profound changes to the existing urban structure plan and more by a need to tackle some of its issues, such as more efficient land use, greater focus on the not yet fully developed centers in Capital Hill and Kanengo, and adding Area 56 and 57 to Lilongwe's jurisdiction. In the face of rapidly growing numbers of inhabitants, the Malawian government had by now developed a certain level of tolerance to squatting as the new OZS also allowed for upgrading and expansion of informally built housing under specific circumstances. The OZS was to be effective until 2000 and when Malawi switched from a one-party to a multi-party system in 1994 the OZS remained unchanged. Subsequent plans failed to be fully recognized which, in some instances, makes the OZS 1986 still a valid planning document today.

## 2010

For nearly 25 years, the OZS from 1986 served as the only guideline in Lilongwe's urban planning, until, in 2009/2010, the JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY (JICA) proposed an updated master plan. It envisioned Lilongwe's urban development until 2030. Based on their recommendations, future urban planning would no longer aim for a linear expansion but follow a cluster shape development around several centers which would be connected through an inner and outer ring road and green and open spaces in between. The overall vision was to develop Lilongwe into a primary city and a gateway for neighboring countries. While never fully in effect, the 2010 master plan nevertheless formed the basis for subsequent plans.



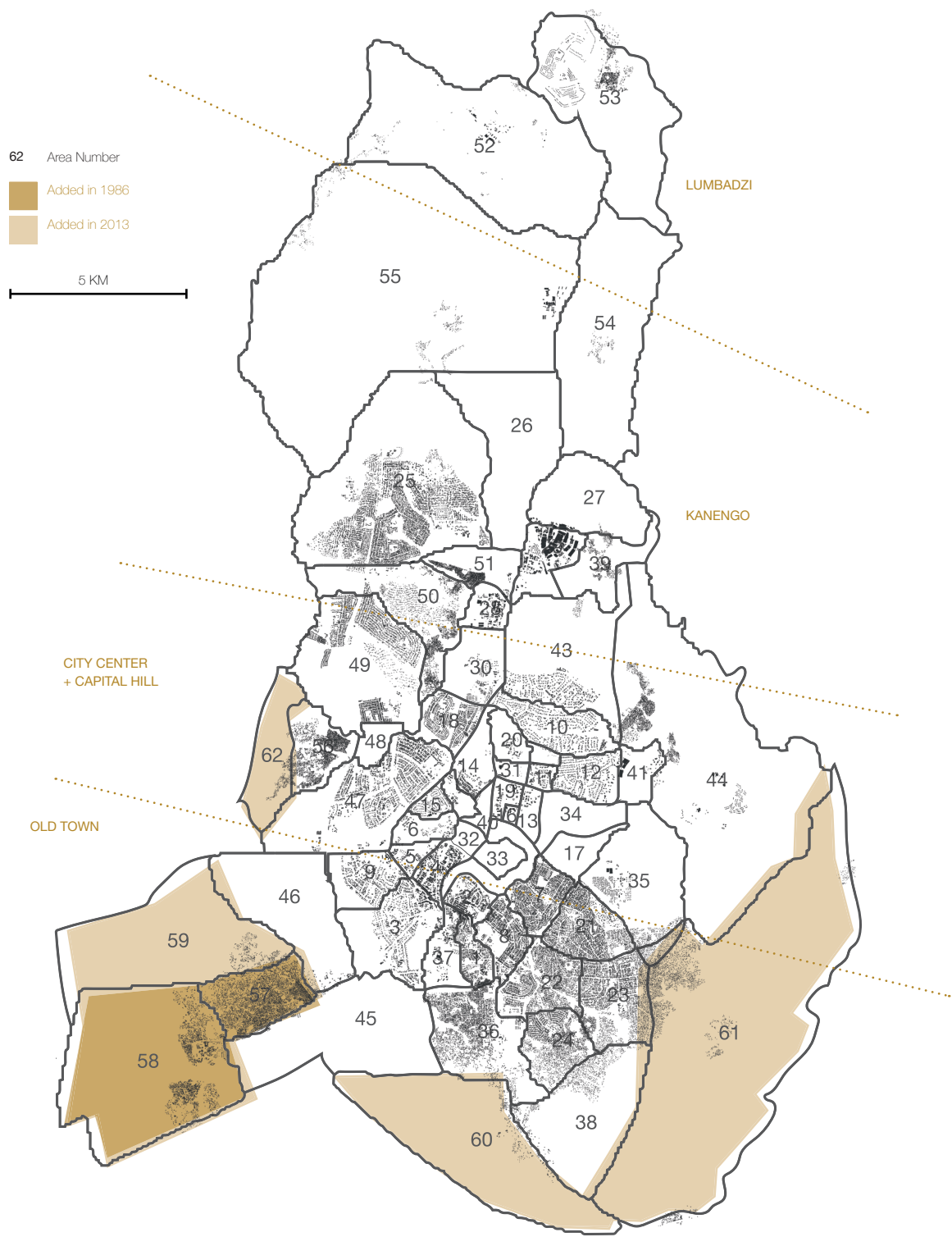
2030 LAND USE PLAN  
from the LILONGWE  
URBAN STRUCTURE  
PLAN 2013

## 2013

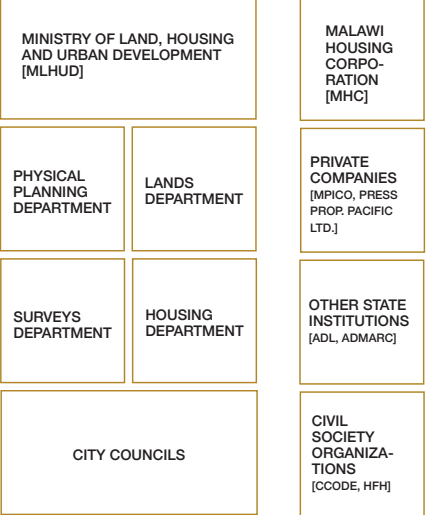
The draft version of the LILONGWE URBAN STRUCTURE PLAN 2013, based on JICA's 2010 master plan, positively stressed the city's twin pole centers as unique to Lilongwe. High density mixed zones were allocated around the centers and no additional residential areas were added to Kanengo. Traditional Housing Areas and informal settlements are now referred to as „high density residential”

or „quasi-residential” to indicate the latter's intended formalization. Moreover, Area 59 to 62 were added to Lilongwe's jurisdiction, making the city's borders grow from 393 to 456 km<sup>2</sup>. As of now, the plan is still in its draft stage and still needs to be gazetted in order to be legally binding despite the fact that some parts of the plan are already in effect or have been implemented.





URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONS



Urban planning and development is spurred by various institutions. The most influential ones are listed here, ranging from government bodies to institutions affiliated to the state. Further, the most significant stakeholders in the private sector and within civil society are also mentioned.

TYPES OF LAND



TYPES OF TENURE



All land in Malawi is property of the Malawian Government. Technically, land in Malawi is thus not being sold but access to land. One can acquire either freehold or leasehold land. In addition, customary tenures reflect yet again Malawi's two-tiered governance system.

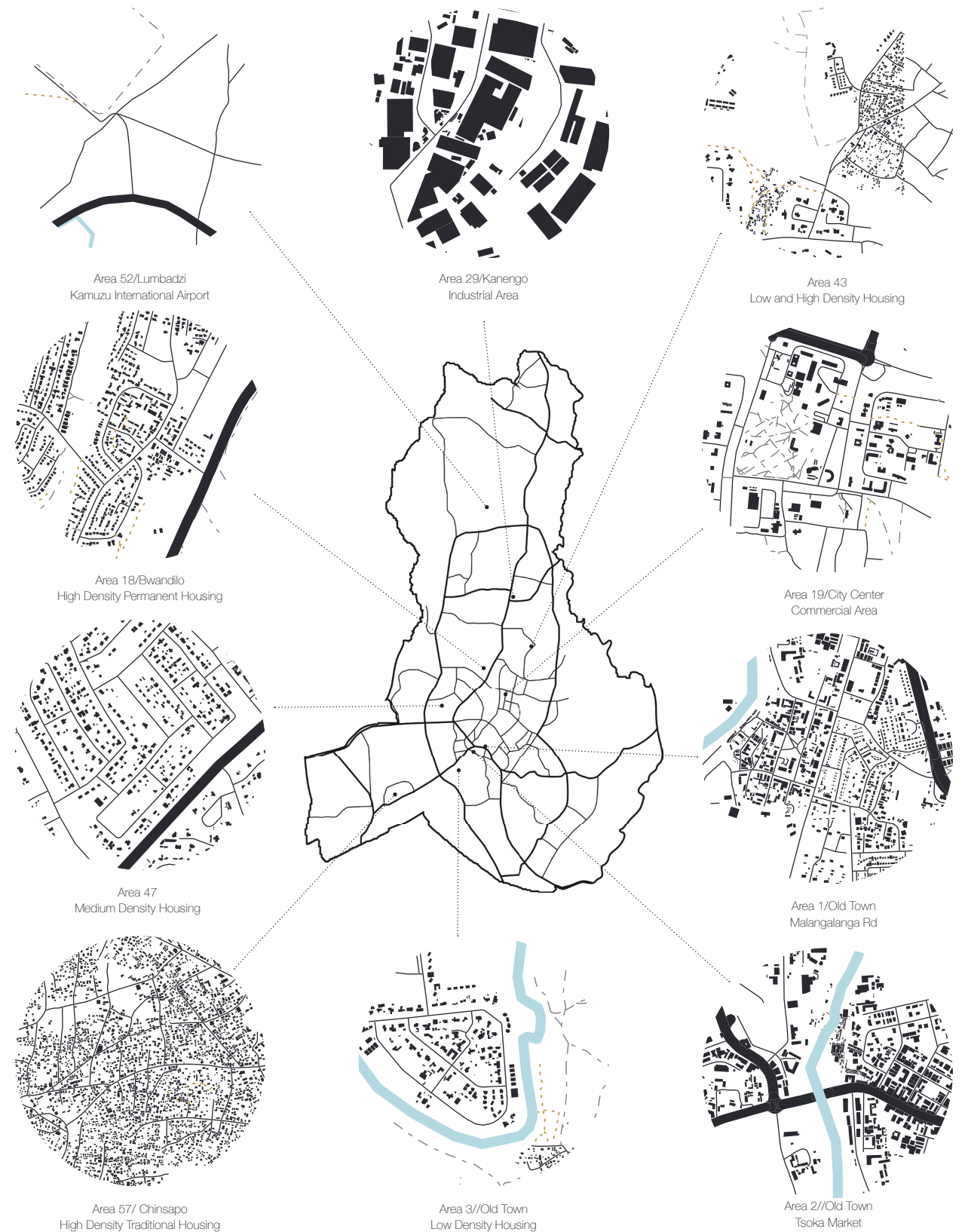
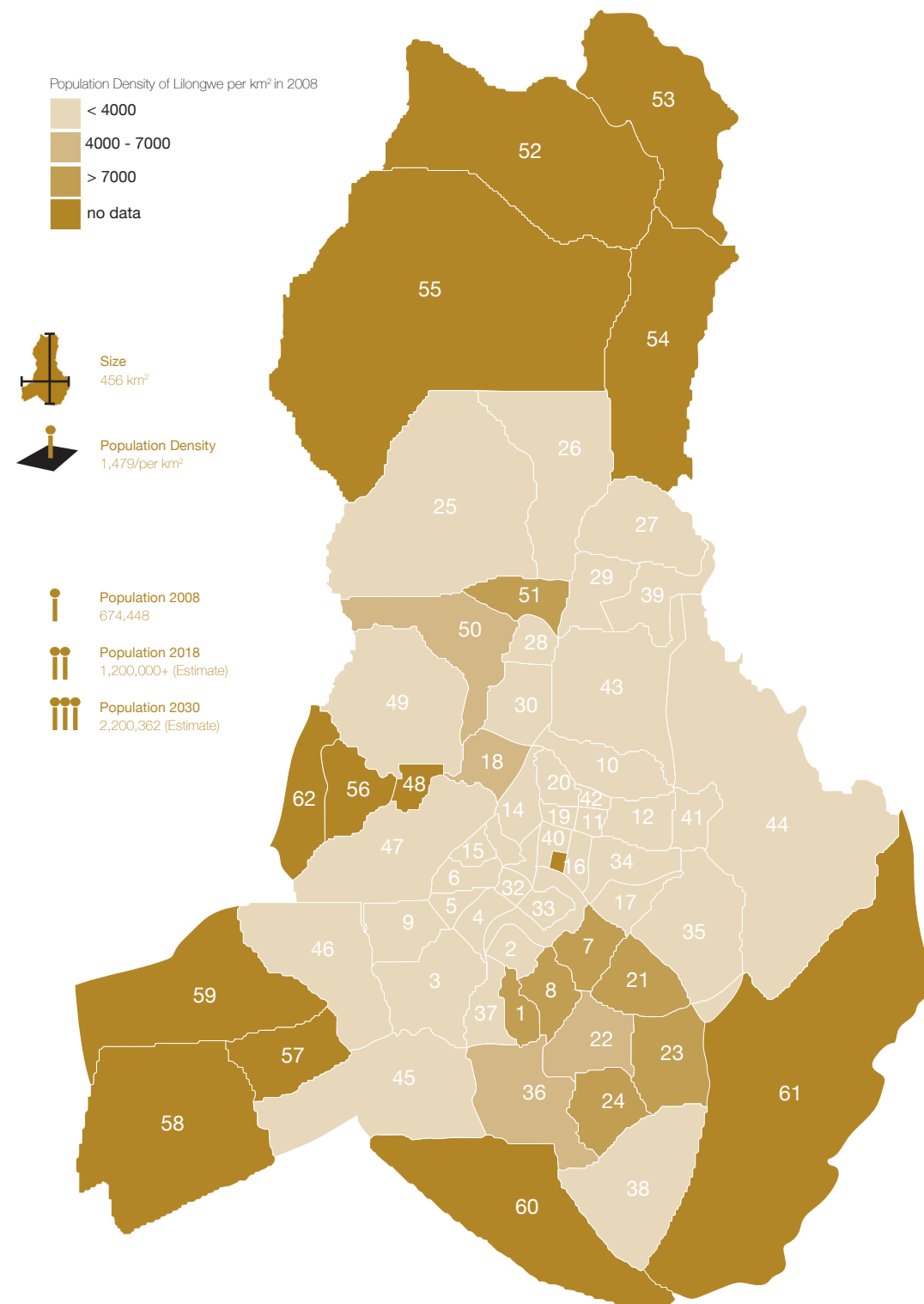
LILONGWE TODAY

Today, Lilongwe is divided into 62 administrative areas. The areas stem from the 1968 MASTER PLAN and are numbered according to their time of entry and formal recognition by the Lilongwe City jurisdiction, less in a geographical order. To indicate a location, the number of the area is given, accompanied by a plot number if possible, although some parts of the city go by their conventional names. The factual boundaries of Lilongwe remain vague as an estimated 76% of the city's population resides in unplanned or informal areas all around the central parts of Lilongwe. As such, they may or may not find themselves within the administrative city borders (UN Habitat 2011).

Four sectors, namely Lumbadzi, Kanengo, City Center/ Capital Hill, and Old Town group the city into different administrative zones that go back to the Lilongwe OUTLINE ZONING SCHEME from 1986. In the north of Lilongwe, Lumbadzi encompasses the widely undeveloped areas around the Kamuzu International Airport. Kanengo is predominantly host to a number of industries, for example the tobacco industry, Malawi's strongest export produce. The central business districts and formal residential areas lie further to the south of the city. Office buildings dominate the City Center, one of the two central business districts. Capital Hill, right adjacent to the City Center, carries Lilongwe's governmental buildings. Together, they are the only areas in town where single-level buildings do not form the majority. Both are surrounded by a number of medium to low density residential areas, housing middle to high income groups. Old Town, to the south of the City Center, technically repre-

sents Lilongwe's historical center from which today's city has originally sprung, though, only few traces hint at a time pre-dating Lilongwe before 1975, before the city experienced its massive re-development owed to its new capital status. Today, Old Town is better described as a vital hub for commerce and trade and where a high Asian population concentrates. It embodies a major node in the city, fostering connections to and from other areas on various layers.

By 2030, Lilongwe is estimated to have a minimum of about 2.2 million inhabitants, more than double its current population of roughly one million (NSO 2010). This expansion will predominantly make the high density residential settlements in Lilongwe's peri-urban areas swell up even further which predominantly house low income groups. For a city that already represents an extreme case of urban sprawl with low densities in its central areas and high densities on its outskirts, this will not be a minor challenge. It is particularly nurtured by the practice of predominantly constructing single-level buildings on fairly large plots with a minimum of 375 m² (JICA 2010). All kinds of infrastructures are and will be affected and the scramble for unoccupied land or plots will intensify. To say it in the words of an inhabitant from Malawi who lives in one of the unplanned settlements: "In Malawi, we don't plan, we plot". But what happens when one runs out of suitable plots? As stated before, life in Malawi is changing but as it goes for nearly everything in Malawi, things appear to be moving *pang'ono pang'ono*, slowly slowly, even if the opposite is the case.





# THE STATE OF PUBLIC SPACE IN LILONGWE

Moving in closer from Malawi, over its urban areas, to Lilongwe and its planning history, the following pages will address the state of public space in Lilongwe and illustrate more broadly what motivates this work.

A landscaped part in Lilongwe's Botanical Garden. It is part of a 118,000 ha green space in the City Center, designated as a park and for recreation. Most of the time it is deserted.





**I FEEL BLESSED  
TO HAVE GROWN  
UP HERE WITH  
SO MUCH GREEN  
AND SPACE.**

A British-Indian-Malawian woman on choosing to live in Lilongwe and not in the UK

**WE ARE A  
COUNTRY  
THAT DOES  
NOT HAVE  
OPEN SPACES.**

Betty M. Dube [Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development] speaking about public spaces in a meeting with other planning professionals from Malawi

**PEOPLE  
COME OUT  
WHEN THERE  
IS SOMETHING  
TO BE GAINED.**

Happiness Zidana (CCODE) on the nature of public urban life in Lilongwe

**CULTURALLY THE  
PEOPLE HERE ARE  
NOT AS OUTGOING AS  
IN OTHER SETTINGS.**

**THERE ARE NO  
RECREATIONAL  
PLACES WHERE  
YOU DO NOT  
NEED TO PAY.**

Wonderful Hunga (CCODE) on public urban life and public spaces in Lilongwe

## NO TRACE OF PUBLIC SPACE

Among Lilongwe's urban planning professionals, the words „public space“ are not uttered very often. Maybe one can hear them discuss it more frequently ever since HABITAT III took place in 2016 and since the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS for 2030 were introduced. But, generally, it appears that there is no clear and consistent understanding of public space in Lilongwe's formal urban planning sector. In fact, on paper it is not mentioned at all. Planning documents speak of *open space*, *public open space*, *public land*, *public buildings* and *public parks* but no *public space* understood in relation to a broader public sphere. Public space seems to be exclusively perceived as a green or recreational space that is primarily focused on other interests besides the public. Should one then conclude that

there is no such thing as public space in Lilongwe? Surely not. Public space, as ambiguous as it is, in essence represents space for/with/of the public. So there must be more to public space in Lilongwe than only open space, greenery and recreation (theoretical concepts of public space are discussed more elaborately in chapter 2).

The following pages illustrate how public space is currently understood in Lilongwe's planning contexts. Moreover, a few selected implementation examples from Lilongwe demonstrate the discrepancies that occur between the planning of public spaces and the experiences thereof when critical debates around public space are absent or being neglected.

## GLOSSARY OF URBAN PLANNING IN MALAWI

**Public open space:** *public park (see open space)*

**Open space:** *space in a layout plan left without buildings in order to promote natural vegetation, develop public parks, protect river reserves, for play areas or at road junctions so that buildings do not distract vehicles. Urban assembly authorities will beautifully landscape the spaces.<sup>396</sup> (see local physical development plan)*

**Public Park:** *An open space for public relaxation or recreation where anyone has the right to enter without fees. The park may be developed with wooden or concrete chairs and facilities for games. Take away shops and toilets may be provided. Urban authorities properly maintain the area and sometimes may fence the whole area; where vandalisation has been noted the local authority can entrust the management of the park into community based organisation, who for purposes of sustainably managing the park may charge token fees.*

**Public buildings:** *office buildings, but usually confused with building for public use such as bars or churches, hence areas zoned for public buildings were developed for bars, rest houses or churches in some urban areas. It is advisable to use institutional buildings (see institutional area)*

**Place:** *a particular area in space where people and the environment interact over time to give it characteristics distinct from surrounding areas. It also means a particular part of space occupied or unoccupied by a person, object or organisms and may sometimes refer to a position in a hierarchy (see space)*

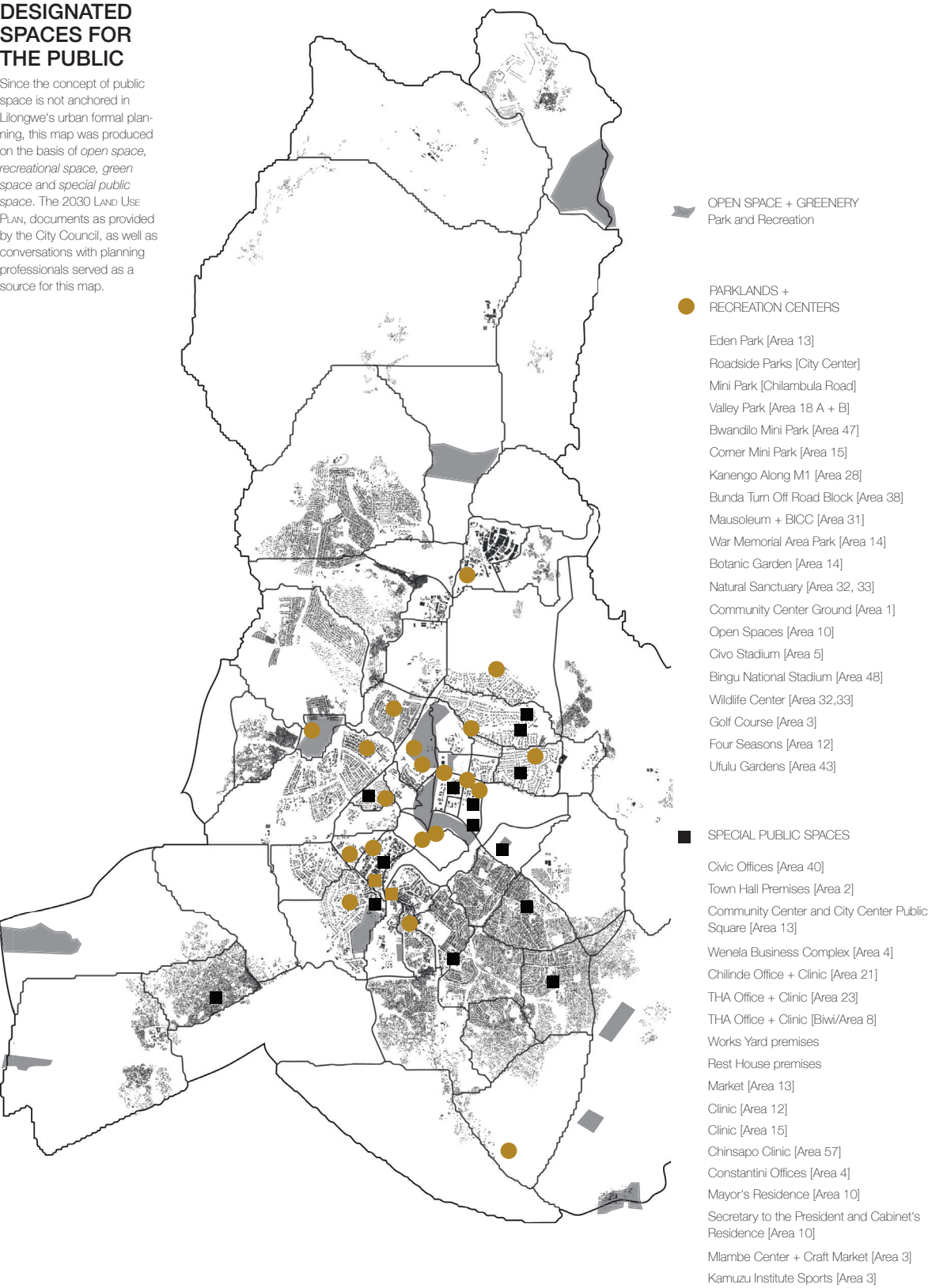
**Space:** *(a) absolute space meaning room available or set aside; (b) relative space, as all economic activities are space users and have spatial dimension. Hence, the geographical view of economic activity is spatial, that is, we have economic space, political space, social space etc.<sup>577</sup>*



„Public space“ does not appear in Mtafu A.Z. Manda's GLOSSARY OF URBAN PLANNING IN MALAWI. Instead the definitions above mentioned are given. Having worked as a physical planner, urban consultant, and lecturer in Malawi and as an honorary member of the MALAWI INSTITUTE OF PLANNING, the author's aim for the glossary was to „consult widely among colleagues on particular topics in specific disciplines“ (2004:3). Though this cannot be simply interpreted as proof for a lack of debate around public space, it does reflect what notions are associated with public space in Malawi. While the glossary was not published by the Malawian Government, it can be considered authoritative as it appears and re-appears in Malawi's professional planning circles.

DESIGNATED SPACES FOR THE PUBLIC

Since the concept of public space is not anchored in Lilongwe's urban formal planning, this map was produced on the basis of *open space, recreational space, green space and special public space*. The 2030 Land Use Plan, documents as provided by the City Council, as well as conversations with planning professionals served as a source for this map.



WHY TRACE PUBLIC SPACE?

One could righteously wonder why it would be important to trace public space in Lilongwe. Perhaps there is a valid reason for the absence of wider public space debates. Perhaps such a concept might not be applicable to Lilongwe in the first place. This work acknowledges that there is a point to be made in such an approach, however, the underlying argument here is that public space exists in one form or another in any city of the world as it comprises a public that is inherent to any city. What is important to understand is that public spaces materialize differently in different context and, therefore, do not only come in parks or squares, equipped with seating options. The public as-

sembles in different ways and public spaces, thus, differ accordingly. Not acknowledging that conceptions, debates, and ideas around public space go beyond open, green and recreational space is like voluntarily turning blind and deliberately hindering the development of „inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable“ cities (SDG 11) which, so the argument, also depend on public spaces with publics being the primary focus. The loss, lack, or decline of public space in Lilongwe must therefore be acknowledged, broached, and become a central element of urban planning debates.

” PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE, GREEN AND PUBLIC SPACES ”

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 7 (UN Habitat 2016)

” MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE ”

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 11 (UN Habitat 2016)

” ONCE URBAN DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE, IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO INCREASE OR RECONFIGURE PUBLIC SPACE ”

MALAWI ECONOMIC MONITOR 2017 (World Bank 2017)

CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC SPACE IN LILONGWE

**ENCROACHMENT** on idle land, both in public or private ownership, contributes to the decrease of public space as land is spontaneously taken and informally privatized by an occupant. Rising urbanization rates additionally spur encroachment tactics as well as the loss of potential sites for the public.

**YOUNG DEMOCRACY** Malawi's society is still in the process of recuperating from the trauma caused by its former autocratic regime. Previous patterns of behavior and thinking are still very present in the national psyche of the people. It is only now that a younger generation begins to shape their country with new ways of being, detached from personal experiences of the one-party-system. Public urban life is thus going through great changes, accelerated by a more urbanizing and globalizing society and increasingly better living standards. As such, it is not very clear where public urban life is heading to and, consequently, what kind of public spaces the public needs and demands.

**SEGREGATION** based on economic backgrounds produces highly homogeneous environments that are marked by social and racial segregation. Since public spaces have the ability to stimulate greater interactions across different economic and social backgrounds, the lack of public spaces consequently stimulates further segregation. This forms a threat for social cohesion and, moreover, puts even more tension on the effects of Lilongwe's urban sprawl.

**PRIVATIZATION** forms a real threat to public space for similar reasons as in most other parts of the world: short term economic interests are prioritized over more future-oriented developments. In countries like Malawi, where the lack or „mismanagement“ of funds seems to be a constant in urban development, partnering up with the private sector presents itself as a feasible solution, though, one might have to question at what cost.



## EXAMPLE 1 BOTANICAL GARDEN

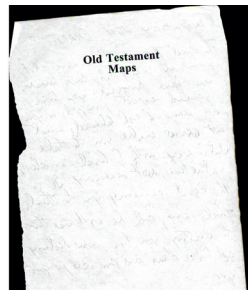
„TOWN AND COUNTRY MUST BE MARRIED, AND OUT OF THIS JOYOUS UNION WILL SPRING A NEW HOPE, A NEW LIFE, A NEW CIVILIZATION.“

Ebenezer Howard in GARDEN CITIES OF  
TO-MORROW [1902]

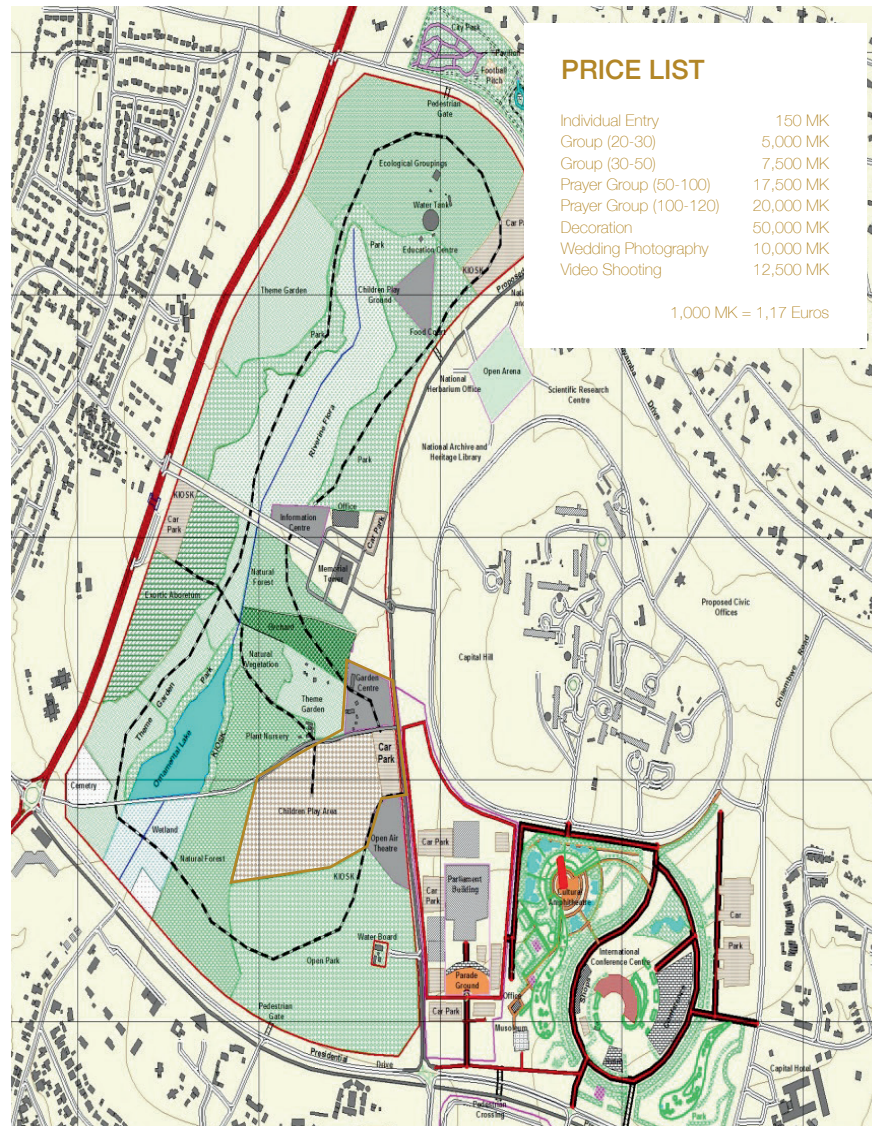
„YOU CAN'T TAKE  
YOUR KIDS THERE  
CAUSE YOU DON'T  
SEE ANYTHING...“

„YOU CAN ONLY  
SEE TREES...”

„OUR CULTURE  
HAS NOT TOLD US  
HOW TO APPRECI-  
ATE NATURE...”



Several pages, ripped out of a bible book and used for notetaking, were found in the Botanical Garden next to a seating area.



The Botanical Garden was established in 1988 and is managed by the NATIONAL HERBARIUM AND BOTANIC GARDENS OF MALAWI. It is centrally located in Area 14, adjacent to Capital Hill. The total area spans over 118,000 ha. As of now, only a fraction of the proposed plan has actually been implemented for lack of funding. This map is an excerpt from the LILONGWE BOTANIC GARDEN MASTER PLAN from 2016 by the Department of Physical Planning and is still under review.

Relatively few people in Lilongwe visit the Botanical Garden. Those who do, that is students and religious individuals or groups, are attracted by the very absence of people, the tranquility and the spacious environment.

## EXAMPLE 2 COMMUNITY GROUNDS



**„THAT’S PUBLIC SPACE. IT HAS GOT INFRA-  
STRUCTURE THERE. IT’S FUNCTIONAL.“**

A member of the Lilongwe City Council on the Community Grounds at Fall Estate

**„FOR CLOSE TO FIVE YEARS, THE FACILITY HAS ALWAYS LOOKED ABANDONED AND NEGLECTED.“**

Quote from a Newspaper Article [June 10, 2017] on the dilapidated state of the Community Grounds at Falls Estate

„THERE'S THIS HOTEL, SIMAMA HOTEL. THAT PLACE WAS ALSO A PARK BUT NOW THIS IS A BUSINESS MAN WHO COLLUDED WITH PLANNERS IN THE COUNCIL AND TOOK OVER. THEY OBEYED AND DESIGNED THE PARK AND GAVE HIM THAT PIECE.“

An urban planner on the developments that took place right next to the Community Grounds



EXAMPLE 3 UMODZI PARK



2009



2011

2018



No rare sight: a deserted Umodzi Park with views of the BICC and the MALAWI SQUARE. This circular square is fully paved and provides for no shade, making it nearly unbearable hot during midday hours.

„THAT PLACE IS A BUSH , NOT A PARK! ... SO I AM BETTER OFF PUTTING IN AN INFRASTRUCTURE WHICH CAN CHANGE THE ECONOMY OF THE CITY, MAYBE BRING VISITORS AND MAKE IT A CENTER, A MEETING POINT FOR THE POPULATION.“

An urban planner recalls what former President Bingu wa Mutharika said about the Chinese Garden and turning it into a venue for an international conference center

Aerial photo of Umodzi Park, comprising of the Bingu wa Mutharika International Conference Center [BICC], the President Walmont Hotel, the Malawi Square, and the Pabwalo Amphitheater. It was officially opened on May 1, 2015 by the PeerMont Group. In 2007, after over 40 years, Malawi broke its diplomatic ties to Taiwan and, in 2008, signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* with China, focusing on industry, trade, investment. Subsequently, UMODZI PARK was constructed on the premises of the former Chinese Garden with the help of funding from the Government of China.



EXAMPLE 4 STREETS



For lack of designated sidewalks, pedestrians resort to walking on the side of the road and share the space with everyone and everything that is not welcome on the space taken up by the road.



Pedestrians dominate this unsealed main road. They become slippery when wet and the dry dust causes severe illnesses.



Sealed road, unsealed sidewalk. Cars first, pedestrians last?



When pedestrians, cyclists and motorized vehicles share one of the many unlit roads, traffic safety is decreasing.

THE CAR BASED CITY

„A CITY MADE FOR SPEED  
IS A CITY MADE FOR SUCCESS.“

Le Corbusier in  
A CONTEMPORARY CITY [1925]

DRIVER OF URBAN SPRAWL

„SPRAWL SUGGESTS THE CITY HAS  
COLLAPSED, LIKE A DRUNKARD ON A  
SIDEWALK, AND IS NOW SPREADING  
INEXORABLY OUTWARDS.“

Robert Kirkman in  
THE ETHICS OF METROPOLITAN GROWTH [2010]

„ABOUT TEN THOUSAND PEDESTRIANS  
TRAVEL BY WALKING EVERYDAY ON THE M1  
SECTION, FROM LILONGWE BRIDGE TO THE  
JUNCTION WITH MALANGALANGA ROAD IN  
THE OLD TOWN. THERE IS NO SIDEWALK FOR  
PEDESTRIANS ALONG THE M1 SECTION.“

JICA 2010



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2

**THEORIZING THE SOUTH**

# SOUTHERN URBANISM

Having established a better understanding for Malawi and Lilongwe as well as the state of public space in Lilongwe, in this chapter, I wish to elaborate on the concepts and theories applied and relevant to this work. They have guided me and can guide the reader's understanding for my research topic. For this reason, in the following I will focus on southern urbanism, African urbanism, urban planning, public space, and public urban life with some references to methodology within these concepts.

When dealing with cities, we are inevitably confronted with the question of urbanism. What is urban? What is not? And what does it entail? Now, what is urbanism? Simply put, asking questions like these is precisely what urbanism is all about. Urbanism or urban theory revolves around cities and the study thereof where "'theory' (always a multiplicity)" is used "as a proliferation of imaginative projects inspired by and productive of the great diversity of urban experiences" (Robinson and Roy 2015: 2). Uniting a plethora of disciplines in one, urbanism contributes to how cities around the world can be perceived, understood, produced and designed though one can understandably never "fully 'know' a city" (Jenkins 2013: 7). But as so often is the case when it comes to academic thought leaders and theoretical debates, much of the discourses held originate in and are dominated by EuroAmerican thinkers and thinking due to hegemonic powers that are and continue to be at work (Myers 2011). Transnational perspectives on the urban sphere remain the minority although urbanism is so intrinsically tied to the spatiality of its subject matters and different geographies naturally have a heightened significance (Parnell and Pieterse 2015). While urban scholars are well aware of the fact that a dominance of EuroAmerican discourses jeopardizes a nuanced understanding of the urbanized and urbanizing world, supply seems to struggle to meet the theoretical demands, thus, causing a mismatch between theory makers and theory making. At the end of the day, cities are found everywhere and need to be explored within their respective contexts. Merely walking on northern soil does not exactly cover enough ground urbanism makes a point of doing, being the studies of cities, i.e. all cities.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CITY IN THE SOUTH

Departing from postcolonial and critical urban theory and in response to the theoretical and practical imbalance in the pursuit of understanding cities all around the world, the field of southern urbanism has evolved (Schindler 2017). The southern perspective, i.e. a view from cities in the global south with a specific focus on insights from southern urban areas, has historically been in short supply (Chakrabarty 2000; Robinson 2002). By providing an alternative theoretical foundation to EuroAmerican debates, southern

urbanism aims to tackle this shortage. Despite its namesake, it can or even must be understood as a stepping-stone towards truly global or transnational urbanism that is moving beyond the constructed global south. At the same time, the goal is not to get lost in universality that dismisses the specificities of urban contexts (Robinson and Roy 2015). One can point out three aspects southern urbanism particularly focuses on. One, it aims to correct underrepresentation of southern perspectives in the field of urbanism. Two, it acknowledges the fact that many southern cities share characteristics that many northern cities differ from. Three, it breaches boundaries by leaving the north-south binary behind and by challenging conceptions of the 'city' itself as its existence has essentially derived from Eurocentric thinking, too (Roy 2015). In this sense and following postcolonial theory, southern urbanism cannot merely be read as an additive, 'southern perspective' which simply contributes to existing knowledge with "'different varieties' of cities", as Ananya Roy notes (2015: 8). Instead, southern urbanism aims for theory that is overall "simultaneously located and dis-located", referring to a "rather paradoxical combination of specificity and generalizability: that theories have to be produced in place (and it matters where they are produced), but that they can then be appropriated, borrowed, and remapped" (Roy 2009: 820). Consequently, southern urbanism demands a geographic shift in its literal sense as well as in terms of theory making. After all, there is a real potential, Roy argues, that by moving the center of theory making to the global south, "a new relationality of theory" can evolve and become productive for both southern and northern or, generally, cities around the world (2015: 8; 2009).

Understanding the city, particularly the southern city, is a tricky objective. Apart from the fact that this goal is - knowingly so - unattainable, there seems to be a widespread feeling, particularly among southern urban scholars, of not doing enough justice to their respective field of research. There seems to be a persistent feeling of missing something, which, however, is hard to articulate theoretically or empirically as the source of the haze seems just as unclear (Schindler 2017). Edgar Pieterse openly admits that existing urban research has thus far fallen short of "capturing 'unknowable' aspects of African [or southern] urbanity which remains an 'elusive mirage clouded by limited data and inadequate theoretical approaches" (Pieterse in Schindler 2017: 4). Hence, in the face of uncertainty, southern urban scholars work with what is "knowable" and from there carve out an analytical lens that carries local insights to more global validity while accepting the urban haze as part of the process. Since my field of research is set in Lilongwe as well as Malawi as well as Africa as a branch of the global south, I will expand on more African debates to which my research is most affiliated and can perhaps contribute to for lack of a wider, more contemporary theoretical discourse on Lilongwe's or Malawi's urbanism (see Englund 2001; Rohregger 2006; Myers 2003



and 2011; Manda 2004; Mwathunga 2014; Mwathunga and Donaldson 2018 for some exceptions). Why academics in the field of southern urbanism are often confronted with a 'lack' or rather with fewer participants of critical urban debates than EuroAmerican pendants can have a variety of reasons. The practical difficulties of doing empirical urban research in many African regions, for instance, research funding that has mostly focused on rural, less urban Africa, or fewer educational institutions in Africa occupied with African urbanism. These are only some of the aspects that inhibit the proliferation of a wider group of African urbanists (Jenkins 2013; Duminy et al. 2014). In times of rapid urban growth and Sub-Saharan Africa being considered the last larger region to go through the process of urbanization, one can be hopeful that a heightened awareness and need for more insights from urban Africa will expand further (Jenkins 2013). This work, for instance, can be read as a product and contribution to the desire of decreasing the figurative white space in urban Africa - from a transnational point of view - by filling some of the voids in Lilongwe and Malawi.

By fusing urban theory with African studies and, thus, creating a discourse around African urbanism, urban scholars like Garth Myers respond to the current inadequacy of urban theory which is perceived to lag behind in capturing the heterogeneous African urbanities. Differing from scholars like Seth Schindler (2017), Myers rejects the idea of a southern "type" of city, despite the reductionist title of his book "African Cities" (2011). Instead, he applies a more cosmopolitan approach, as outlined by Jennifer Robinson (2002), to make sense of his experiences and insights from a variety of African cities (Myers 2011). In so doing, he attempts to see a selection of cities in Africa through a "comparative thematic approach" that does not rely on intrinsic characteristics but emphasizes the processes at work behind Eurocentric readings, calling for a greater attention to "vision" as well as "re-vision" (ibid. 8f). Five phenomena guide Myers understanding of cities in Africa, namely "*postcolonialism, informality, governance, violence and cosmopolitanism*" (ibid. 15, emphasis in the original), which stand at the intersection of theory and practice. He refers to Africa as a whole not only to appeal to a bookshop category in order to attract an interested audience but provocatively chooses the more general over the specific to express his criticism. Myers takes his cue from anthropologist James Ferguson who laments the "'principled' but 'ineffective' tactic" of many of his colleagues who avoid 'Africa' as a category and, instead, resort to only speaking about "the narrow corner of the continent that they have come to know". Thereby, Ferguson argues, urban scholars involuntarily hand over discursive control to "journalistic and policy vision' that can be 'misleading, factually incorrect, and often racist'" (ibid.3).

Filip De Boeck - an anthropologist - has published significant work in the field of southern urbanism by mostly

writing about his experiences in Congo without claiming to be speaking on behalf of other parts of Africa (see for example De Boeck and Plissart 2004, De Boeck and Baloji 2016). In this sense, he might personify Ferguson's much feared "principled" anthropologist. Yet, Myers argues, De Boeck utilizes his research in Congo much more as a means to take the specific to more universal understandings, "to speak back to Western urbanists", and, thereby, sets himself apart from Ferguson's antihero image (Myers 2011 :10). Furthermore, De Boeck turns the "unknowable" or rather "invisible" city into a productive means to generating knowledge by making the invisible a quintessential trope of Congo's urbanities (De Boeck and Plissart 2004). Following this logic, he distinguishes between the vertical and horizontal view of the city. The former focuses on what occurs in a city *beyond* its built environment or "hardware". The latter is embedded in the former but emphasizes what occurs *within* the built environment or, as De Boeck phrases it, on "the surface of the city" (De Boeck and Baloji 2016: 25). In this manner, he adopts different perspectives to reading the city, either as a mental space that represents the materialization or "mirror of the mind" of its inhabitants, or through surface qualities that are revealed in a city's topographies, materialities, infrastructures, architectures, and stages of dilapidation or emergence (ibid.).

Paul Jenkins provides yet another approach to African urbanism that can be read as inherent or enriching to those mentioned above. He focuses on how specifically culture forms the basis for agency within the materiality and political economy of southern cities. Physical "improvements (a much-beloved Victorian term)", he argues, can only bring about positive change when paired with "social and cultural changes" (Jenkins 2013: 15). In order to develop a non-normative, more nuanced understanding of cultures or urban realities found in the heterogeneity of African settings, Jenkins highlights the value of empirical research in planning. It opens the gate to seeing cities in Africa "for what they are, and not for what they should be" (ibid.18). In that, he emphasizes the importance of transdisciplinarity (being an architect, planner and social scientist himself) as well as more inductive approaches as he criticizes the limited "silo-mentality" of current research in Africa and their too deductive analyses (ibid. 5, 33). This is not to say that professionals, i.e. planners, architects, government officials etc., are "off the hook" doing their work. Transdisciplinary research rather provides alternative perspectives and challenges the state "to change its attitude and method of engagement to recognize 'formally' what in fact it often does at local levels 'informally'" (ibid. 18-19). By means of empirical research, argues Jenkins, one can move from urbanization over urbanism to an understanding of urbanity. When linked to "wider contexts, concepts, and imaginaries" urban scholars are able to create "real impact on policy and praxis or popular representations and knowledge of Africa" (ibid. 40).

## PLANNING THE CITY OF THE SOUTH

Seeing southern cities from a southern perspective is one thing, putting this theoretical framework into practice yet another. But both are intrinsically intertwined. Throughout southern urbanism literature a common itch, a persistent urge to do something about the current state of southern cities keeps appearing. Perhaps this is owed to the fact that there is so much that could or needs to be done, especially if one heeds to the dystopian images widely associated with them (see for example Davis 2007). Even though these images narrate only one part of the story, they leave an impression. So, how can urban theory become productive in the urban sphere, one might ask. Or in other words: What can be done? What should be done? In line with this thought, urban planning goes hand in hand with urbanism, being the professional guild that formally has been entrusted with these questions. One must keep in mind, though, that *doing something* about southern cities always also carries the potential of doing as much good as harm, reflected in the numerous critiques hotly debated in the not-so-distant development literature (see Easterly 2007 and Moyo 2010 for two popular examples). But as fatalism is not a disposition of urbanism, *doing something* remains the focus of both urban theory and planning. For this reason, in the following, I will elaborate on selected concepts within planning theory as it forms a suitable point of departure and supplement for southern urbanism in order to build a bridge between theory making and practical applications (Rao 2018). Is it, after all, not a prime interest of the field of urbanism to understand cities in order to bring about positive change, knowing that cities are changing every day one way or the other? Does urbanism not serve as a capable guide to explore and determine which ways cities can go, refreshingly supplementing "quo vadis?" and "the way forward" reports? And is it not also the interest of southern urbanists to uncover the workings behind who or what shapes and makes cities in the south where much of the urban form falls below the radar?

Cities in Africa can often be traced back to the period of colonization by the French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Belgians, Germans, Dutch, or Italians during the 19th and 20th century. Given that all African nations except two, namely Liberia and Ethiopia, were colonized at least at one moment in history, in its extreme after the BERLIN CONFERENCE 1884-85, such a broad statement is frighteningly more true than false. Cities emerged from where colonial powers had originally settled to strategically pursue their interests. Different factors, including the burgeoning age of industrialization in Europe, caused the number of Europeans arriving and living on the African continent to rise. At the same time, they imported both tangible and intangible goods from Europe. Among these, the concept of town planning found its way to African lands. Subsequently, planning systems from the respective colonizing powers were adopted,

put in place, and have mostly remained nearly unchanged (Watson 2009). Colonial town planning was heavily tinged in racial segregation, exploitation and a general exercise of power, justified through notions of superiority and health concerns. Its legacy lives on in the planning systems of many African cities up to this day.

In consequence, more and more urban scholars have come to agree on the fact that planning systems currently in place in numerous cities in Africa appear to be inadequate as they fail to accommodate the interests of its present (and future) inhabitants. So, in the spirit of southern urbanism, Vanessa Watson calls for an additional, much neglected non-Eurocentric view not only for southern theory but also for planning practice, one that "provides a useful and necessary unsettling of taken-for-granted assumptions in planning, essential for a conceptual shift in the discipline" (2009: 2261). This shift appears necessary because, as Rahul Mehrotra brings to the point, "in post-colonial situations where the creators of an environment and the custodians of an environment are of different cultures, you can't use the narrative of the creators" (2018). A prominent example of such practice is the global spread of modernist architecture and planning that materialized in cities around the world, at times successfully, at times failing miserably. Nowadays, yet another variable also needs to be considered: southern cities and their lifeworlds have actually become the norm and EuroAmerican urban lifeworlds the exception (earning southern urbanist also the title of *majority urbanists*). As a result of this debate, Watson sees the urgent need for more southern forms of planning that are capable of critically engaging with a more "informalised and marginalized population" on the one hand and "techno-managerial and marketised systems of government" on the other hand (2009: 2272). These are the aspects she strongly associates with planning in the urban global south. Though the field of southern urbanism corresponds to Watson's call in the field of planning, she recommends critical (post)development studies as a helpful theoretical resource, perhaps due to its more applied focus (ibid. 2273). A word of warning however: Watson's call for more southern perspectives does not suggest that EuroAmerican planning ideas should be carried, transplanted and translated to southern playing fields, in a way attempting to tackle southern planning issues with EuroAmerican solutions. It might end up letting (colonial) history repeat itself. More explicitly, Patsy Healey warns of blindly following "travelling planning ideas" (2011: 189), including south-south-travels, without critically reflecting on the different types of southern urban realities inherent to any given planning context. One successful case in one place can produce a failed or even damaging case in another if local histories and challenges are overlooked in the excitement of fulfilling a planning ideal that might, essentially, be out of place (ibid.). Following both Watson's and Healey's arguments, planning in cities of the global south must truly be seen in its local context, putting special emphasis on perspectives

from the south, less for the south. A decolonized view of cities therefore forms one of the key guiding objectives in southern planning.

How can a decolonized view of cities in southern planning be achieved then? How can planners see more through southern eyes? In an attempt to respond to these questions, Watson and her colleagues James Duminy and Nancy Odendaal propose three main imperatives (2014). They encompass 1) the collection of more and better data, 2) the improvement and updating of planning education, and 3) the formation of an ethics of planning that focuses on “equitable outcomes” and does not yield to liberal values in the process (ibid.). To address these imperatives, Duminy et al. suggest a rethinking of prevailing planning curricula that incorporates a *case study methodology* and the use of mixed methods to provide detailed data on “events as they actually happened” (ibid. 187-188). It is an attempt to move from prescribed towards more pragmatic forms of planning, guided by questions like: Where are we going? Who gains and who loses, by which mechanisms of power? Is this development desirable? What should be done? (Flyvbjerg 2001). Perhaps this is what Jenkins had envisioned new inductive approaches in African urbanism to be. The *case study methodology* does not seek to plant an external idea “upon specific histories and geographies” but to cultivate a “community of inquirers” and, as such, does not impose but listens in order to inform more grounded planning ideas and practices (Healey 2011:188). With Healey’s words of warning in mind, they are not to be used as cookie cutters that could end up in rushed copy-paste-urbanism.

While a decolonized view of cities in southern planning is a noble long-term rationale worth striving for, Heather Campbell rather focuses on current planning realities that are much more concerned with ad-hoc actions and little concern for such planning ideals. Her approach outlines how planners can navigate through southern cities as long as they remain colonized so to say, given that it is unclear when, if at all, they will gain planning independence. Rightly so, planners have argued that planning is strongly correlated to questions of power, particularly endowed by knowledge (e.g. Forester 1982; Friedman 1998; Kameite 2011). Campbell makes an argument for not making knowledge the only driver for action as, in consequence, lack of knowledge drives inaction and misinformation unsuitable actions (2012). Moving a planner’s gaze from centers of *power* towards those who are equipped with *powerful messages* could, therefore, serve as a useful tool to circumnavigate the challenges associated with southern planning. To put it in the words of a Mozambican architect who once told me: “We don’t plan in Africa, we deal with situations”. Campbells train of thought might clarify this argu-

ment. To bridge the gap between what *is* and what *ought* to be, Campbell ponders on the production of knowledge to eventually arrive at the conclusion that there can be no *is* as knowledge is socially constructed and, therefore, there can be no *ought* (ibid.). Consequently, she tries to make a connection elsewhere and finds it in the contrasting frameworks of *analysis* and *synthesis*. The analytic framework, so Campbell, is rooted in knowledge, it points to the complexities of the world, is based on reasoning and forward looking and focuses on what ought to be. The synthetic framework, on the other hand, is rooted in intuition, it points to clarity, is based on explanations and backward looking, focuses on what currently is (ibid.). The latter goes beyond hard facts and know-how and, like Flyvbjerg’s planning approach, “involves judgments and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor” (2002). Perhaps, for southern cities, such a shift in focus could inspire a useful grounding in planning as it can also have a positive impact on planning education, theory, and policy making. Campbell’s approach can be read as an alternative form of empowerment as it is a means to make those heard and visible who may otherwise remain mute and invisible because their knowledge is not being acknowledged. In planning, the underlying question revolves around who or what is actually planning planning (Burckhardt 2004). This, in turn, points to the fact that the power variable can never be entirely canceled out. In the end, who will be the judge on whether the analytic or synthetic approach should be applied (Campbell 2012)? Hence, judgment needs to be made on a case-by-case basis, pre-assessing the risks that belie each approach and continuously re-assessing its outcomes.

While urbanism is largely occupied with understanding cities and urban planning with making cities, there are a number of categories in which both fields operate. Social life, architecture, and infrastructures are some of the dimensions in which cities function and to which both urbanism and urban planning are dedicated to. In my research, I focus on the concept of public space which can be understood as yet another urban category. In order to illustrate my understanding of public space in more detail I will first expand on EuroAmerican debates around public space, i.e. from where the concept has originated and evolved from. I will then depart from there and pair understandings of public space with a southern perspective as described above in order to arrive at a theoretical framework that can be used productively in the context of my field of research in Lilongwe, Malawi.

What is public space? To put it in a nutshell: it is a difficult question and there is no clear answer. Notions of public space differ strongly while each is plausible in its own right. It is not to be mistaken with *open spaces*, which describe a spatial separation in more technical terms, for example the space that creates distance between buildings or makes room for light and greenery (Greenberg 1990). Further, a number of scholars distinguish between what is public space and the public realm or sphere (see for example Low and Smith 2006 or Amin and Thrift 2002) but, following Don Mitchell’s (1995) argument, the former can also be read as the materialization of the latter. So, what is being said about the public realm and sphere can also be translated to what can be said about public space. In an attempt to cluster notions of public space, Lynn Staeheli and Don Mitchell have meticulously put together what definitions are being used in academia and, interestingly, how often. In their statistics on “public, publicity and public space”, they focus on definitions of “publicity” or “public-ness”, which describe relationalities between public and private (2007: 794-795). This, simultaneously gives valuable clues on what can be understood as private as it is connected to the public beyond being the mere opposite. Building on Jeffrey Weintraub’s analysis of literature in political theory (1995), they begin with four different conceptual strands of public space. Thus, in a “*liberal-economistic*” reading, the public is equivalent to “the state and its administrative functions”, the “*Marxist-feminist*” stance attributes the public “to the state and economy”, and those supporting a “*republican-virtue*” model locate the public in a “community, the polity and citizens” while the private is located in the household or “private property”. Lastly, the public can be connected to “practices of *sociability*” where the public is associated with “symbolic display and self-representation” (ibid., all emphases in the original) to which my understanding is most affiliated to and I will expand on further below. Staeheli and Mitchell then supplement Weintraub’s taxonomy with an analysis of over 200 works in geographical literature through which they come up with a list of definitions of public spaces as well as a list on the importance

of public space, ranked according to how often they were encountered in their sources (see page 76). This data supports what I stated before: Notions of public space differ widely and depending on who is being asked one might receive very different though very plausible definitions. So, for the moment it suffices to say that there is no agreement on a clear-cut definition of public space and, I would argue, there is also no need for it. Although the definitions listed by Staeheli and Mitchell are various and somewhat diverse, they tend to be not mutually exclusive and, thus, hint at a quality that seems to be intrinsic in all definitions of public space, that is the notion of “inclusiveness” which gives us, at the least, a broad sense of what public space entails (Mitchell 1995).

In order to progress and to shed more light on my understanding of public space that is not based on a mix-and-match game distilled from Staeheli’s and Mitchell’s analysis and one that goes beyond the notion of inclusiveness, it is worth looking at definition clusters or schools of thought around the notion of public space. In modern debates of public space research, Richard Sennett (2017) distinguishes between three different major strands. The first school perceives of public space as a *political* space where gatherings of people can exchange their thoughts in a free and equal manner, devoid of influences from the private realm, safeguarded by anonymity and ideally located at the center of a city. The Greek Agora and the Forum Romanum are archetypical examples of this kind of public space, for which Hannah Arendt and her book *The Human Condition* (1958) appears to be the “advocate par excellence” (587). From there, Jürgen Habermas pushed the second school of thought towards perceiving public space as a *communicative* space through “any medium, occasions, or event” that facilitates open communication among strangers and, as such, embodies the acting out of democracy (Sennett 2017; Habermas 1989[1962]). Besides Arendt and Habermas, there are a number of other scholars who have focused on how public space primarily describes a political and/or communicative space, including Kurt Iveson and Setha Low (2016), Sharon Zukin (2010), Setha Low and Neil Smith (2006), Sophie Watson (2006), Susan S. Fairstein (2005), Leonie Sandercock (2003), Chantal Mouffe (2000), Don Mitchell (1995), Michael Sorkin (1992), Nancy Fraser (1990), Iris M. Young (1990), David Harvey (2012) and Henri Lefebvre (2016 [1968]) to name only a few.

The third school of thought can be ascribed to urban scholars like Richard Sennett and AbdouMalq Simone and it also informs this work. This school of thought understands public space less as a predominantly political or communicative but, first and foremost, as a *cultural* space (Sennett 2017). Public space is thus understood less as a static container but as a dynamic and performative process or, in other words, “an act or speech that is produced with the openness to be translated” (Simone 2010: 119). Performative, because public space is not regarded



# DEFINITIONS OF PUBLIC SPACE

**PHYSICAL DEFINITION [E.G. STREETS, PARKS]  
MEETING PLACE OR PLACE FOR INTERACTION  
SITES OF NEGOTIATION, CONTEST OR PROTEST  
PUBLIC SPHERE, NO PHYSICAL FORM  
OPPOSITE OF PRIVATE SPACE  
SITES OF DISPLAY  
PUBLIC OWNERSHIP, PUBLIC PROPERTY  
PLACES OF CONTACT WITH STRANGERS  
SITES OF DANGER, THREAT, VIOLENCE  
PLACES OF EXCHANGE RELATIONS [E.G. SHOPPING]  
SPACE OF COMMUNITY  
SPACE OF SURVEILLANCE  
PLACES OF OPEN ACCESS – NO OR FEW LIMITS  
PLACES LACKING CONTROL BY INDIVIDUALS  
PLACES GOVERNED BY OPEN FORUM DOCTRINE  
IDEALIZED SPACE – NO PHYSICAL FORM**

# IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SPACE

**DUE TO FUNCTION [E.G. WALKING, GATHERING]  
SOCIALIZATION, BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION, DISCIPLINE  
DEMOCRACY, POLITICS, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS  
SITES OF CONTEST  
SITES OF IDENTITY FORMATION  
PLACES FOR FUN, VITALITY, URBANITY, SPIRIT OF CITY  
BUILDING COMMUNITY OR SOCIAL COHESION  
SITES OF IDENTITY AFFIRMATION  
LIVING SPACE [E.G. FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE]  
JUSTICE**

in terms of its spatialities alone but much more considered a practice where “the public becomes a vehicle through which diverse facets of urban life can intersect” and where “people [come] together without having to be integrated” (Simone 2010: 119). In this sense, public space cannot exist without its actors and actresses composing it and is, consequently, closely tied to the anthropological cultures that are inherent in any action (Sennett 2017). Sennett describes the so-called performative or dramaturgical school as follows:

“We are interested in the street clothing, customs of greeting, rituals of dining and drinking, ways of avoiding eye contact, the places people crowd together and the places where they keep their distance, when people feel free to talk to strangers and when they do not, the bodily gestures which excite a stranger’s sexual interest and the bodily signals which forbid it – it is from these minutiae of behavior that a public realm [or space] is composed” (ibid. 588).

Simone expands on the performative nature of public space and emphasizes its capability not only to express cultural backgrounds but also to deconstruct them. “Publics”, so he says, are “about forms of being together or of being connected that go beyond the specific details of what a person does, where he or she lives and comes from” (2010:117). Public spaces, subsequently, facilitate a “common arena of life” that does not necessarily require a membership card or a sense of belonging (ibid. 118). This is not to say that membership and belonging becomes redundant as hierarchies of power remain intact and maintain their trajectories. In contexts where the “common arena of life” represents an essential element in fulfilling a need, however, say even survival, alternative “public works” can emerge thanks to the nature of public space. It creates a kind of unknown support network where people are no longer primarily perceived as individuals but as “infrastructure” with the potential ability to fulfill a need, no matter what the cultural background (ibid. 124).

None of the three schools aim to exclude one another as they emphasize different foci in order to arrive at a collective goal, i.e. creating a living space everyone wants to live in (however unattainable it may be). So, in true spirit of its nature, not only definitions of public space can overlap and include one another, also research on public space is very inclusive. While the first two schools focus more on the democratic foundations of society, the latter focuses on creating ritual bonds but both thrive from each other’s approaches (ibid.). Some of the noteworthy scholars who have made ritual bonds, in a broad sense, their prime interest in the production of public space include Ervin Goffman (1959), Henri Lefebvre (1991[1974]), Michel De Certeau (1984), George Perec (2010[1975]), Guy Debord (1995 [1970]) and Lucius Burckhardt (2004). In addition, some urban scholars and professionals have emphasized how

” THE PUBLIC BECOMES A VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH DIVERSE FACETS OF URBAN LIFE CAN INTERSECT ”

Abdoulmalik Simone in *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads* (2010)

ritual bonds can also nurture economic bonds, among which one can find Jane Jacobs (2011[1961]), William W. Whyte (2001[1980]), and Jan Gehl (2010).

Naturally the question arises how public space defined by performative practices can materialize in the physical world of the urban sphere without falling into the trap of treating the built environment in cities as a mere backdrop, as a “stage set”, for public practices or public urban life. After all, it is within and through what cities have to offer, including streets, buildings, materials, organizations and institutions as well as situations, rhythms, sensory experiences, city dwellers and so on, how public urban life or public space as a practice is acted out. Slightly more to the point, Kim Dovey views public spaces as “the primary site where a sense of ‘common’ becomes embodied in everyday life” (2016: 10). So through interaction, adoption and appropriation of the urban sphere by a multiplicity, public urban life can emerge. Consequently, when the urban sphere ceases to welcome public life and, instead, shuts its doors, barricades itself, public urban life declines, given that modes of inclusion often go hand in hand with modes of exclusion. Such developments can be observed in a variety of examples in cities around the world, invigorated most strongly by modernist visions, neoliberal processes, and vast geographies of securitization. They tend to prioritize rational architecture, privatization, as well as an architecture of fear that, in its worst case scenario, creates a “city of walls” - all of which are only some examples how contemporary urban lifeworlds inhibit the ability for people to perform among strangers (Sennett 2017; Caldeira 2001).

In order to overcome the crisis or challenges of public space without inflicting its ideological and numerical decline, Sennett proposes a move from a closed system to an open system in how we shape our world or, more precisely, build our cities. Closed systems, according to Sennett, are too “over-determined”, too “preplanned” and blindly follow rigid, functional forms for their purity, rationality and ability to exercise power and control (2017: 589-590). Characteristic for open systems is their flexible and unfinished form and planning. They begin and end with

"skeletons" that allow for enough space for potential change, making them particularly resilient (ibid. 600). Besides their different modes of execution with regard to urban form, their most significant difference lies in their varying goals. The closed system aims to create *boundaries*, open systems rather aim to create membranes or *borders*. In allegory to natural ecologies, Sennett describes the distinct differences between these two concepts as such: "borders are the zones in a habitat where organisms become more interactive, due to the meeting of different species or physical conditions" and a "boundary is a limit, a territory beyond which a particular species does not stray" (ibid. 590). Following this thought, open systems identify with porosity, whereas closed systems have a preference for enclosure. What porosity entails in the urban sphere is perhaps best described by Walter Benjamin when he explains how "building and action inter-penetrate in the courtyards, arcades and stairways...to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided...Porosity is the inexhaustible law of the life of this city, reappearing everywhere" (1997: 169-171).

Porous, open systems nurture public spaces in which "people react to, learn from, people who are unlike themselves"—ideally—but as it is the case with most ideals, they represent goals to strive for, less reflections of reality, and such is the case with public spaces, too (Sennett 2017: 595). There is strong doubt whether the ideal public space as described here actually has ever existed, exists or will ever exist in any part of this world. A number of scholars have explored for what reasons this may be as the reasons are manifold. To begin with, the ideal public space claims to include everyone and to exclude no one. Yet urban realities show the structural exclusion from public spaces of marginalized people on the basis of race, class, gender and other markers of difference (see for example Mitchell's 1995 work on homeless people). In their search for the "just public space", Iveson and Low argue why such mechanisms of exclusion could be somewhat "justified" and find that what is just does not necessarily entail equal access to public space for all (2016). Moreover, the ideal public space presupposes a certain diversity or heterogeneity of people making use of public space and, in addition to that, also assume a general will to socialize so one can "learn from" the other. Yet, as a number of scholars have remarked, diversity and social mixing are not automatically the key to social cohesion as "[t]he sheer presence of diversity does little to counter mutual indifference" (Sennett 2017: 596). Iris M. Young thus embraces homogeneous public spaces as long as they maintain porous borders, facilitating potential heterogeneous encounters less within one space but in exchange with other spaces (1990). Similarly, Leonie Sandercock defines public spaces not only as places of encounter but also as a place where "the pleasures of anonymity" can be experienced (2003). Susan S. Fainstein even argues against prioritizing diversity in public space for it may be capable of causing healthy conflicts but just as

well conflicts that simply "produce mutual loathing" (2005). She, therefore, argues for the deliberation of diversity on par with other sets of values, such as democracy, equity, growth and sustainability and advises to "trade [them] off against each other" (ibid.). On a more hopeful note, perhaps the key to the ideal public space lies in adjusting our interpretation of the ideal. Social cohesion, after all, may not be the ideal *ideal* for public spaces and, instead, Sennett argues, that fostering "sympathy...with the ways of life, and particularly with the suffering of another" as well as "empathy", i.e. the "curiosity about lives the observer cannot pretend to understand" may be much more realistic and worthwhile to dwell on (2017: 598). Thus, striving for sympathy and empathy can provide a means to consolidate social difference and indifference in public space, less postulating spaces of encounter and rather promoting "spaces of tolerance" (Amin and Thrift 2002). This may be more in synch with everyday life and, as Sennett argues, may produce more cosmopolitan urban dwellers, i.e. people with "a sense of comfort and security in the midst of strangers" (ibid. 597-597).

While notions of public space are various and can differ strongly, it appears that a large question mark looms around what kind of public spaces match contexts that are not based in a EuroAmerican public urban life. In other words, what kind of public spaces encourage and emerge from public urban life that are more Malawian? History has shown, European settlers in Africa generally lacked the knowledge and will to build cities that were suitable for local lifeworlds and, instead, were more interested in "creat[ing] towns and buildings worthy of an empire" (Home 2015: 59). Knowing only European cities and European life, the colonial powers crafted cities according to what was seemingly the only and best way to build, plan and live in cities. The same can be said about public spaces, being one element of cities, if not *the* element, given that public space can nearly always also be equated with urban space (Low and Smith 2006). This mode of thinking about cities has changed little in recent history. It is then not so hard to understand why urban planning appears to clash so vehemently and continuously with urban realities in non-European context where European planning principles have been and continue to be at work. Lilongwe stands at the brim of transforming from a village city to a metropolitan city. In this sense, it represents a "city yet to come" (Simone 2004). Only few urban scholars and professionals, however, have taken a closer look at this city with the intention to first understand and then to induce change. Rather, it often goes the opposite way. So it appears to be a(bout) good time to take a moment to reflect and to explore the nature of public spaces in Lilongwe with the help of debates that may have originated with EuroAmerican scholars but are addressing transnational studies of public space and the urban.

Like all scholars of African cities who are critical about their subject matter, including myself, I am aware of the fact that Cape Town is profoundly different from Cairo and that Nairobi has little resemblance to Lagos. There is no such thing as the "African city". Cities differ and keep changing, therefore, urban scholars know that each context is different in any given place and time and must be treated accordingly. Nonetheless, using concepts that go beyond the most local and specific makes sense in order to handle an otherwise impossible task: trying to understand the urban. The term city or urban in itself is already a container term as there are so many different cities, in its extreme with as many differences as there are cities (Scott and Storper 2015). Speaking about African cities can and should, therefore, not be understood as an all-encompassing generalization, rather it alludes to an individual's experiences and images connected to this part of the world. This can be helpful but also highly problematic. Helpful as it is a means to imagine what is being told from afar and problematic as experiences and images can be skewed in the face of misrepresentation, something cities in Africa can certainly claim to have been prone to. So, to clarify, when I refer to Africa in conjunction with urbanism or cities, I use it as Jane Jacobs uses "Great American Cities" in her influential book *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* without actually dwelling on all American cities while acknowledging that there is a commonality between them (2011[1961]). Likewise, Italo Calvino writes in *Invisible Cities* "[t]o distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit" (1978 [1972]: 86), knowing that human thoughts, reflected in language, are better communicated when something unfamiliar is presented with the familiar.

In this work, I wish to contribute to the field of African urbanism with insights from public urban life in Lilongwe and explore its implications on local conceptions of public space that will, more broadly and poignantly, lead to alternative perspectives on Lilongwe's urban space and urbanity. My work can be understood as an attempt to providing a better understanding - from a transnational point of view - of urban Africa, though I make no claim to be contributing anything more than a small fraction of what urban Africa encompasses. "Who would find my work useful?", one could think, and admittedly, this is not a thought I am unfamiliar with, but I pair it with another more comforting thought: Naturally, urban Africa comprises more than the sum of its parts, yet insights from each part matter. Particularly in such theoretical and practical dry zones, which in some aspects more resemble deserts, insights from Malawi can help in gaining new perspectives that have thus far been overlooked. How small they may be, one cannot know how big they can grow. As of now, it is the attempt to know more that counts, to be curious, without fear of being wrong. Besides, the experiences of Lilongwe's public ur-

ban life depicted in this work gives Lilongwe a greater, too long neglected presence in debates around urban Africa as I sense that this city offers much that other postcolonial cities in Africa, or at least other cities in Malawi, can learn from.

For this research project, I follow the school of thought of southern and African urbanism and planning theory as outlined by the urban scholars mentioned above, Ananya Roy, Garth Myers, Filip De Boeck, and Vanessa Watson in particular. Furthermore, I strongly rely on Paul Jenkins' perception of culture and how it is a fundamental element of change and urban development. I also respond to his call for more transdisciplinary empirical studies that experiment with new inductive approaches to cities in Africa. Like him I ask "what exists; how this came to exist; and what the trajectories are likely to be" as I agree with him that it is not only urban professionals and the state apparatus that shape and make cities but, first and foremost, "everyday activities" (2013: 23-24). This might hold true particularly in African cities where modes of informality so often overrun modes of formality, drawing a neat line between what "activities" are accepted and which are not by those in power. This naturally becomes a site of contestation with regard to urban planning. In order to show a path out from EuroAmerican planning systems and ideals, I aim to illustrate how notions of public space are much more related to practices of public urban life as outlined by Abdoumalik Simone and Richard Sennett than by a specific group of people or a specific spatial arrangement. Public practices, in that sense, create public spaces, not the other way around. They bestow meaning to a space that would otherwise be meaningless. Thus, embracing a more cultural perception of public space and pairing it with empirical evidence may have the potential to shift the focus away from a planning elite towards a planning public who, in all reality, already shape urban life on a daily basis. What if "unprofessional" city makers were given "professional" room to maneuver their cities? In this sense, my work can be understood as a contribution and attempt to non-EuroAmerican, locally grounded forms of urban planning by giving the rudder to the daily users in a southern city.



Main business and commercial road in Area 2. On weekdays, this road is crowded with traders, shoppers, worshippers, and plenty of other people trying to gain something from the hustle and bustle of this place. On Sundays, most commercial activities come to an halt, revealing the naked physical environment of Old Town, the historical heart of the city.





RESEARCH DESIGN

3

MAKING SENSE  
OF LILONGWE



LEITMOTIF

I AM WRITING  
ON THE TOPIC  
OF...

PUBLIC  
SPACE IN  
LILONGWE

BECAUSE I WANT TO  
FIND OUT...

WHY PUBLIC SPACES  
FROM A EUROAMERI-  
CAN POINT OF VIEW  
ATTRACT SO FEW  
PEOPLE IN LILONGWE  
AND WHERE PUBLIC  
URBAN LIFE OCCURS  
INSTEAD

SO THAT I CAN UNDERSTAND...

WHAT CONSTITUTES  
PUBLIC SPACE IN  
LILONGWE AND THUS  
MALAWIAN URBANITY  
WHICH ESSENTIALLY  
REPRESENTS THE  
FOUNDATION FOR ANY  
FORM OF URBAN  
DEVELOPMENT IN  
MALAWI.



DOING RESEARCH

INTEREST +  
BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

It all began in November 2016. I had attended a conference at the Technical University of Brunswick (Germany) where I heard an architect speak about his work in Lilongwe and their challenges in the urban planning sector. I was fascinated and eager to learn more about this country which I then knew nothing about. To make a long story short: Briefly after, in spring 2017, I had signed up for an internship with the speaker's organization to do research on Lilongwe's informal or unplanned settlements and, in addition, embarked on a somewhat large-scale urban exploration tour through South East Africa, namely Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania. As an urban design student enrolled in the master's program at the HafenCity University in Hamburg (Germany), I had spent much time on studying critical urban theory. But I wished to expand my knowledge by responding to Vanessa Watson's cry in the best way I could, that is to "refocus urban planning on the globe" by "seeing from the South" (2009). So I left my anthropological armchair in order to collect more Malinowskian (1978 [1932]) first-hand experiences on what it means when urban scholars speak about the challenges of cities in the global south (see e.g. Pieterse 2008), about "African cities" (Myers 2011), and about moving "toward a post-colonial urban theory" (Roy 2014). Much of my background knowledge on Lilongwe's local and global context stems from this five-month-study trip. My recent research endeavor would have not been possible if I had not scouted - pardon the colonial term - for a feasible - pardon the policy jargon - field of research in which I could conduct my work in the limited time given. Upon my return to Germany, I continued delving into southern and African urban theory, postcolonial theory and planning theory while continuously relating what was being said in books and papers with the urban realities I had observed and experienced in South East Africa.

MOTIVE +  
RESEARCH QUESTION

During my psychogeographic travels, I encountered a phenomenon in Lilongwe that probably could only be detected by EuroAmerican eyes like mine. For some reason, Lilongwe did not seem to have any public spaces of the kind I had known all of my life in Europe. I began to wonder why this was the case, given that Lilongwe's planning history originated in an EuroAmerican (or South African-Afrikaans) planning tradition. My work is an attempt at providing a possible explanation for this urban condition. Building on the current demand for alternative approaches in urban planning in southern cities, I hope to offer a less-EuroAmerican understanding of public spaces in Lilongwe that is guided by a more grounded analysis of public urban life. This approach, which I take from a variety of urban thinkers as outlined in the previous chapter carries a powerful message that can be groundbreaking if applied to planning practice. It would offer a more nuanced framework for Lilongwe's urbanity and could contribute to better informed decision-making with regard to urban development in Lilongwe or Malawi as a whole. Therefore, I arrive at the following research questions:

WHAT ARE  
LILONGWE'S  
PUBLIC  
SPACES?

WHAT DOES  
LILONGWE'S  
PUBLIC URBAN  
LIFE LOOK  
LIKE?

AND HOW CAN ITS  
UNDERSTANDING  
CONTRIBUTE TO  
WHAT CONSTITUTES  
MALAWIAN  
URBANITY?

FIELD RESEARCH +  
METHODOLOGY

Upon a trip to Lilongwe in spring 2017 (3 months), I managed to outline a research topic in a field that would no longer be entirely foreign to me during my second trip in April/May 2018 (2 months). In the months in between I kept in touch with some of the inhabitants so I could stay in the loop with what was happening in Lilongwe. During my second trip to Lilongwe, I began with tracing public spaces in the central areas of the city by mapping places of encounter and places where people in Lilongwe gathered. By means of go-alongs, as outlined by Margarethe Kusenbach (2003), with a number of subjects I explored different kinds of public urban life and, thus, created an inventory of public spaces in Lilongwe (see page 96-97). Go-alongs allowed me to observe the unobserved and public urban life through the eyes of inhabitants and less through my own Eurocentric eyes. Though I still cannot claim to have seen things in its full size as my external vision can always only be partial, it can be seen as an attempt to get at least closer to a more grounded understanding of Lilongwe's public urban life without imposing an external reading on the local context. Go-alongs also proved to be helpful when there was more Chichewa spoken around me than English. In these cases, "communication" between the informants and me consisted of silence, broken English, gestures, and movements, which, in a way, were telling much more than an interview could have. But luckily, most of the time I was able to resort to an English speaker who could translate for me and respond to further questions or clarifications.

In total, I conducted eight go-alongs which lasted between three hours to an entire day, i.e. as long as there was daylight. I partly selected go-along partners according to different socioeconomic backgrounds or was referred to them through existing contacts. They led me to informal and formal parts of Lilongwe, either by foot, minibus or car. My partners included both men and women between the age of 19 and 41. Since the selection of my go-along partners were indirectly guided by my existing social network, I used several *dérives* through different parts of Lilongwe as a methodological supplement in order to further broaden my inventory of public spaces. Once I had collected around 200 potential public spaces in my inventory, I began to narrow down places of interest for my research.

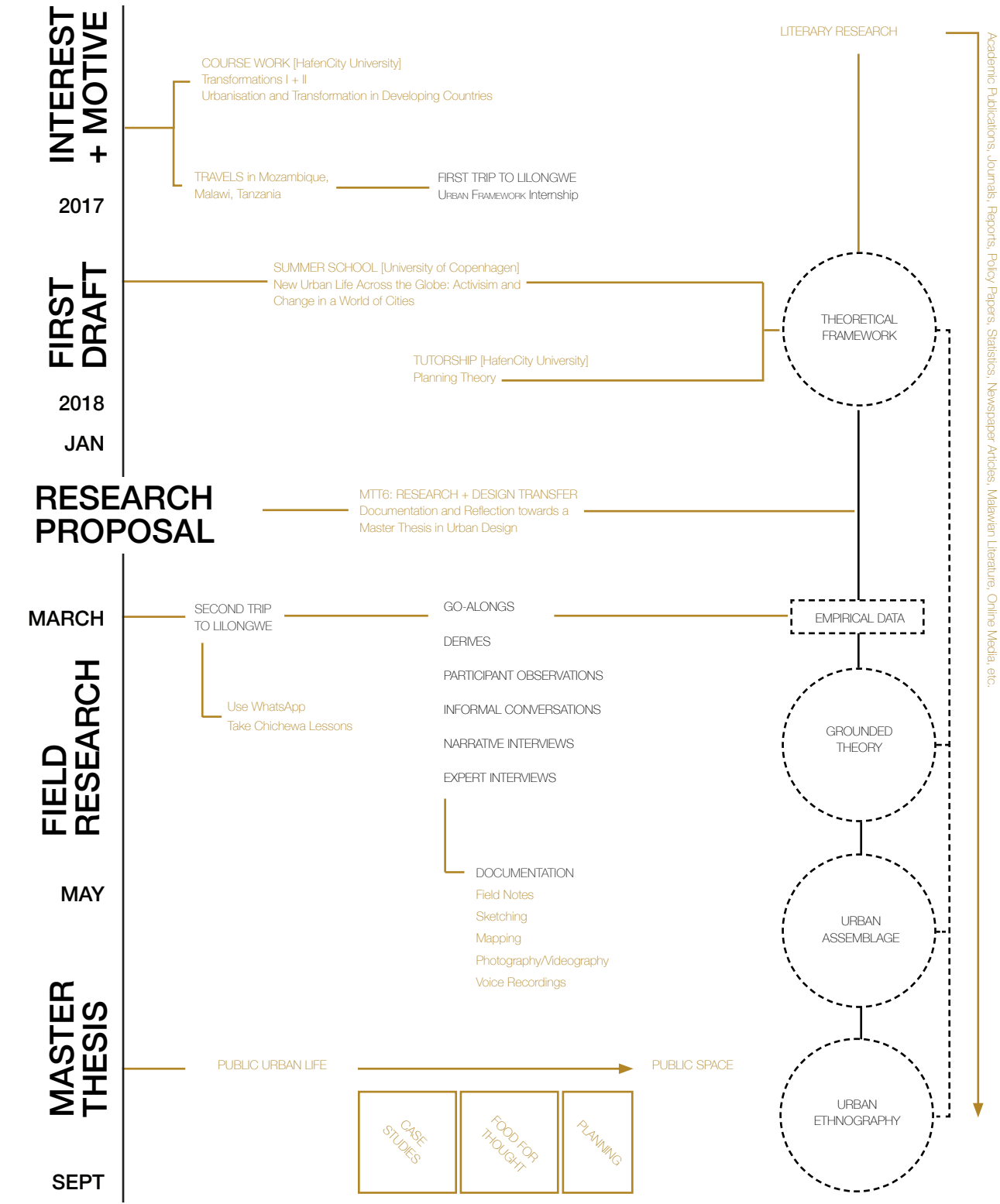
In a second stage, I selected eight case studies where I conducted more in-depth empirical studies. The selection was based on differences to EuroAmerican public spaces, from my point of view, as I also kept in mind that the research findings would first reach an EuroAmerican audience (and only later a Malawian one). Five of the case studies are discussed as brief introductions for potential further research, three examples are presented more in-depth as they seem particular noteworthy for Lilongwe's current public sphere. The selected examples make no claim to cover the entirety of Lilongwe's public urban life, rather they serve as thought-provoking impulses that strongly encourage urban practitioners to incorporate more of such urban realities in Lilongwe's future urban development.

During research, I oscillated between silent observer, mere company, and conversation partner and collected data by means of participant observation, informal conversations and narrative interviews. I documented my findings in field notes, photographs, videos, voice recordings and the occasional artifact. With the help of a smartphone I was able to do much of my documentation but, as I knew from my first trip to Lilongwe, it also represented a highly helpful tool for getting and staying in touch with informants, namely via WhatsApp\*. A lot of people in Malawi either use the messenger on their own smartphone or have access to somebody who can serve as a substitute. It is so widely used as a communication tool in such a variety of settings that it felt like second nature when, for instance, the Director of Land, Housing and Urban Development messaged me on WhatsApp to schedule a meeting, or when I was sending photos to Malawian protestors, or when I entered a conversation with over 250 members only by using WhatsApp. It also enabled me to connect with urban planning experts with whom I conducted semi-structured expert interviews in order to collect Malawian perspectives and voices on my research topic, as well.

The qualitative data collected in Lilongwe was paired with statistical data, existing maps and plans, relevant gray literature, Malawian literature and further information from different media. By applying urban assemblage and producing an urban ethnography, I finally arrived at different inputs with regard to public spaces in Lilongwe which I articulated in five *Food For Thoughts* (Jackson 1985; Farias 2011; McFarlane 2011). They can be read as learnings from public urban life and, as such, have a heightened relevance for Malawi's urban planning sector.

To better grasp local customs and mannerisms, I also decided to take Chichewa lessons and – via a WhatsApp group – soon found a Chichewa teacher who had formerly taught for the American Peace Corps. Her experience with teaching Westerners paired with her didactic skills enabled me not only to learn more Chichewa but to also find explanations to why some expressions said in English by Malawians sound like nothing a native English speaker would probably ever say due to literal word-by-word translations. With a background in the humanities, I was aware of the fact that culture is most strongly reflected in language. True to this thought, some of the Chichewa vocabulary and grammar I learned made me understand more about Malawian social interactions. Last but not least, learning Chichewa, though unfortunately not to the extent that I could carry a fluent conversation, allowed me to understand more of the conversations I was hearing around me. More importantly, it often served as an ice-breaker when speaking to subjects or strangers as it created interest and trust.





## THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Doing anthropological field research in order to collect qualitative data has been a contested field ever since its beginnings, given it is so intrinsically connected to colonial mannerisms. In a way, it seemingly permits the researcher to speak on behalf of others, justified by knowledge that is informed by a more or less long-term presence in the respective field. "Being there" (C.W. Watson 1999) has been a steady mantra in field research, knowingly outlining an unattainable goal for any anthropologist. Now, despite its imperial past and a certain sense of impossibility, doing field research also appears to be one of the least detached ways of reflecting contemporary human realities which, after all, is exactly what it is meant to do. By openly producing a non-objective account for scientific audiences, field research does what other sciences might be unable to do: produce knowledge that makes no claim to be universal and, more so, makes its subjectivity very clear. With this in mind, I am aware and also wish to draw attention to the fact that my research and findings presented here can only be read and understood as one narrative of many, though, with a hope that this narrative is shared by many, too. In this manner, my position as a researcher more resembles the role of a writer as I am telling my story and my view of things observed, which, in turn, are heavily influenced by socially constructed perceptions I carry with me from Germany to wherever I go (Clarke 2003). Particularly in the context of Lilongwe, one that is so profoundly different to my usual living environment, my role as a researcher and the lens applied to this research should not only be clear to me but also be clear to any reader of this work (Whyte 1993[1943]). That being said, I am a female urban scholar in her late 20s with an academic background in cultural anthropology. I have bicultural roots due to my German and Taiwanese parents and, therefore, oscillate between Asian and European lifeworlds. I grew up in Germany, i.e. in a democratic country that is part of the EU and that has a social welfare system. I was privileged enough to attend school and university up to the master's level, to travel to numerous countries on various continents, and to have never experienced poverty or hunger myself. In Germany, I would belong to the non-white middle income group, in Malawi I was a member of a white high income group. During my stay in Lilongwe, I was living in a shared house in a central area where my house mates and I could afford to hire a household employee, a gardener and a few guards who would have an eye on the surrounding walls and the gate. Most of the people and lives I have based my field research on have little in common with the life that I know, which is not to say that I should be deemed an incompetent candidate for this task. Erving Goffman once said: "The first day you'll see more than you'll see ever again. And you'll see things that you won't see again" (1974), meaning to say: we all become blind in our everyday routines and sometimes somebody who is not part of the routine can see more than the actual person who is confronted with it day by day.







FIELD RESEARCH

# 4

## PUBLIC SPACES IN LILONGWE



Public urban life in Lilongwe has many faces and it is impossible to show all of them. In fact, a comprehensive overview of Lilongwe's public urban life would reveal a thorough misconception thereof as there can be no such thing as an overview. Like there is no African „type“ of cities, there are also no „types“ of public urban life. In this work, public urban life is understood as the framework that encompasses public practices. While practices follow certain rhythms, each exercise practiced is unique in its own, hence, no type. People are not automated beings and neither are their urban environments static. As such, public urban life, like life itself, is fleeting and continuously reconfigured from one moment to another. Depictions of public urban life then merely represent snapshots, images of singular moments and, more importantly, cannot be categorized, nor programmed. Public urban life has its own ways of carving out public spaces, may it follow the path as envisioned in planning documents or not, which has vast consequences for the city's urban development. This is particularly the case in cities like Lilongwe which „appear dynamic and static at the same time“, implying that „sometimes conditions change with remarkable speed“ while it is not entirely clear how, why, and who is causing the changes (Simone 2005: 5).

This work perceives public space less as space shaped by materialities in which certain practices occur but as space that only comes to exist through public practices. They are being produced and come to exist because practices bestow spaces with meaning through the cultural layers found within them, so the argument here (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). In a world where Western culture has more often than not

reigned over other cultures, it appears just about time to scrape the local ground for unaccredited potentialities for public space. Especially so, when foreign ideas have largely shown to be unsuitable.

In this chapter, the attention is drawn to eight examples of public urban life as encountered in the field of research of which three are presented as zoom ins in more detail. The other five examples can be regarded as entry points for further research and provide a broader view of public urban life as found in Lilongwe. The selection is based on what - to my European eye – appeared “non-European”. But they were also selected in order to illustrate the great diversity of public spaces in Lilongwe, all of which have thus far been widely ignored in planning.

In an effort to emphasize the practice-based nature of public space, the titles of the examples presented in the following are extended by an *-ing* suffix that grammatically turns nouns into progressive verbs (one could also speak of *public spac[ing]* instead of *public space*). They are meant to function as a continuous reminder that public spaces are constructed through what people do, less the other way around, though it plays a role in how people and materialities interact and which the following examples attempt to illustrate.

**Note** In the presented case studies, the **actors** are highlighted in a different color in order to emphasize who or what is behind certain practices and who or what shapes public urban life.



# INVENTORY OF PUBLIC SPACES INTERSECTIONS OF PUBLIC URBAN LIFE

PLACES OF ENCOUNTER as observed in the field

FOOTBALL FIELD  
GOLONGOZA CAMP  
GATED RESTAURANTS  
PARKING LOT  
CHIBUKU HUT  
ALCOHOL  
MARIHUANA/CHAMBA  
SHADE  
CHISAKASA [CHAT HOUSE]  
SMALL DIRT PATHS  
SIDE OF MAIN TARMAC  
ROADS  
FRIDAYS 8-11 AM AT THE  
CHINSAPO MATERNITY  
WARD  
**KACHERE**  
FLOODED BROWNFIELD  
PILE OF GARBAGE  
DIRT PATH OR SQUARE IN  
FRIDAY NIGHTS IN CHIGWIRI  
**HOMES**  
MINIBUSES  
HITCHHIKING  
ADMARC CENTERS  
FIXED SALES POINTS OF  
STREET VENDORS (FOOD,

FRUIT+VEGETABLES, COAL,  
MEALS, ELECTRICITY, PHO-  
NE CREDIT, NON-EDIBLES)  
SERVICE POINTS FOR  
CUTTING HAIR, WATCHING  
MOVIES, PLAYING MUSIC  
**LABOR OFFICE**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
PRIVATE SCHOOLS  
NURSERY BUILDING  
CHURCH PREMISES  
INFORMAL MARKETS WITH  
TEMPORARY STRUCTURES  
FORMAL MALL COMPLEX  
WITHOUT TEMPORARY  
STRUCTURES  
AFRICAN BIBLE COLLEGE  
(ABC) CAMPUS  
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD  
CAMPUS  
SHOPPING MALLS  
GATEWAY MALL  
CROSSROADS  
CITY MALL  
OLD TOWN MALL  
PACIFIC MALL

EXECUTIVE MALL  
SHOPPING COMPLEXES  
SANTA PLAZA  
GAME COMPLEX  
SANAA  
**WATER KIOSK**  
LIKUNI PETROL STATION  
PLACES OF CONSUMPTION  
WESTERN RESTAURANTS  
CLUBS  
BARS  
PRIVATE GYM  
CHEZNTEMBA  
BWANDILO AT NIGHT  
LARK'S  
GOLDEN PEACOCK  
FOUR SEASONS  
UMODZI PARK  
GOVERNMENTAL BUILDINGS  
CIVIC OFFICE  
ROAD TRAFFIC DEPART-  
MENT  
IMMIGRATION OFFICE  
CAPITAL HILL  
LABOR OFFICE  
WATER BOARD

ESCOM  
CRAFT MARKET  
MLAMBE CENTER  
STANDING IN LINE AT A  
BANK  
PETROL STATIONS  
M1 MAIN ROAD  
CIVO STADIUM  
BINGU STADIUM  
BUS DEPOTS  
LABOR OFFICE  
MALANGALANGA  
INTERCAPE TOTAL STATION  
BUS STATION BEHIND M1  
PUMA STATION  
KAMUZU YOUTH INSTITUTE  
TSOKA MARKET  
KAUMA MARKET  
**AREA 13 MARKET**  
CHINSAPO 2 MARKET  
POOL TABLE  
**BAWO GAME**  
PAINTED DRAUGHT BOARD  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN  
CHINSAPO  
STREET LIFE ON MAIN RO-  
ADS  
WEDDINGS  
FUNERALS  
SWIMMING POOLS  
STREET CORNERS  
KABAZA STOPS  
MANDASI VENDORS  
TREES ON THE SIDE  
OF THE STREET  
BOTANICAL GARDEN  
LINGADZI FOREST  
RIVER  
RIDING A BICYCLE  
TAKING A TUKTUK  
ACROBATICS BEHIND  
A HOUSE  
REED MATT

BWANDILO  
CHIWAYA STALLS  
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD  
REVIVAL GARDEN  
LIBRARY  
WUHAN SUPERMARKET  
SHOP FRONTS  
KHONDES  
STREET CURBS WITH COOK-  
ER/STOVE  
DRAINAGES  
SUPERMARKET  
OLD CHIBIKU  
NEW CHIBIKU  
SHOPRIGHT  
SPAR  
KAPANI  
7/11  
**CHURCH**  
ENGAGEMENTS  
TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES  
AREA 3 MARKET  
CURTAIN MARKET  
MADSOC  
AZUNGU PLACES  
PRIVATE SCHOOL EVENTS  
ACTIVITIES  
BUNDA MOUNTAIN  
KAMUZU DAM  
HOTELS  
LODGES  
SIMAMA  
BRIDGEVIEW HOTEL  
WAKA WAKA HOTEL  
KIBOKO HOTEL  
LATITUDE  
MADIDI LODGE  
MANGOCHI MOTEL  
KORTASIA  
ROSE GARDEN  
MABUYA CAMP  
KUMBALI  
EDEN LODGE

WALMONT HOTEL  
UFULU LODGE  
JOHN'S SHOP  
ROAD INTERSECTIONS  
SELF-CONSTRUCTED  
BRIDGES  
THICK BUSHES  
PRIVATE CARS  
WIFI HOTSPOTS  
SOLAR PANELS  
PHONE CHARGING BOOTH  
ELECTRICITY  
LIGHT  
BRAAI/BBQ  
COMMUNITY GROUNDS  
PLAY CENTERS  
JUMPING CASTLES  
FUNCITY AMUSEMENT PARK  
GOLF COURSE  
CHINSAPO SECONDARY  
SCHOOL HALL  
TV SETS  
PA-SYSTEMS  
TOWN HALL  
SUGAR CANE  
BILLBOARD CONSTRU-  
CTIONS WITH STAIRS  
CULTURE CLUBS  
ROUNABOUT  
PUBLIC HOSPITAL  
HIGH MAIZE FIELD  
HOOP + STICK  
**WHATSAPP**  
BODY-SIZE MIRRORS  
CARLSBERG GREENS  
FORESTS  
MAIN ROADS AT NIGHT  
FUNCTIONING STREET  
LIGHT  
DEVIL'S STREET  
NETBALL FIELD  
...

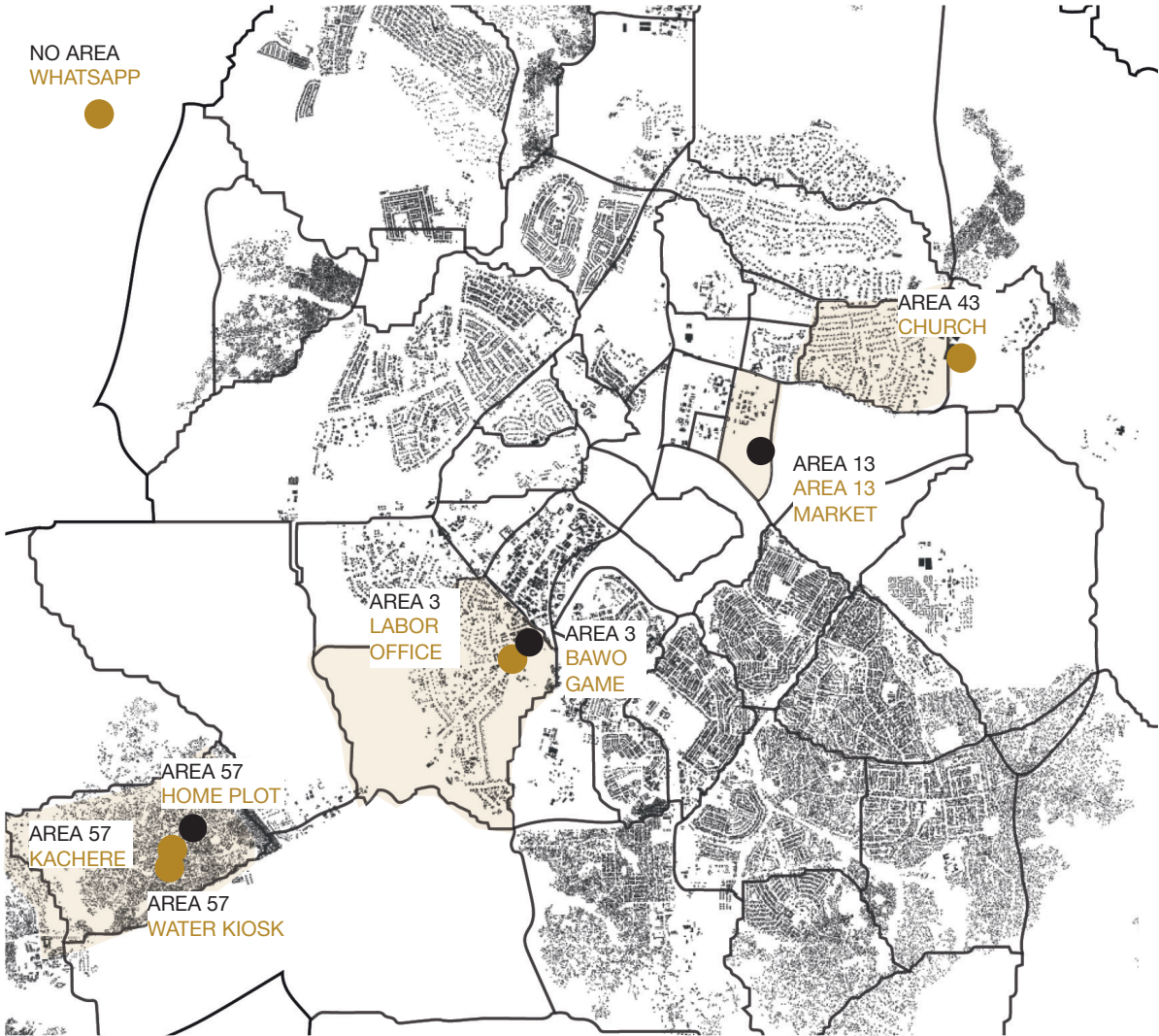




MALAWI



LILONGWE



- AREA 57 — CHINSAPO
- AREA 3 — OLD TOWN
- AREA 13 — CITY CENTER
- AREA 43 — KAUMA

- 2.5 KM
- EXAMPLE
- ZOOM IN





Water kiosk in Chinsapo [Area 57]



Women getting water from the water kiosk in Chinsapo [Area 57]



Piece workers waiting for a job outside the Labor Office at the Lilongwe District Council. Men wait for potential employers in front of the labor office building next to the main road. Many of them look for a job in construction. Job-seeking women sit separately behind the building and are often hired as household employees.







Kachere in Chinsapo [Area 57]

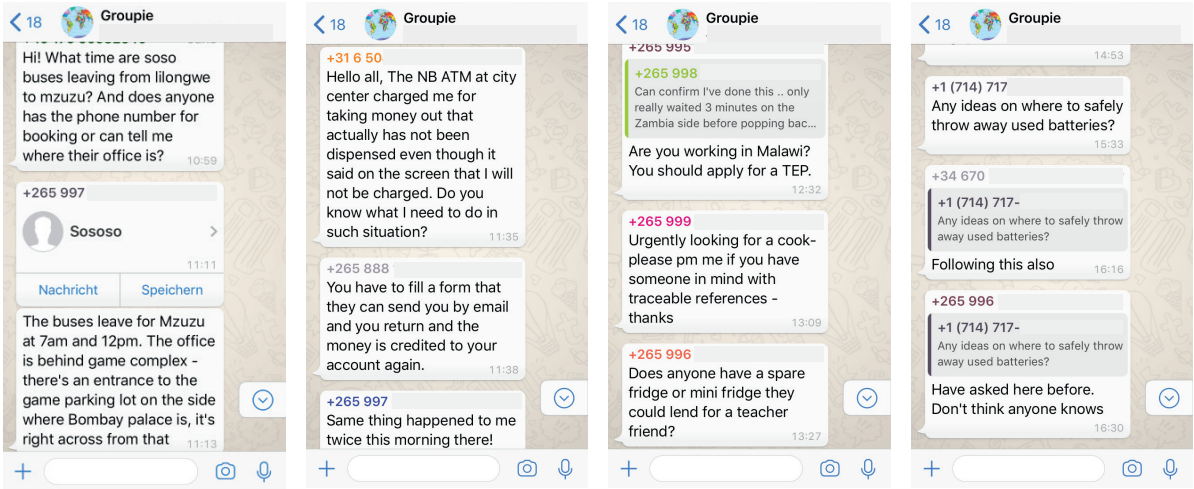


Kachere Market in Chinsapo [Area 57]





City-Wide Assemblies of God Church in Kauma [Area 43]



A selection of conversations held in a WhatsApp group with 256 members





Water is life and, therefore, part of everyday life. Most of rural Malawians source water from boreholes but the situation is slightly different in urban areas (JICA 2010). The Lilongwe Water Board (LWB) predominantly supplies the city with water through communal standpipes, also called water kiosks. They target high density residential areas in peri-urban locations, which, overall, house over three quarters of Lilongwe's population (UN Habitat 2011). This makes water kiosks an integral part of public urban life for the majority of Lilongwe's inhabitants. Each water kiosk is designed to serve around 50 households with an average of 4 to 5 people per household. The first water kiosk was constructed upon establishment of the Water Board

in 1947 (LWB). By 2009, the LWB had installed nearly 500 water kiosks. According to a survey in 2017, over 90% have access to clean water, nonetheless, many residents of Lilongwe remain vulnerable to water-borne diseases. Cholera outbreaks, for instance, form a real risk residents of all areas are aware of, even if the chances of actually being affected vary. In addition to that, existing water kiosks cannot keep up with the demand and they often face a number of shortcomings, such as punctured pipes, lack of formal contracts with kiosk operators and spiked water prices. Though things are steadily improving, having access to clean running water at home is a luxury only few inhabitants of Lilongwe can experience.

#### WATER SUPPLY IN LILONGWE

12.6% Piped Water

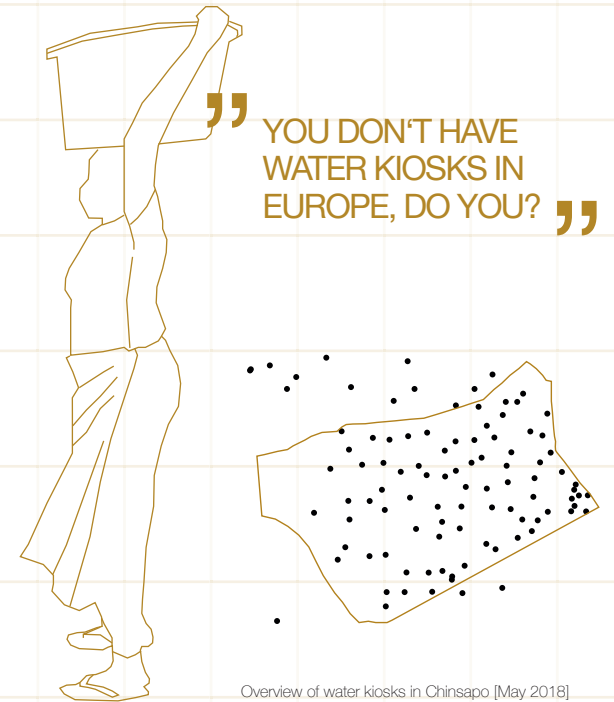
15.3% Boreholes

64.2% Water Kiosk

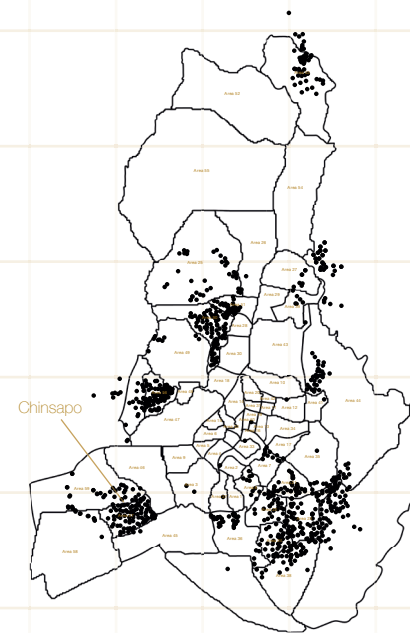
7.9% Unprotected Wells or Rivers

At one of the water kiosks in Chinsapo [Area 57], general opening hours are roughly from 6 to 10 AM and 3 to 6 PM. Mornings are busier than evenings. The key, which comes in the shape of a water valve, is with the key keeper, usually a woman living closeby, who has been contracted to manage the water kiosk. She also collects the 20 MK for 20 liters or 40 MK for 40 liters as advertised in handwriting on the water kiosk. Once a week, an employee of the water supplier comes to collect the water fees and checks the meter.

The key keeper, in return, receives a steady income. She stands out as being the only woman carrying a purse in which she collects the banknotes. Most fellow women have wrapped a chitenje around them, in various colors and to different degrees of wear-and-tear. Placing one's plastic bucket behind those who came first forms the queue and enables its owners to roam around without being cut in line. Often only one pipe is in use so waiting times give a good reason for a chat before everyone goes their ways just to meet again a little while later or the following days. Fetching water is a female domain, so water kiosks are predominantly female spaces as well as for children. The occasional unmarried man joins in and he may appear slightly out of place but he is "most welcome", as people say. With efficiency in mind, most women opt for the 40 liter buckets despite the heavy load. One assists one another by placing the heavy buckets on each other's heads because this is how the water is carried home.



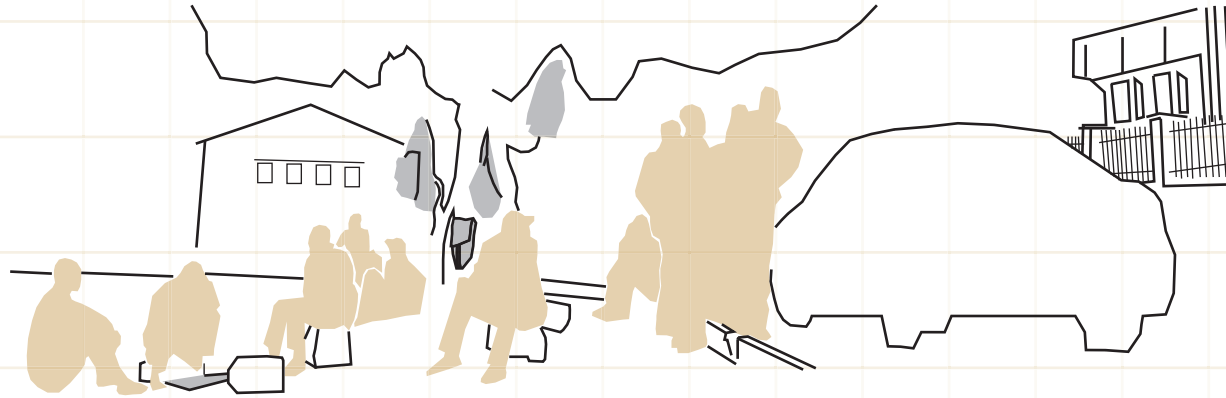
Overview of water kiosks in Chinsapo [May 2018]



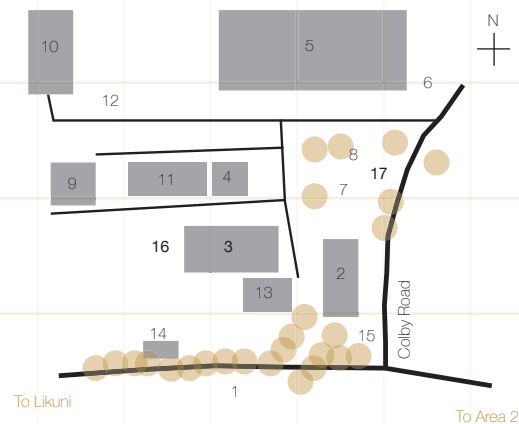
Overview of water kiosks in Lilongwe [May 2018]

Water kiosks, along with water tanks and pumps, do not only span a network that caters to those seeking clean water. They also orchestrate the daily movements, particularly for the women in Chinsapo, who often walk more than 20 minutes to the closest water kiosk. As such, footpaths are forged, faces are familiarized, news are being exchanged, and social ties and disconnects come to the forefront. Most interestingly, fetching water takes the domestic sphere, literally, to the streets. The fact that water kiosks are also used as places of encounter outside opening hours is living proof for their pulling power beyond being a source of water. For instance, a group of teenage boys might mingle underneath a water tank, listening and dancing to some music, or there can be two young women who appropriate the water kiosk and turn it into a bench to have a better chat. In this sense, water kiosks represent major nodes in neighborhoods like Chinsapo where, in a way, hardships can also be softened by being shared.



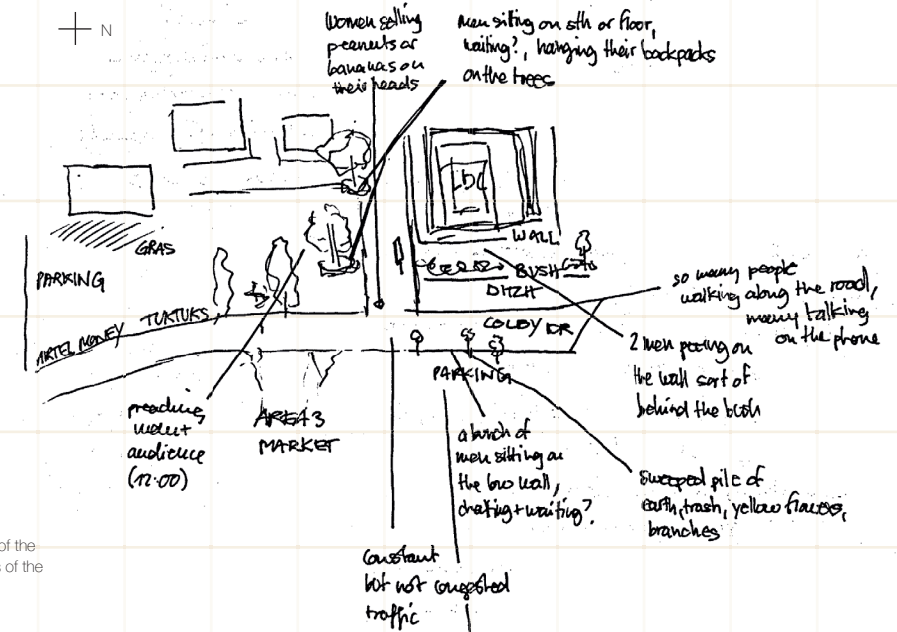


# LABOR OFFICE<sub>[ING]</sub>



- |                             |                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 „Labor“ Bus Depot         | 10 Court                  |
| 2 Lilongwe Cashier Office   | 11 Waiting Zone           |
| 3 Labor Office,             | 12 Desk with ID-Cards,    |
| Lilongwe District Council   | Draught Players           |
| 4 Offices for rent,         | 13 Street Food Vendors    |
| Storage for benches,        | 14 Department of Refugees |
| Print Shop for T-Shirts     | 15 Telecom Antenna        |
| 5 Lilongwe District Council | 16 TukTuk Stop,           |
| (under construction)        | AirTel + TNM Sales Point  |
| 6 Open Defecation           | 17 Female piece workers   |
| 7 Preacher's Corner         | Male piece workers        |
| 8 Bawo Players              |                           |
| 9 Magistrate Court,         |                           |
| Waiting Zone                |                           |

The Labor Office or „Rabor“ as people say (R and L are pronounced the same in Chichewa) is found in the Lilongwe District Council (LDC) building. It is centrally located in Old Town, close to commercial shops, banks, markets and transport hubs. During weekdays and daylight hours, many people pass through the premises for a multitude of reasons. One specific group will be given attention here: piece workers. When passing by the institutional area, one cannot help but notice the unusual high number of men sitting around in the dry green grass, underneath trees, and leaning at walls, seemingly waiting for something. At a first glance, it is not clear what they are waiting for, in a second thought, they do not seem to know either. Nonetheless, from all corners of Lilongwe they flock here to find work without any intention to apply for a job at the Labor Office. Instead, they run their very own labor office, outdoors, in public, on institutional land, with their very own welfare system. They are contracted on a work-on-demand-basis for however long employer and employee agree to. More euphemistically one could say they are freelancers. „We want quick and big money“, somebody explains without a hint of megalomania. Whether these piece workers make „quick and big money“ shall rest in the eye of the beholder. One

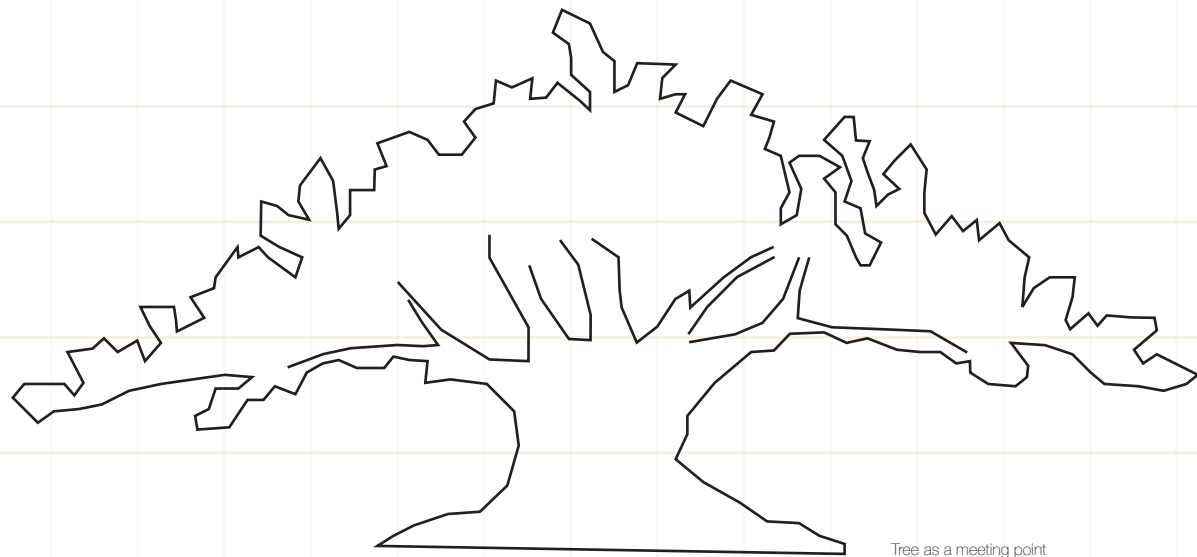


Mental map of the surroundings of the Labor Office

informant says that he has been coming here from Monday to Saturday since 2013 (others have been around since 2011). The minibus station is right next to the Labor Office but he cannot afford public transport so he walks up to an hour from home to „Rabor“ and back again. He used to be employed by a construction company before where he had earned slightly over 1,000 MK (ca. 2.50 Euros in 2013) per day while as a piece worker he can earn between 3,000 to 5,000 MK (ca. 3.50 to 5.80 Euros in 2018) - if he finds work. How does one find work? „You simply ask me. You are my human resources now“. This is to say, people find the piece workers, less the other way around. Competition is hard and it gets harder during dry season when even more people cover the earthen ground. The central location of this outdoor labor office is essential for the piece worker's income as they depend on high visibility and open accessibility for both themselves and their potential employers. If nobody knows you are looking for a job, how is one to give you a job? At the labor office, the rules of the game are fairly straightforward. Not only for the men waiting here but also for the women who come with the same intention but sit separately from the men. They mingle and wait for a (good) job offer in „their“ corner while sitting on the bare ground on their colorful chitenjes. Waiting, a

seemingly tedious affair, never seems to lead to boredom however, so they say. The men exchange news from their respective areas, they chat, listen to radio, play Bawo\*, eat local sugar cane or groundnuts, play with their phones (note: no smartphones), listen to the preachers who come here every noon, or, simply stay quiet and think of their families at home. When there is food, it is being shared. When somebody is missing, which means he has found a job, it is noticed as everyone knows each other's faces. Backpacks hang from the tree branches, signaling that one is always ready to do work. A brand new building, much bigger and modern, is currently being constructed opposite of the current office building and the LDC will soon move in although it is unclear how soon. Given the close proximity between the old and new building, existing patterns, networks and ties are likely to remain fairly the same. Heightened security measures, e.g. the walls around the new building, however, might trigger some changes. Currently, the LDC building seems to have a fairly relaxed policy for those who enter the building and who prefer the adjacent outdoor „office“, creating both an accessible and affordable meeting ground on formal premises for those living in informal areas and empowering them with a means to make a living.



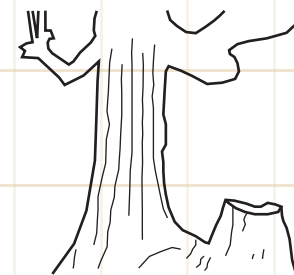


Tree as a meeting point

# KACHERE<sub>[ING]</sub>

In Malawi, **trees** are abundant and play a vital role not only as a resource for wood or in terms of ecology and aesthetics. Trees are being „used“ in a variety of ways. **People** frequently use their roots and stems as seating or tables, the branches are used as hangers and, most importantly, the crowns are pleasant umbrellas that protect from both sun and rain. The shape of the tree sets the parameters of usability. Certain trees have even gained a symbolic significance due to their shape. **Baobab trees**, for instance - majestically large, comically corpulent and often very old - are considered sacred and people „visit“ a tree to worship it. Then there is the **kachere tree**, a „very big tree where **people from different tribes** meet and share their problems and help each other“, as an **inhabitant from Lilongwe** describes it. Traditionally, the kachere tree, a ficus, marked the assembly point where a **traditional leader or „chief“** would make announcements while the **community** would gather and listen in its shade. Though the traditional use of the kachere tree is still very much alive in Malawi, the uses have expanded and evolved from there. Particularly in urban areas, where traditional worlds mix with modern lifestyles, the changes become most prevalent. In Chichewa, „kachere“ no longer only refers to a specific tree and

assembly point, it has become a synonym for meeting points in general. This is exemplified, for instance, in the naming practice of rest houses and lodges, which incorporate the word „kachere“, emphasizing that in the home away from home one will meet „people from different tribes“, too. Most interestingly, in Chinsapo [Area 57], the term „kachere“ has even been elevated to the name of an entire **neighborhood**. Subsequently, in this context, kachere is not necessarily associated with its traditional understanding, being a tree for gatherings, but also with a particular location in the urban fabric of Lilongwe. While Kachere in Chinsapo was named after a still existing kachere tree, marking the location of this neighborhood, the neighborhood itself has grown, expanded and, become a namesake. So there is a Kachere shop, a Kachere hair dresser, and a Kachere prison - none of which have any relation with the kachere tree and its assembly character. However, there are also exceptions. The Kachere Market is one. As it is the nature of markets, it attracts **vendors** and **customers** from around the area and **those attracted by the crowds**, forming a nucleus of public urban life within Chinsapo. It runs along a more or less straight dirt road and besides the typical commercial activities, one can observe that the market also serves as



Tree trunk as seating option



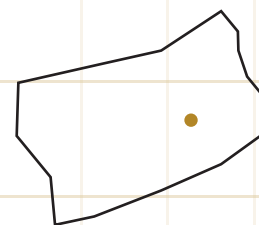
Sitting and eating around a tree



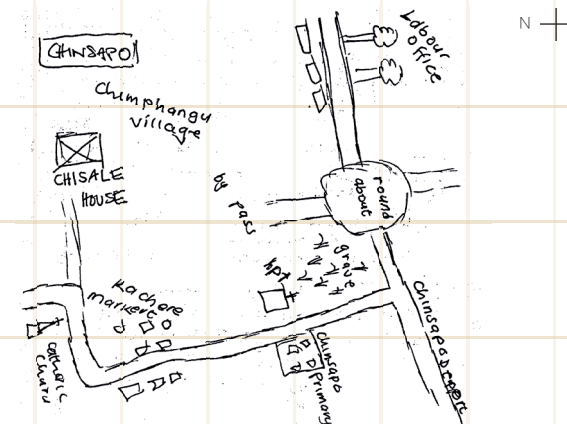
Tree trunk for poster ads



Tree crown for shading



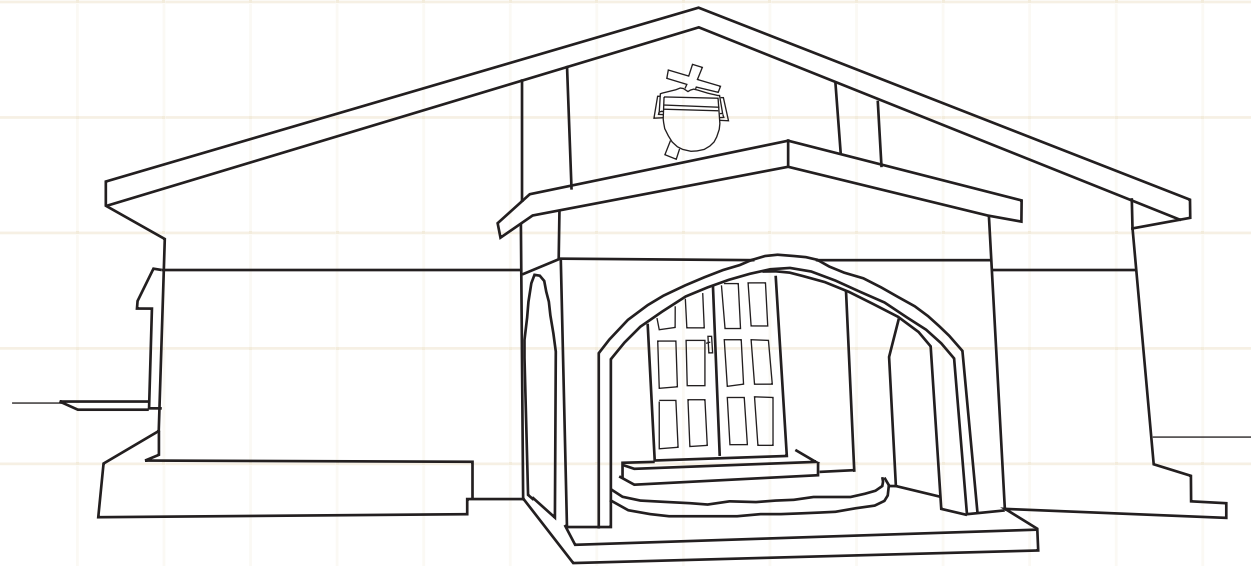
Tree as a name for a neighborhood



Drawing of Chinsapo by a local with the location of Kachere Market

a place to stop for a chat, where one visits each other, where children play, where news are being exchanged and where one can show face to see and be seen. In this manner, the market has become a landmark in Chinsapo, a location that can be identified by both **local residents** and **those coming from elsewhere** as „Kachere“ is also a fixed stop on Lilongwe's minibus routes coming from Old Town. Remarkably, despite being a somewhat prominent place within Chinsapo, there is no sign, not a name plate nor an indicative line, that would officially pay tribute to Kachere as a neighborhood. It shows up in no maps, no plans, no drawings. But it exists - in the minds of the people. To know about the Kachere Market or „kacheres“ in general then requires to know **people who know** and tell you about it. In a way, kachere trees and its conceptual offsprings can thus be read as indicators for already existing public spaces in Lilongwe's urban fabric, even when they have not materialized (yet) in **Lilongwe's formal geographies**. Different to planned public spaces, they were born from a tradition and are flexible enough to accommodate transformations that go hand in hand with the changes of public urban life. So, when a tree turns into a lodge or a neighborhood, it can still retain its „kachere character“ but, other than town halls or memorial towers, these landmarks were not artificially built but planted organically. Thus, they potentially provide a socially more sustainable and fertile soil for public urban life that is less imposed and more at ease.





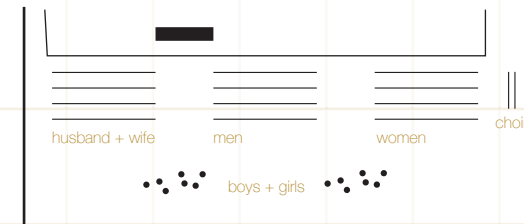
# CHURCH<sub>[ING]</sub>

Religion plays a very important role in the life of **most Malawians**, which the country largely owes to its long and influential history of **missionaries**. It began in the 19th century when **British colonizers and explorers** like David Livingstone carried „Christianity, commerce and civilization“ to Malawi (Nkomazana 1998). This first put a halt to the brutal and bloody slave trade by the **Arabs** and then also introduced a previously non-existent education and health sector to the country. The construction of missionary schools and hospitals improved Malawian living standards significantly and up to today missionaries enjoy a rather positive reputation. Most Malawians are **Christians** (83% in 2010), the second largest group is formed by **Muslims** (13%), a legacy left by the Arabs and particularly prevalent in Malawi's Southern Region. Most Christian Malawians attend services on Sundays, while some are Sa-

turday **church-goers**. One cannot help but notice that practices of worship are part of everyday public life not only in church. They enter all kinds of situations even though its presence has begun to shrink among younger generations in urban areas. Still, an overwhelming majority regularly prays before eating a meal and after meetings. Frequently, one makes references to **God** in their speech. It appears, being a **devoted Christian** is part of public decency, no matter if one is a **faithful service attendant** or not. So, for many Malawians, attending church service on weekends is an undebatable deed practiced religiously nationwide. An **inhabitant from Lilongwe** explains why: „There are two reasons why Malawians attend church. For one, church is the center point for spiritual guidance and God's connection. Secondly, to ensure a respectful funeral that is according to faith's protocol. Not for yourself...when you are dead, you are dead...You don't want to disgrace your **family**. If there is no protocol, there is no control and **people** just smoke and drink during your funeral“. So on Sundays, most businesses and offices close, work is put down and the chitenje is replaced by a fancy, yet elegant dress, while men put on a suit to go to church. Most church buildings in Lilongwe are solitary structures, in Kauma\*, however, not only one but

## RELIGION IN MALAWI

83 % Christian  
13 % Muslim  
2.0 % Other (Hindu, Rastafarian, Jewish)  
—  
2.0 % No Religion  
—



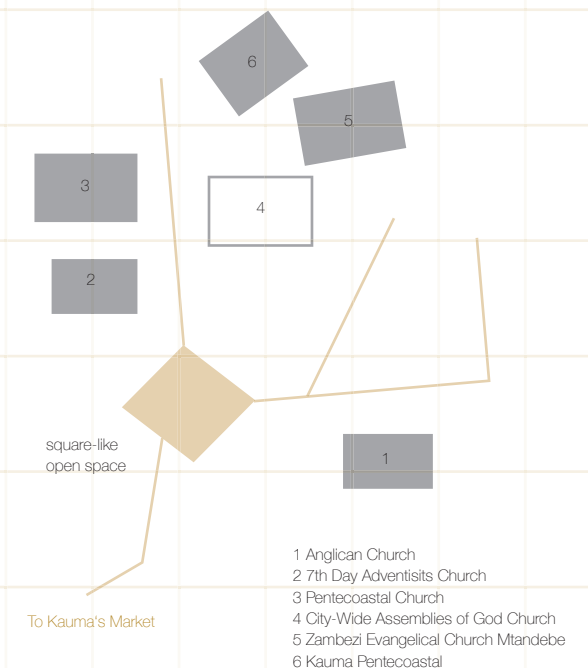
Seating chart during service at the City-Wide Assemblies of God Church

several **churches** line the road. Somewhat resembling a church or churches square, it is here where **Kauma's inhabitants** meet each other on weekends. One can rest assured that one's **family, friends, and neighbors** as well as **unknown faces of the same denomination** will be around. In Kauma, church services are in Chichewa but there are also a number of English services in Lilongwe that accommodate non-Chichewa speakers. During service, **men and women** sit separately unless one is married. Before and after service, one can mingle, representing one of the few spaces where a **married man** and a **married woman** can be seen together in public without raising eyebrows. **Children** play in the open space around the churches as well as in the last row of seats in the church. Some people, particularly children again, snack from a small cone of popcorn during mass which they bought outside for 20 MK from a **street vendor**. Some devoted **church members** come to church early to attend bible school or to exchange anecdotes from the past week in which they personally witnessed God's workings. The square fills up and empties again in steady flows as church services begin and end at different times. Never is there a feeling of overpopulation. One can comfortably spot familiar faces and have a chat before parting just to see each other, latest, next weekend again.

On special occasions like weddings, churches become an attraction not only to **those of the same denomination** but for all **wedding guests**. A woman from Lilongwe, who used to be a regular „wedding crasher“ as a **teenager** comments: „Everybody thinks they

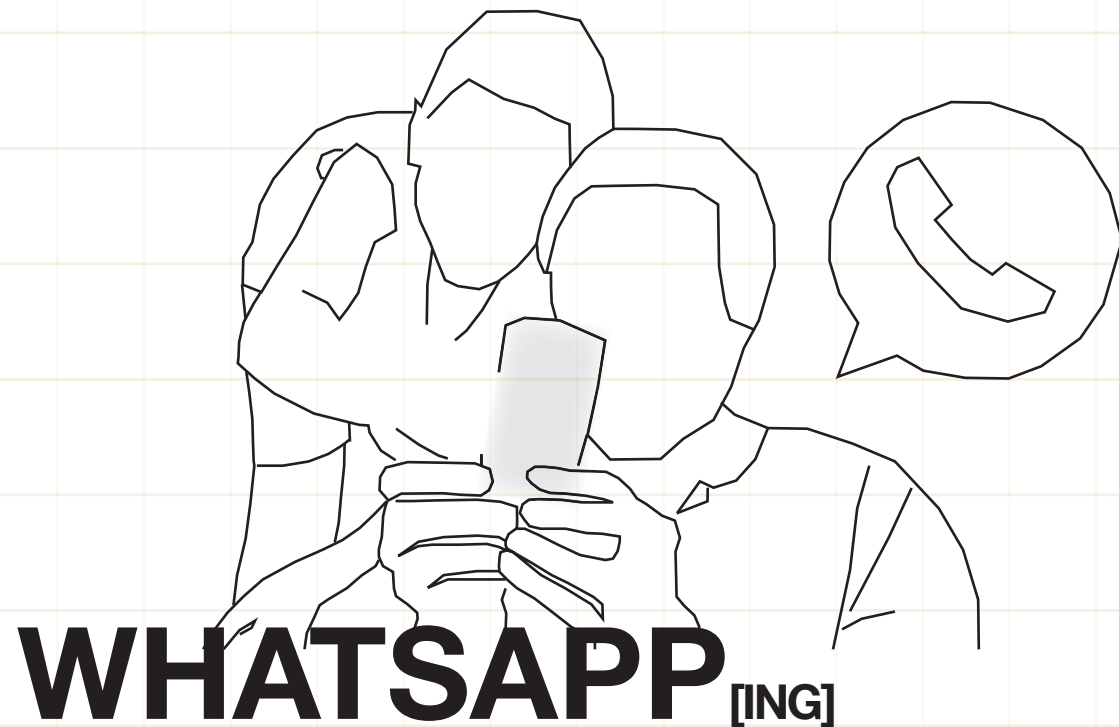
are invited“ so usually, in the afternoon, when snacks and drinks are being served, the number of „guests“ suddenly swells up. „It's private but it becomes public because nobody will stop you“, the woman explains and adds „because of your skin color, they will give you a chair“, referring to the special status of **azungus\***.

Churches in Lilongwe tend to be very inclusive places as religious denominations generally have an interest to grow. The fact that many Malawians foster a deep connection with (a) God produces a not so insignificant pulling power of public urban life. Due to the great attraction of Sunday and Saturday church services, public urban life in Lilongwe is given a steady rhythm in which many other forms of public urban life must operate, too. To acknowledge the fact that certain beliefs and temporalities can override other forms of public urban life appears to be yet another crucial aspect of Lilongwe's public spaces.



- 1 Anglican Church
- 2 7th Day Adventists Church
- 3 Pentecostal Church
- 4 City-Wide Assemblies of God Church
- 5 Zambezi Evangelical Church Mtandebu
- 6 Kauma Pentecostal





„In countries like Malawi where mobile phone companies ask for an arm and a leg for SMS service, WhatsApp is god-sent“. This is how a journalist begins his newspaper article about WhatsApp in Malawi, bringing the secret of its success to the point. WhatsApp, a free messenger application that works with most mobile phones capable of connecting to the internet, is widely used in Malawi. It represents a means of communication ranging from informal chitchat among friends to professional discussions with superiors. On some government websites, WhatsApp numbers are even given as an optional contact. Why, despite many other alternatives, is WhatsApp so ubiquitously present in Malawi's society? Perhaps due to the fact that it is affordable, fairly reliable and it offers a few additional services a text message simply could not do for you, such as sending images, videos, and recordings. Perhaps WhatsApp was just in the right place at the right time. In 2009, Malawi's two mobile operators TNM and AirTel introduced mobile-broadband and, in the same year, WhatsApp entered the market. Both, TNM and AirTel offer daily, weekly and monthly WhatsApp bundles customers can purchase to use only WhatsApp specifically. Fact is, WhatsApp has become more than a simple two-way-communication medium

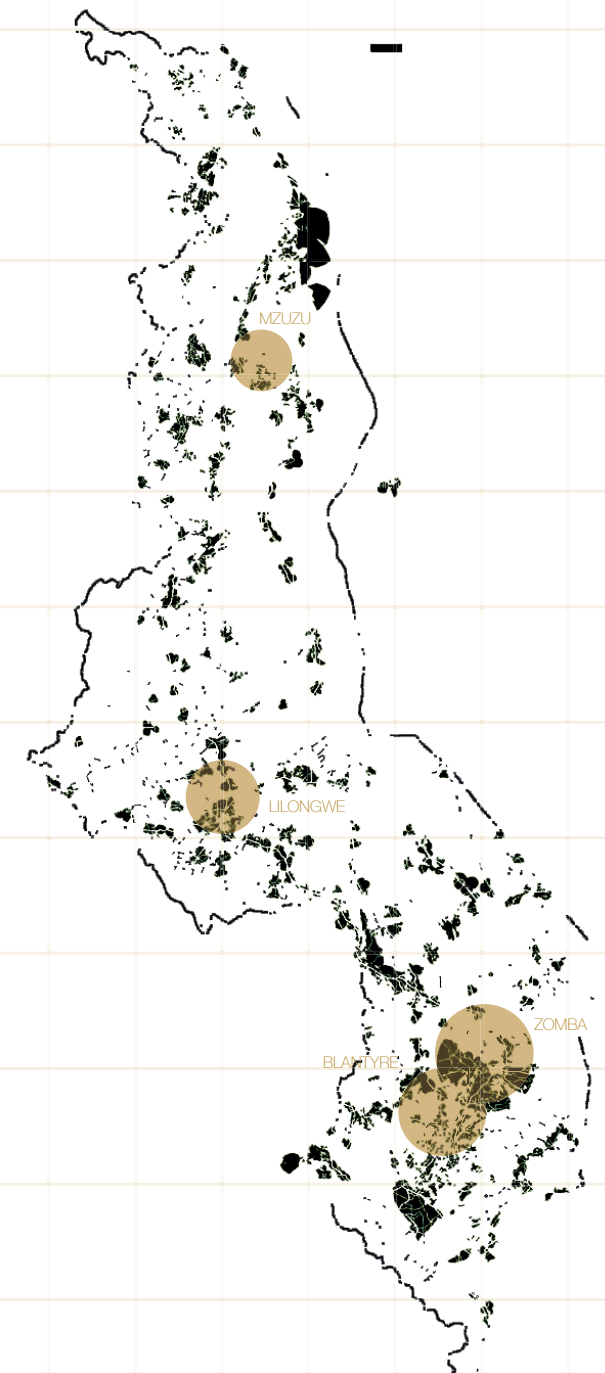
between two individuals. Group chats have opened up the channels of communication to a wider public. In a country where basic infrastructures struggle to make ends meet, the digital network of WhatsApp enables people in Lilongwe to overcome certain shortcomings through collaboration and exchange. This is to say, if you own or have access to a mobile phone that is compatible with the application, if you are connected to electricity, and if you can afford the phone credit. For large groups of people, these obstacles are still impossible to overcome. Those who can, though, and



Facebook posts with referrals to WhatsApp groups

” IN COUNTRIES LIKE MALAWI WHERE MOBILE PHONE COMPANIES ASK FOR AN ARM AND A LEG FOR SMS SERVICE, WHATSAPP IS GOD-SENT. ”

nearly everyone who can also does, uses WhatsApp and their group chat function. By now, the majority of Malawians own a mobile phone but it still belongs very much to the urban domain as ownership rates in urban households are at 85% and only 42% in rural households (MACRA 2015). Through WhatsApp groups, the real time messaging application transforms into a broader social media platform that allows WhatsApp users to connect on all matters of concern. Its significance in Malawi's society is exemplified by the fact that other social media platforms, like Facebook, are even being used to connect on WhatsApp. Something along the lines of „oh I hate WhatsApp groups, I'm already in so many“, can frequently be heard, yet boycotting WhatsApp groups rarely becomes an option as the benefits and their presence in and for public debate are too vast to ignore. From finding likeminded people, to exchanging news and knowledge, to doing business, WhatsApp often facilitates the discussion of current affairs as well as the first contact between two or more strangers. As such, it embodies a space where time is being shared while being in separate locations. Moreover, it functions as a virtual prequel to a potential meeting in urban space which, in a way, turns the place of encounter into a public space, though admittedly, it is a very selected public. With this in mind and depending on the context, the member limit of 256 people per WhatsApp group can either be read as an annoying technocratic feature or as a welcome gatekeeper, ensuring that any given public is exclusive to 256 members only.



TNM mobile phone coverage in Malawi: customers in urban areas have the „best signals“ while particularly border and lake regions have only „fair signals“ with a few exceptions.



# BAWO

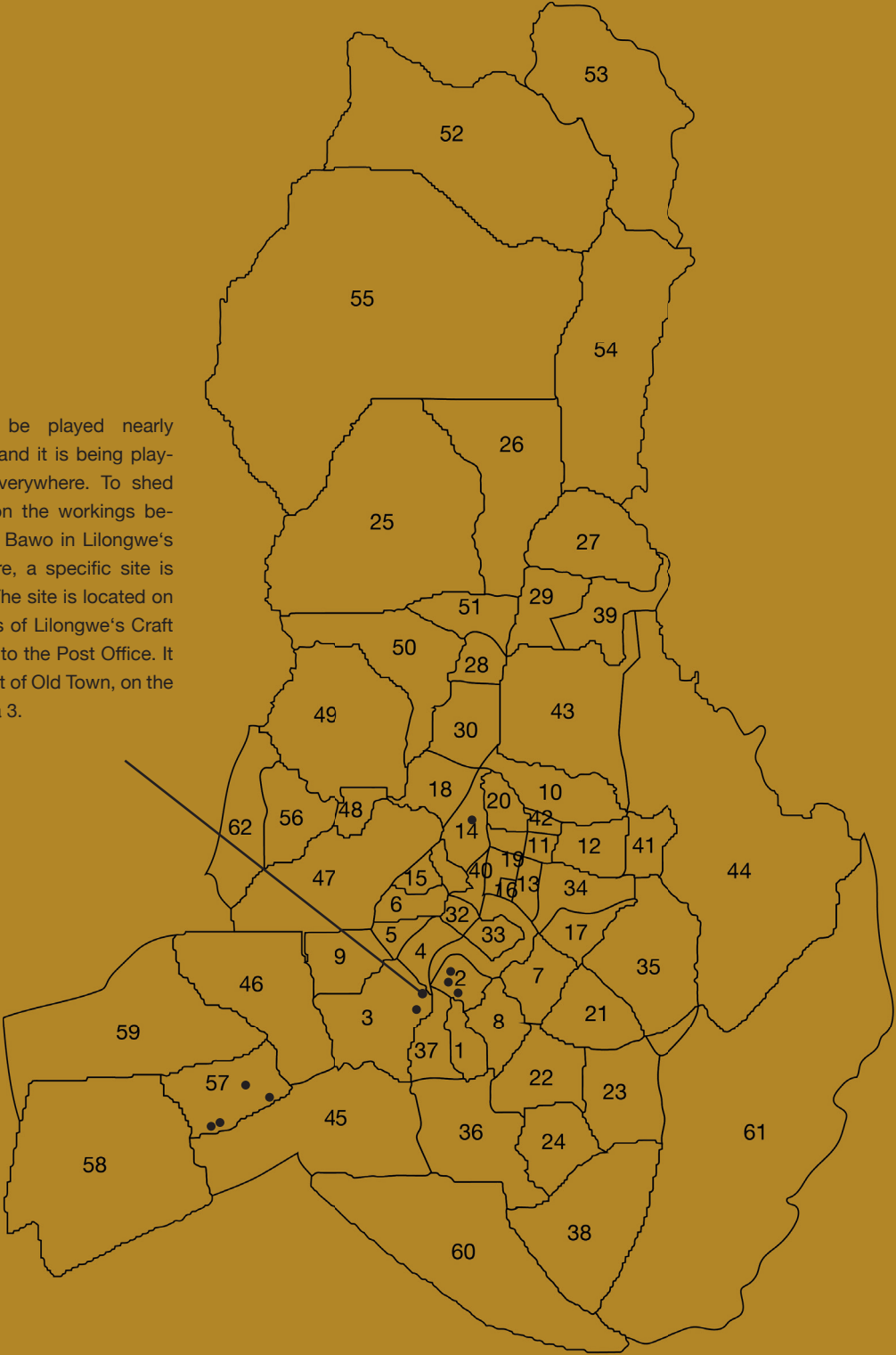
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ZOOM-IN



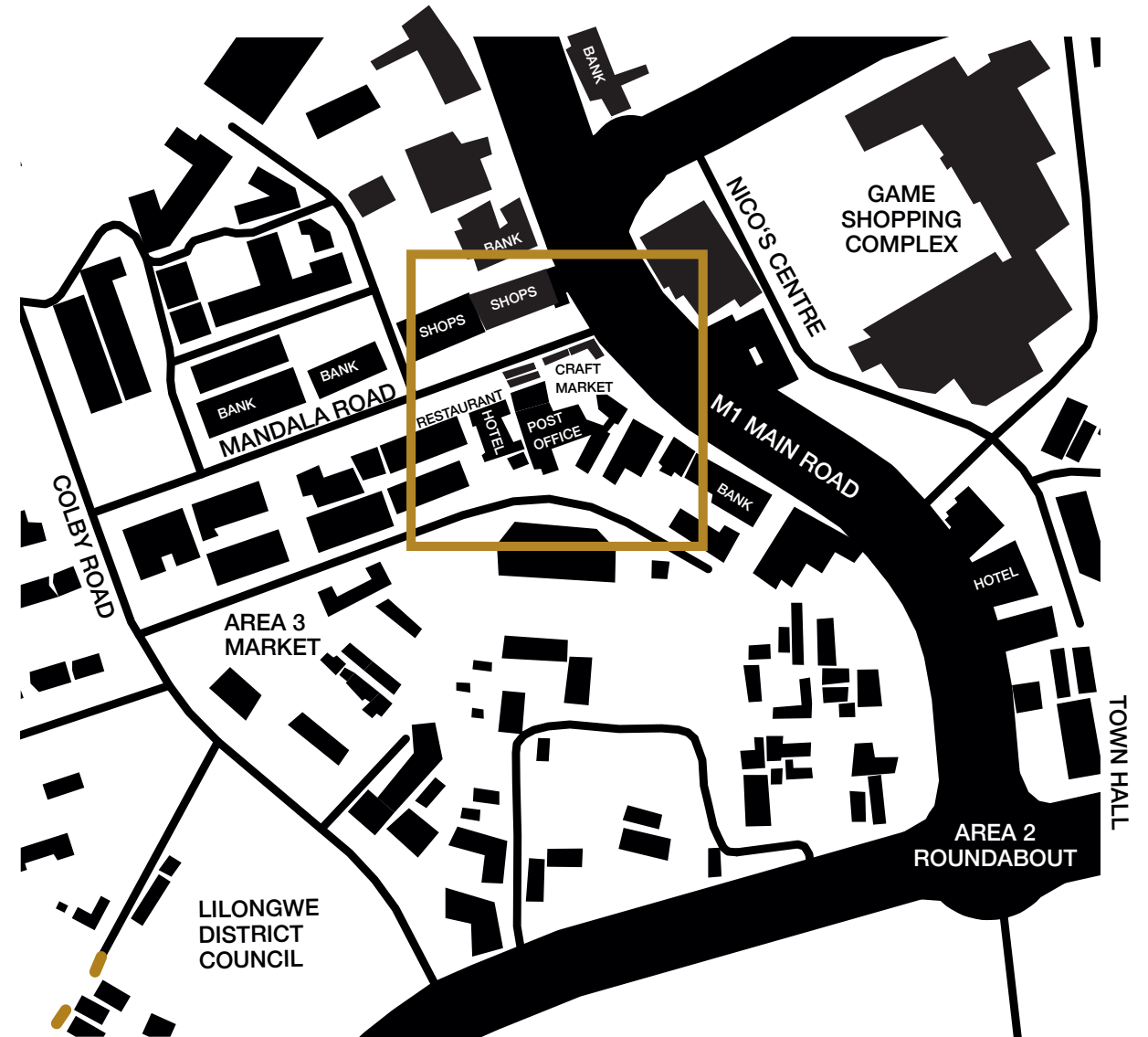
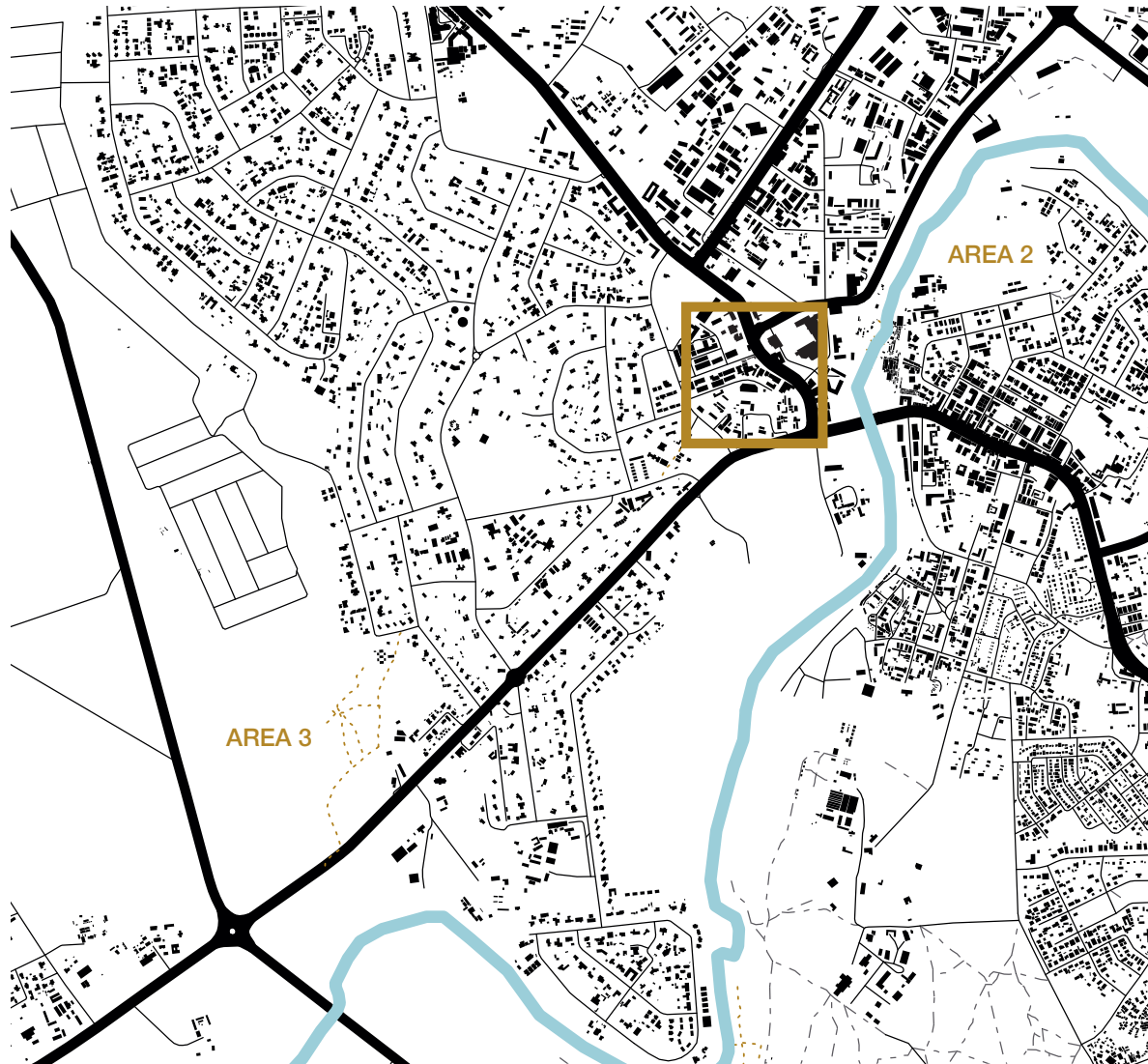
Bawo can be played nearly everywhere and it is being played nearly everywhere. To shed more light on the workings behind playing Bawo in Lilongwe's public sphere, a specific site is presented. The site is located on the premises of Lilongwe's Craft Market next to the Post Office. It is in the heart of Old Town, on the edge of Area 3.



Before one can see them, one is likely to hear them. Tap, tap, tap, tap, TAP. It is the sound of **people playing Bawo**. Depending on the material of the board and the seeds being used, the sounds may come out shrill, clunky, and brassy or slightly dull, heavy, and muffled. Either way, the sounds are produced by the movement of seeds, perhaps in the shape of marbles, beans, or shells, hitting a metal or wooden board. Players move one or several seeds from one pocket to another and, oftentimes, finish their last move with a smash, signaling to the other player that it is his or her turn. Likewise, these signature sounds work like soft sirens, luring in players and **spectators** alike. In the soundscapes of Lilongwe, the Bawo taps can easily get lost in the shuffle. Once one pays attention to these sounds, though, they seem to appear from, literally, every corner of the city. Wherever there are **small or large crowds**, Bawo games are not far to be found.

Bawo is being played all over Malawi. Only a Bawo board and a few seeds are needed. All the materials are portable so that a game can technically be played almost everywhere.









A typology of bawo game settings as observed all over Lilongwe

# THE NAME OF THE GAME IS BAWO

Bawo or bao [pronounce: „bow“] is being played up and down the eastern coast of Africa. In fact, different variations of it are being played all over Africa, in Asia, the Caribbean, South America as well as some parts of Europe. Bawo belongs to the class of *mancala* board games in which the goal is to capture and destruct the opponent by spreading seeds or similar objects (*mancala* is derived from the Arabic term „to move“). While Bawo in Malawi is played on a board with four rows, other variations only have two or three and also follow different rules. The historical roots of Bawo are disputed. Some claim that it even goes as far back as to the Ancient Egyptians. In any case, there is agreement on the fact that Bawo has already been played for many generations and will most likely be played for many more generations to come. Bawo is being played on a district, regional and national level, in both rural and urban areas. Interestingly, it is played across **all generations, genders, tribes, religions, and socioeconomic strata**, though, to various degrees of enthusiasm. Many learn how to play the game already at a young age and „hardly a **Malawian** passes through childhood, graduating to adolescence...without having learnt bawo. Even the **urbanized youth** more familiar with reggae or hip-hop culture has at some point in his life been exposed to this ‚count-and-capture‘ board game“ (Chimombo 2009). One might not actively pursue playing it but the rules are known to nearly everyone, despite the fact that the rules of the game can be fairly complex. The rules are hard to make out only by watching other players. Much of what occurs on the board might not exactly reflect what is going through a player’s mind as the movements do not necessarily show every single step towards making the move played. „It is important to count“, an avid Bawo player clarifies. It is important to count the number of seeds in a pocket, on the board as a whole, and the number of pockets one can traverse with a move. Bawo is very much a mathematical mind game that requires much skill and experience if one aspires to be a good player. There are two sets of rules how Bawo can be played, a basic and advanced version. In all seriousness, they are also commonly referred to as „women’s and children’s version“ and „men’s version“, somewhat reflecting how gender roles are broadly perceived in this country. The basic version is easier to learn and play, the advanced version works like the basic version but starts with a more complex setup.

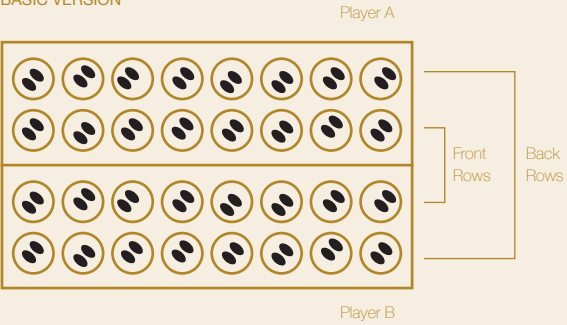
In order to learn the rules and to become an **advanced player**, one needs to have time to „waste time“, as some would say. For many people in Malawi, time spent on something that does not earn you something is a luxury one cannot afford. If one, however, has so much time at hand because nothing is being gained anyway, leisure time comes in excess and pastime activities like Bawo turn into welcome distractions. In urban areas of Malawi, both wo-

men and men are equally considered **breadwinners** even though not everyone necessarily works for an income for varying reasons. In any case, **women** additionally carry the burden of taking care of the domestic sphere. So, speaking of time, it is impossible to ignore that the majority of Bawo players seen in public are **men**. It is men of different age and social standing but it is nearly always only men. Upon asking a woman from Lilongwe why she barely plays Bawo despite the fact that she knows the rules and enjoys playing it, she confirms: „It is a game for men. They have nothing to do. They have time for this“. Women, as she is implying, need to do the cooking, and washing, and take care of the **children** and, therefore, do not have time to waste time with playing Bawo. Anyway, she much more prefers to chat, she adds. So it happens that one mostly sees **groups of men** playing the game and only in few cases one may spot the odd woman playing as well. Similar gender divisions are found in a number of other pastime activities, for instance, in football and netball, the former being a predominantly male activity, while the latter is mostly played by girls and women.

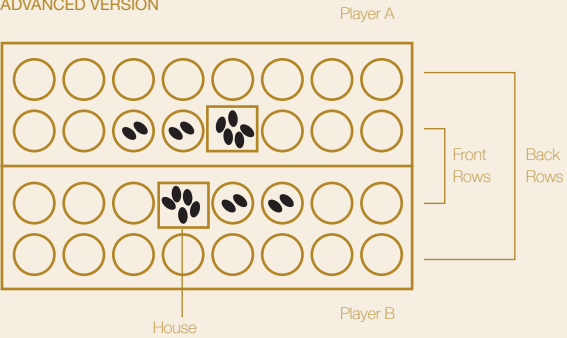
As already briefly touched upon, when two players get together to play a round of Bawo, oftentimes they do not stay alone for too long. Bawo is generally a game made for two but offering entertainment for many. Rarely is it played in the privacy of one’s home as playing Bawo outside appears to be just as much a feature of the game as the board and its seeds itself. Thus, it is deliberately set up in prominent places where the public is sure to spot the players. Spectators and other **eager players** then join and surround the **two players**, closely paying attention to every move, commenting and debating in both excitement and despair once a move was made. Silence, however, generally wraps the thoughts of a Bawo player. One could compare it to the atmosphere of a chess or tennis game. Bawo games are shows without conscious performers as the performing artists are usually entirely taken up by the game, paying little attention to its audience. A game usually does not last longer than 15 to 20 minutes, **experienced players** barely take a minute to make out what will be their next move (continuously counting and counting). When there is no board to play on, a Bawo game can easily and economically be set up by digging a few holes into the ground and collecting a few seeds. Some claim that this is how Bawo originally developed on the lake shores of Malawi, by digging holes in the sand on the beach. In this manner, Bawo represents a very social and inclusive game where technically everyone interested in watching or participating is welcome. Depending on the social make up of a Bawo setting, however, they can also trigger feelings of intimidation, disturbance, or perhaps even hostility. If there is money involved, for instance, players also begin to scan the spectators carefully before slipping a banknote under the board. Rarely anyone would openly admit that they are gambling. For one, in a religious country like Malawi, gambling is frowned upon and regarded as an evil of society.



BASIC VERSION



ADVANCED VERSION



START Place two seeds in each of your pockets.

MOVE Start moving by picking up all of the seeds in one pocket and drop one seed every time you pass a pocket. You can choose whether to move clockwise or counterclockwise. Your last seed dropped determines whether you can carry on moving and spreading your seeds.

TURN OVER If your last seed ends in an empty pocket, your turn is over.

SPREAD If your last seed ends in a back row and the pocket is not empty, pick up all of the seeds in the pocket and carry on moving in the direction you chose before.

CAPTURE/EAT If your last seed ends in a front row opposite your opponent's front row, pick up and capture your opponent's seeds. If the pocket is empty, your turn ends. Note: If you cannot capture with your first move, your turn ends too.

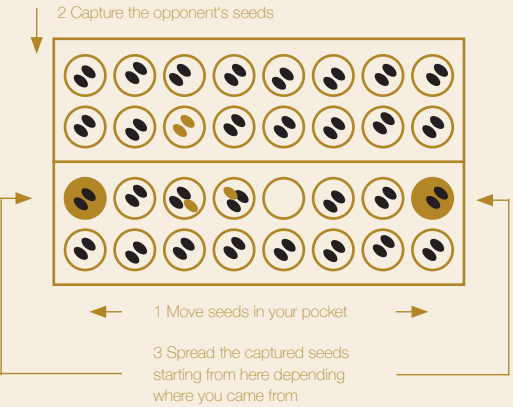
MOVE AFTER CAPTURE Spread your new seeds beginning with the first pocket in the front row. If you moved clockwise (left) before, you need to start on the right side and vice versa.

HOW TO PLAY BAWO

**Set Up**  
2 Players  
1 Bawo Board  
64 Seeds [32 per person]

**Goal**  
Capture all of your opponent's front row seeds OR paralyze your opponent by leaving him/her with only one seed in each pocket.

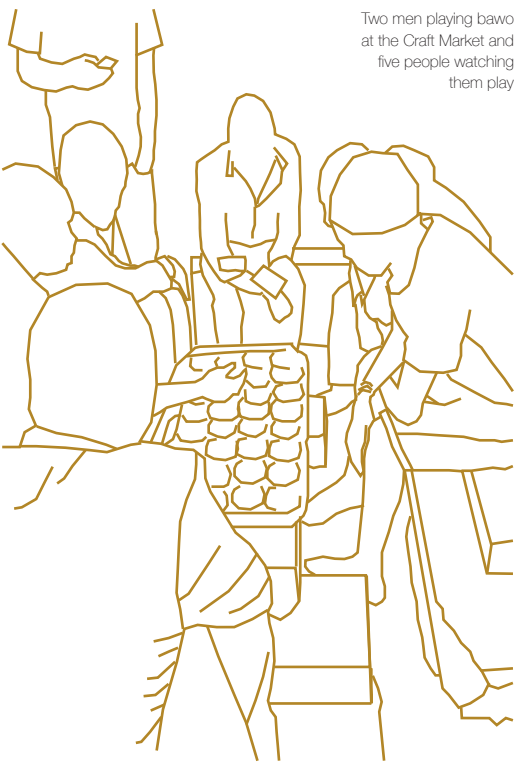
**Organization**  
Each player owns a front and back row and, in the beginning, has 32 seeds. By moving your own seeds, you will attempt to intrude on the opponent's front row in order to capture the seeds in the pocket attacked. Only the front row can be attacked, the back row is a safe zone.



Secondly, there are men who play Bawo as their source of income which brings about an entire new dimension to the game of Bawo. They gamble to survive but have to stay below the radar because in Malawi unlicensed gambling is illegal and punishable by law. Spontaneous, informal settings like these follow informal rules, though, and the rules of gambling are usually negotiated on the spot, not in court. In order to get a greater perspective on how Bawo[ing] comes about, is influenced and influences its immediate surroundings, in the following, I will focus on a specific site where Bawo players frequently come together to play. Thereby, they leave a clear footprint in Lilongwe's urban fabric that is less temporary than the board game might suggest.

THE BAWO ARENA

Lilongwe's **Craft Market** is located on the premises of Lilongwe's **Post Office** in the very center of Old Town, amidst bustling businesses, shops, banks, traffic and all kinds of city commotion. Originally, the market developed from a few informal stalls with simple sheets or self-built structures. Today, it extends to more than 30 stalls, all lined up where perhaps otherwise there would have been more parking spaces. As of mid 2017, some of the informal structures were replaced by more permanent structures that are made of concrete walls and corrugated iron roofs in contrast to wooden branches, cardboards, plastic and wires. While **vendors** did not pay any market fees before, as technically they had only created the market through encroachment, the permanent structures can only be used for a monthly fee of 8,000 MK (ca. 9,50 Euro). Despite the extra costs, the benefits seem to outweigh the financial burden. Particularly the roof is being welcomed by the vendors and envied by those who are still confined to their temporary structures. „When it rains, we can't sell while the others make business. It's not fair“, one of the vendors explains and who is waiting for more permanent structures to be built. Simultaneously to the renovation work at the Post Office, they were constructed as part of a **public sector** program endorsed by the current **president**. The Post Office has now become the **MLAMBE CENTER**, shining bright in red and yellow colors. It is also known as One Stop Public Service Delivery Center, where Lilongwe's inhabitants can collect passports, drivers' licenses, ID cards, birth and death certificates and manage paper work for their vehicles all in one place on top of sending their regular mail. A milestone in Lilongwe's public service delivery sector. As a result, the people who frequent the premises of the MLAMBE CENTER can be regarded as **desirable customers** for the craft vendors as they are likely to belong to a middle to upper income class with money to spend on luxury items such as arts and crafts. Many vehicles and **pedestrians** pass by day in and day out at the M1 main road and Mandala Road intersection. The traffic only stops at nighttime



Two men playing bawo at the Craft Market and five people watching them play

and the Craft Market is clearly visible from there. This works for the market's advantage as it might catch somebody's attention with an interest to buy, say, one of the **tourists** from the handful of hotels nearby who tend to be willing to spend more money on any given item, knowingly or unknowingly. The Craft Market exclusively sells crafts ranging from chitenje bags over wood figurines and reed baskets to hand painted canvases. Many stalls on the Craft Market sell similar objects with slight variations to accommodate different tastes. But there is no sight of any fruits and vegetables, fresh meat or secondhand products as on other markets in Lilongwe. Strictly arts and crafts seems to be the rule. There are also no, or barely any, **street hawkers** who try to make an additional Kwacha, though, they can be seen roaming the streets only few meters away from the Craft Market. On other markets in Lilongwe, they are frequent nuisances or perceived as competition by the more **immobile market vendors**, at times being the source of conflicts. Recently elevated from the main road and with only one main entrance street hawkers usually refrain from entering the premises. Perhaps this is due to the presence of several levels of authority. For one, the MLAMBE CENTER is a public building with **civil workers** and there are also paid **guards** who patrol the parking lot. Moreover, there is an **officer who collects the parking fees** and who has a constant eye on the parking space, watching who is coming in and going out. Ironically, parking tickets are then handed





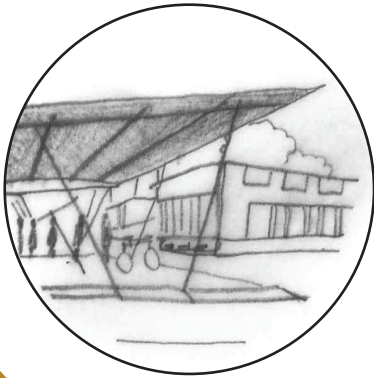
**8 HOTEL**

Next to the Craft Market is the Kiboko Hotel, a popular accommodation option for tourists visiting Lilongwe. Many of them also pay the Craft Market a visit. Guests of the Kiboko Hotel are often from Europe or other Western countries. They stand out with their appearance, therefore, attracting the vendors's attention in the hope to make good business.



**4 ENTRANCE**

The Craft Market is accessed through a two-lane vehicle entrance that leads directly onto the parking lot. Car traffic is moderate though consistent, the same can be said about pedestrians coming in and out.



**5 PERMANENT STRUCTURES**

As of spring 2017, the informal Craft Market has been slightly re-developed and permanent stalls were put in place where there were only self-built stalls before. The Craft Market, now fully acknowledged as such, was further elevated from its surrounding roads.



**6 TEMPORARY STRUCTURES**

Most craft vendors started out with a simple blanket or sheet to sit on. Some constructed their own market stand to be more on eye-level with potential customers, leaving skeletons of wood and wire behind at night. As the parking lot is lined with large trees, the vending space is fairly shaded. Some craft vendors can be seen making their products on the very same spot, for example, carving a wood figurine, though this has become a rarer sight these days.

**7 SECOND EXIT**

Technically, the parking lot is not an enclosed space as there is a second exit that leads back onto the M1 main road. However, it is much less used, perhaps due to the fact that it is not clearly visible from the main parking lot and that oftentimes heavy traffic awaits outside. Most people take the main entrance and exit the same way.



**3 PARKING LOT**

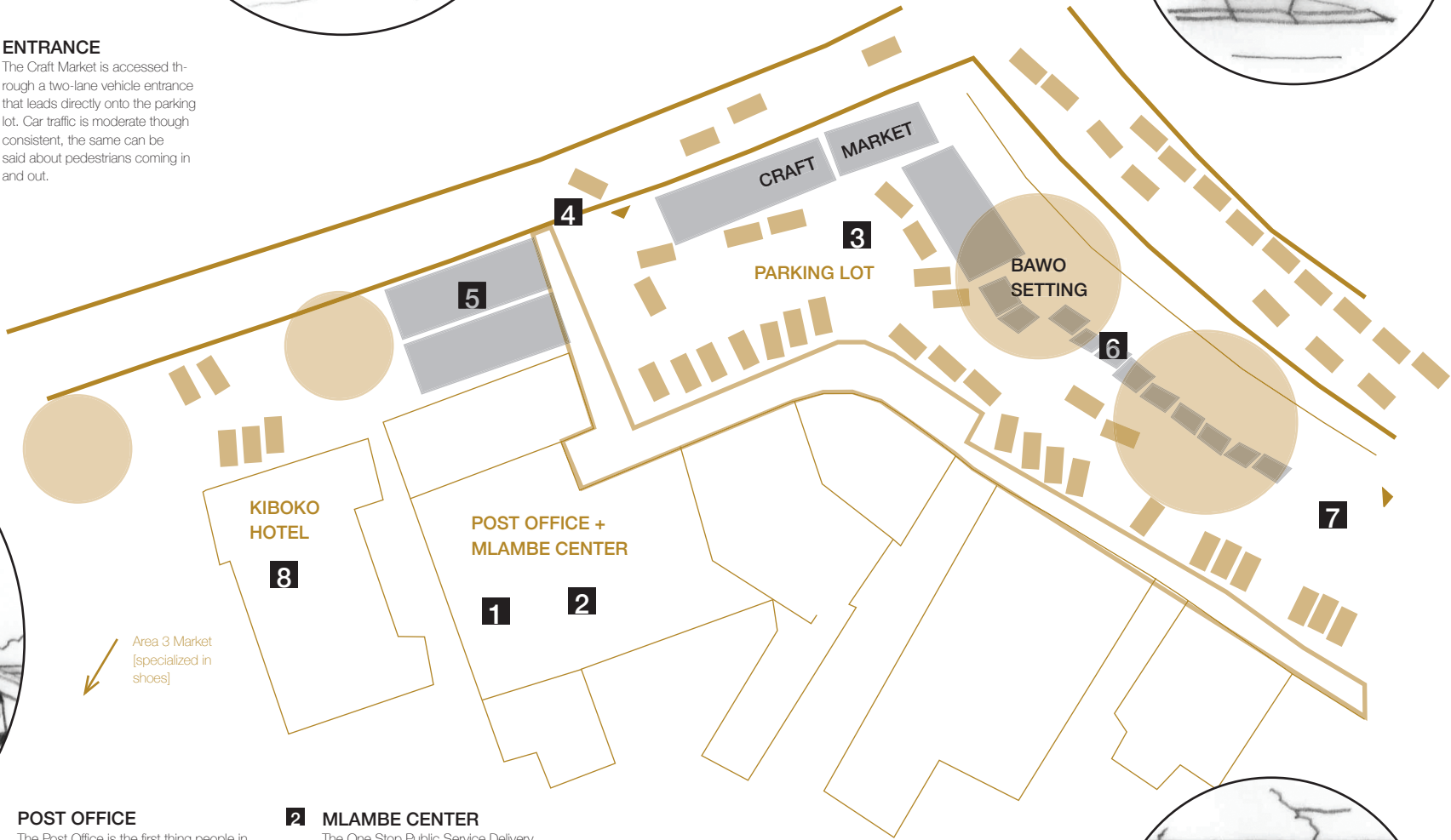
The parking lot is located in a highly central location of Lilongwe and, as such, does not only attract visitors of the Post Office, the MLAMBE CENTER, or the Craft Market. The parking lot encompasses any open space between the buildings and the market stalls as long there is enough room for a car to pass through. Parking for a day costs 100 MK (ca. 0.12 Euros).

**2 MLAMBE CENTER**

The One Stop Public Service Delivery Center, generally referred to as MLAMBE CENTER, was opened in 2017 in response to the public service stations in Lilongwe that struggle to cope with the masses coming to their offices and dealing with their requests (*mlambe* is the Chichewa word for „baobab“).

**1 POST OFFICE**

The Post Office is the first thing people in Lilongwe associate with this location. During weekdays, there is a steady flow of people coming in and out. It has also attracted street vendors who have specialized in selling envelopes, pens, paper, and post stamps, selling right outside the Post Office's entrance. Since the MLAMBE CENTER was installed, the building shines in bright red and yellow facades.

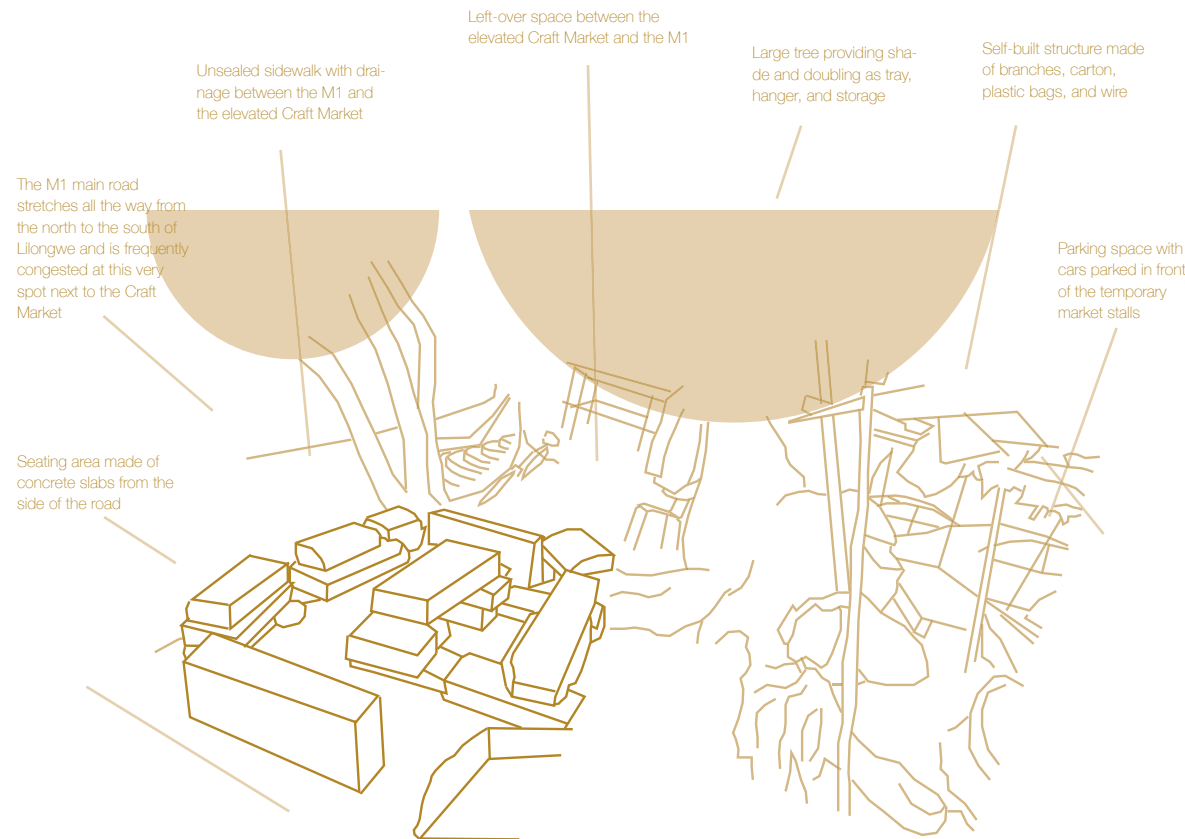




Bawo setting behind a self-built structure next to a permanent structure at the Craft Market in Old Town







Bawo setting at the Craft Market

out for 100 MK (ca. 12 Cents) per day right through the car window in the same manner as a street hawker would approach potential customers.

How is all of this relevant to the game of Bawo being played at the Craft Market, one might ask. In short: very much. This particular Bawo setting has come to exist due to several circumstances that are tied to the place, people and objects surrounding it. First off, the site of this Bawo setting is predominantly frequented by the **vendors of the Craft Market** themselves, exclusively all **male**. They used to play on wooden benches as it is common fashion all over Lilongwe. Nowadays, they have a seating area made of stacked concrete slabs. In the shade of a large tree stuck behind a temporary stall, the seating area was only set up in March 2018 by the vendor who is based right next door. In fact, his stall stands where the borderline between permanent and temporary structures begins, his currently being the last permanent post. **Steven** (name was changed by the author) thought it was too „worrisome“ to wait around and simply built the seating area from material he found on the side of the road in order to create a more comfortable environment for himself and fellow Bawo players. More permanent structures, according to **City Council**, are planned yet the vendors are still wait-

ing for their implementation. Steven came to Lilongwe in 2003 and used to sell in a self-built structure until he took the opportunity to sell his products from the comfort of a roofed stall. He speaks an eloquent English, and he is an avid Bawo player.

Every day, except Sundays, from around 9 AM, the Craft Market begins to open its nonexistent doors. One by one, the vendors arrive at their stalls and begin unpacking and setting up their products which they leave more or less secured on the premises over night for it is too cumbersome to carry the objects back and forth. Particularly since the vendors either walk or make use of public transport. To be extra sure, the vendors collectively pay **four night guards** who have an eye on what is essentially their income, social security, and safety net. When the vendors get ready for their customers, the first round of Bawo is soon to be played. Idle time is a good time to play and mornings seem to begin slowly despite the fact that there is already **plenty of people and cars** going in and out of the parking lot of the MLAMBE CENTER. It seems that **arts and craft shoppers** do not necessarily have rush hours for the art of strolling through an arts and craft market is also one that defies time. So here they meet: the **idlers** and **flâneurs**. Despite the associations that may come up, in a way both being **was-**

**ters of time**, there surely is no time wasted when there is business involved. Vendors overload a **potential customer** with purchase options, mostly verbally, sometimes literally. If the bait is not attractive enough one can ask for „a good price“ though the „good price“ generally stays higher than in other locations in Lilongwe selling similar products. A painted canvas, for example, could cost up to 40.000 to 60.000 MK (ca. 45 to 70 Euros), an enormous sum in a country where the average wage is around 30.000 MK (ca. 35 Euros) per month. When there are no customers around, a game of Bawo can extend to long hours. Should there be customers, interested in looking at or buying something but the vendor is busy playing, without being asked, fellow colleagues will call for him as well as cover his position in the game. This can be the same person or not but the vendor will jump up so he can take care of his business immediately. In a way, the Bawo setting at the Craft Market provides ideal conditions for a good Bawo game. The seating area comfortably sits **at least eight people**, while doubling the amount of people would be no problem either. Spectators can stand around and still have a good view on the board and the moving seeds. It is shady with a soft breeze, easily accessible, and it is rather quiet and tranquil despite the honking cars only few meters away and the **great amount of people passing by each day**. Also, during the game, vendors can play or watch while keeping one eye on the premises around them. At the end of the day, a vendor's prime interest is to do business so, in this context, Bawo is less used to waste time but to kill time in between transactions. Moreover, there seems to be common agreement on the fact that Bawo played here follows the rules of the more advanced, „men version“, not the basic „woman friendly“ version. After all, all players and spectators are men. It can be Steven himself, who conveniently plays right next to his stall. Or a **young man** who frequently comes to play and always seems to listen to music or the radio on one ear without hearing or saying a word. It could be another **elderly man** with short grey hair or it could be **men in dark grey suits and bright white shirts**, clinging to their smartphones as they watch the games unfold. It could also be a **vendor's friend from Zambia** who has heard of Bawo and sees it being played for the very first time at the Craft Market. Although there are plenty of vendors who sell artistically crafted Bawo boards in their stalls, even selling them at a great profit, the Bawo board being used in this setting is of simple wood, minimalistic, without carvings, and appears slightly worn-out. Marbles are being used for seeds. Both the board and marbles belong to one owner who can be regarded as the **game keeper**. His game set is brotherly shared and he can rest assured that his „**friends**“ (as people say no matter if one is a close friend or a stranger) will take care of his belongings even in his absence. Nevertheless, it so happens that things are „misplaced“. When a Bawo game disappears, whatever the reasons may be, it is quickly replaced as the Bawo show must go on.

When the midday sun rises, some of the vendors might have made a fortunate sale already, others might not even sell anything by the end of the day and hope for better chances the next or the following day. Either way, surely a round of Bawo has been played already and a **few men from nearby offices** might have joined the **street vendors crowd**, too. It is not uncommon to see the same faces on a regular basis. Bawo might be a simple board game but some take it more seriously than one could expect from a game that is also played by children. Around lunch hour, that is between noon and 1 PM, a **woman** halfway joins the Bawo setting. Halfway, because she did not come to play Bawo but to take advantage of the Bawo setting. Carrying a large bucket on her head, covered up by a chitenje cloth, she regularly comes by to sell lunch meals. It is local Malawian food for 500 MK (ca. 0.60 Euros) per plate, a price that can hardly be beaten anywhere in town. Between Steven's shop and the Bawo players, she puts down her heavy bucket and serves nsima\* with an assortment of relishes. Some vendors and other customers from the area wait for their plate, eating it on the spot or wherever they just came from. Sometimes Steven buys a plate too: „When there is money, I eat. If not, I don't“. Along these lines many of his **colleagues**, or many **impoverished Malawians** in general, cope with the fact that sometimes the stomach must remain empty for a while if one wants to survive. Is this potentially painting a too dramatic image of the situation at hand? In Malawi, where widespread hunger and poverty is part of many lives and the cause for many deaths, one can arguably say that such circumstances are much closer to reality than one could wish for. So, instead of having lunch, Steven and fellow vendors alike, carry on doing their business while playing Bawo in between when there is nothing else to do. This goes on all day, every weekday, until around 6 PM. As the sun sets early in Lilongwe, roughly around 5:30 PM, the last few rounds are played under a night sky. This is when it gets too dark to play in the Bawo arena behind the market stalls. Thanks to its mobile character, the Bawo set is then moved onto the parking lot and closer to the shops just opposite of the market. Why? Because there is light, fairly reliable even - the perks of being in such a central location of Lilongwe.

Since the seating area of the Bawo setting is slightly hidden behind one of the temporary stalls and a large tree, the game sessions generally barely raise anyone's attention other than those who seek to find them, regardless of its central and prominent location. By staying below the radar, Bawo players here can carry on playing undisturbed while the chances of attracting conspicuous attention are kept low. As some people might recall, in Lilongwe, Bawo players had to abandon their preferred place of encounter before. Only a few meters further down the road from the Craft Market, the open space next to the **Town Hall** used to be known as a popular hangout spot for Bawo players only a few years ago. Undemeath tall trees and on the flat, earthy ground, they would get together and create a Bawo



ACTANTS + AGENCY

This is a small selection of actants and assemblages as found at the Craft Market. In different constellations, they produce different kinds of agencies, all of which have an impact to a smaller or greater degree on the bawo setting at hand.

PERMANENT STRUCTURES  
+ TEMPORARY STRUCTURES  
= THRESHOLD

VENDING HOURS  
+ NIGHTTIME  
+ ELECTRIC LIGHT  
= APPROPRIATION

ARTS AND CRAFTS  
+ INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING  
+ HOTELS NEARBY  
= HIGH SPENDING POWER

LARGE TREE  
+ SHADE  
+ BREEZE  
= COMFORT

ELEVATED GROUND  
+ LEFT OVER SPACE  
= BACKROOM OF THE MARKET

LOCATION  
+ DAILY RHYTHMS  
+ FAMILIARITY  
= SOCIAL CONTROL

INFORMAL MARKET  
+ INCOME  
+ SECURITY GUARDS  
= VULNERABILITY

BAWO  
+ RULES OF THE GAME  
+ MEN  
= ENTERTAINMENT

CENTRAL LOCATION  
+ PUBLIC LAND  
= FUTURE DISPLACEMENT?

SELLING CRAFTS  
+ WAITING FOR CUSTOMERS  
+ COMMUNITY OF VENDORS  
= TIME TO SPEND

TEMPORARY STALL  
+ LEFTOVER SPACE  
+ CARS AT PARKING LOT  
= HIDDEN SPOT

setting that, in its size and prominence, no longer can be found in Lilongwe. Several Bawo boards would be played at the same time, forming rows after rows of pockets with eager players and spectators mingling around the rectangular spectacle. This came to an abrupt halt when Lilongwe's City Council, by law, righteously „removed“ the players from what is essentially public land or, to be more exact, land that rests in the hands of the city. Supposedly, some people began misusing the designated recreational space for their personal commercial activities. Supposedly, they were moving too close to the adjacent main road and one feared that they would clutter and congest the street which, admittedly, is already happening a few meters further up the road. In the end, it is not entirely clear why the Bawo players were removed from Lilongwe's Town Hall. Not even members of the City Council can say for sure, though one can safely suspect that the Bawo players themselves probably had little to do with it as the developments were driven by pure politics. As of now, the open space has been restored to a Bawo-free zone through which a number of pedestrians daily cross through, little more, little less. For the Bawo players at the Craft Market it seems wise to remain in the shadows of the market's elevated leftover space, tugged between a high traffic road, a busy sidewalk, the stalls, a parking lot and an institutional building in order to carry on as usual by minding their (own) business and playing Bawo in between.

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC URBAN LIFE?

There is no dispute: Bawo is intrinsically tied to the public urban life all over Malawi. So, one must righteously wonder why, in Lilongwe, Bawo games are so often confined to the city's hidden corners, shady niches, and earthen ground although it is a game that thrives off its public display. Does a game played so enthusiastically across an entire nation not deserve to be paraded? Why, curiously enough, is it not recognized as an official game in Malawi while football and cricket is? Uganda did it for Omweso, another variant of Bawo, so what is stopping Malawi to show pride in its local games? Perhaps the answer lies in the less obvious. In his work on Bao players in Zanzibar, Alexander De Voogt states that players were perceived as „idlers“ by Zanzibaris and they believed „that the game disturbs your social life, as if it was a dangerous addiction“ (1995:4). Though Zanzibar is predominantly a Muslim island, one can perhaps make an analogy to Malawi's Christian conservatism when it comes to matters of public display. In this sense, Bawo is perceived as a practice that is to be avoided, being associated to gambling men, idleness, and noisy soundscapes. As such, it appears to threaten Lilongwe's envisioned order as inherited by Banda's vision of the new capital and so strongly marks Lilongwe's urban fabric produced on paper, plans and policies. One could wonder why the potentialities behind the Bawo game are faster shunned than

explored. Being a game that covers all of Malawi's socioeconomic strata, Bawo could be seen as a blueprint for more socially cohesive public urban life. On top of that, an active Bawo community embodies an active agent in the conservation of a valuable tradition that, in the face of more modern (and foreign) pastime activities, risks to lose ground in the urban framework of Malawi's urban centers.





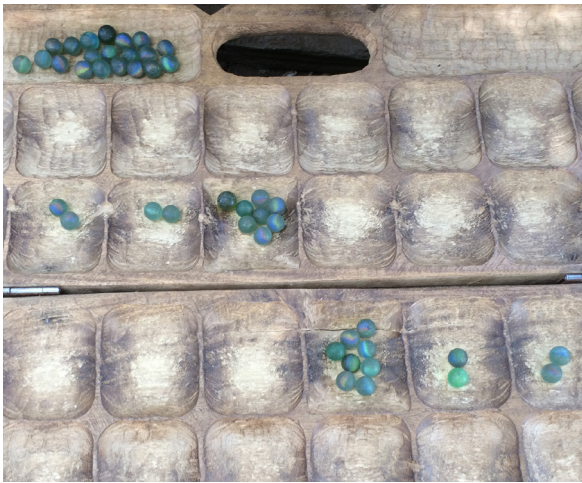
Two men playing bawo at the Craft Market







Bawo setting at the Craft Market looking on to the parking lot and the MILAMBEE CENTER



A typology of bawo boards as seen in Lilongwe: boards made out of wood, soil, painted wood, and metal



# AREA 13 MARKET

[ING]

ZOOM-IN





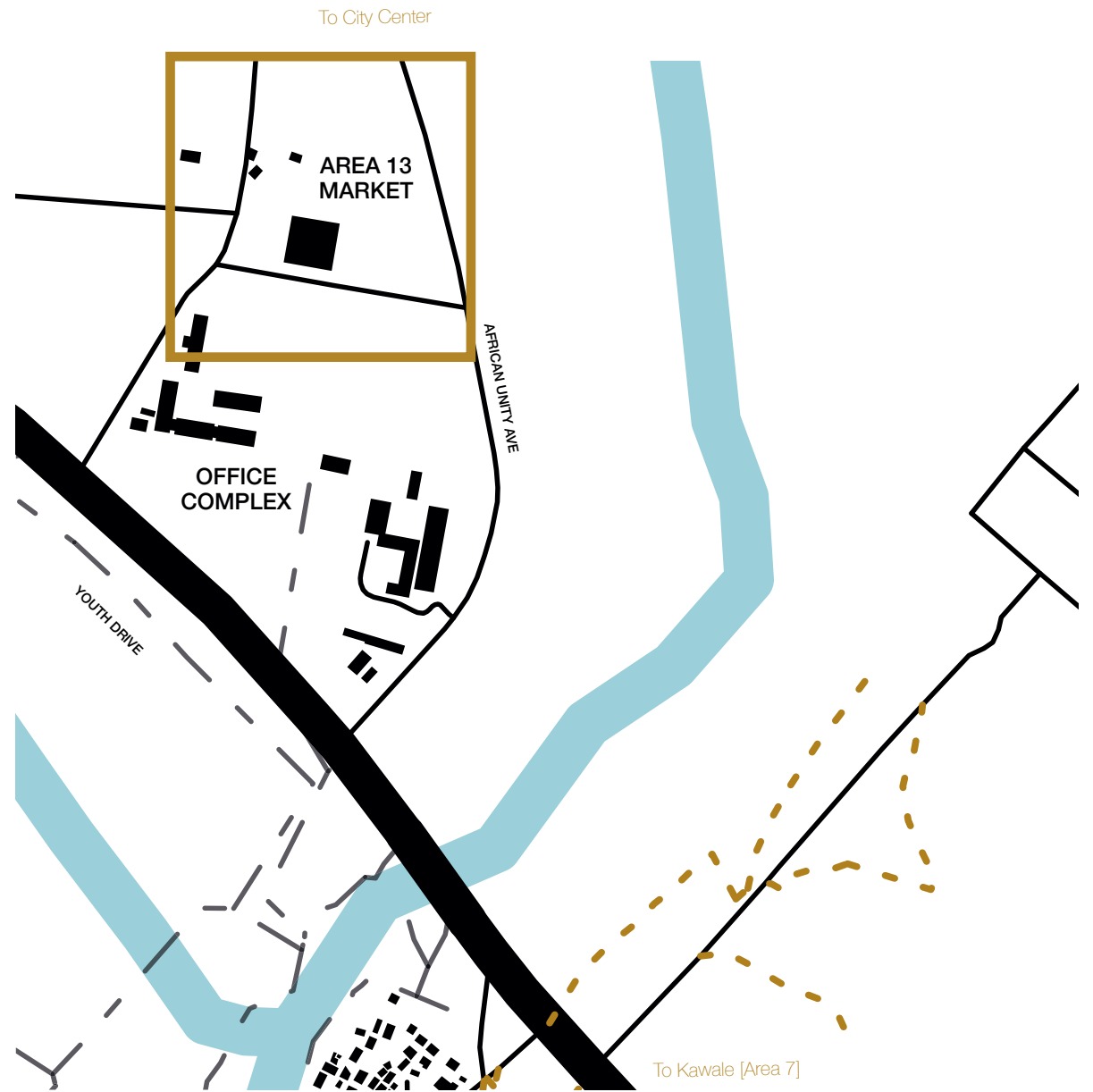
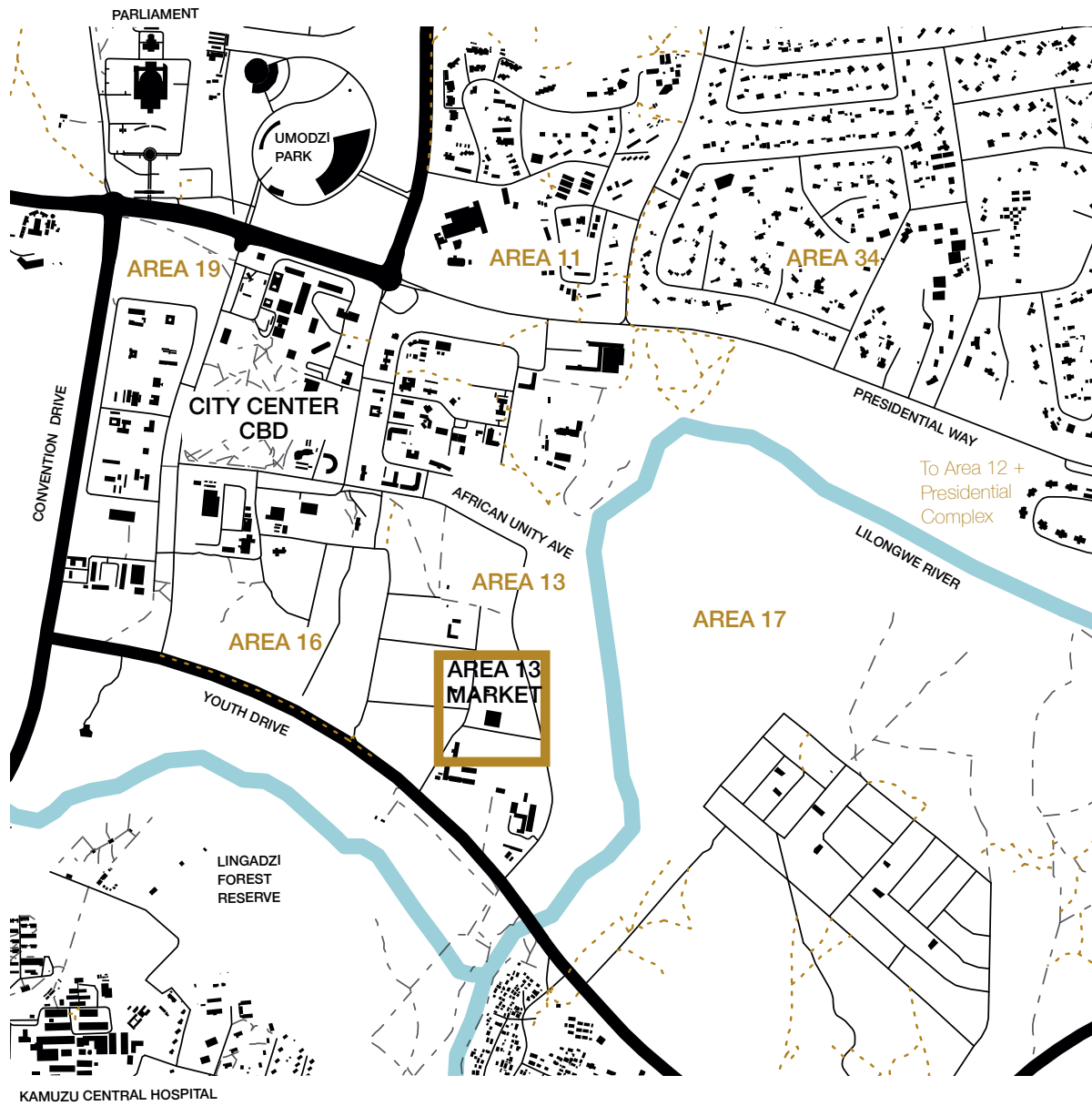
The Area 13 Market is located within Lilongwe's City Center. There, a number of informal restaurants offer Malawian dishes for lunch in makeshift structures inside and outside the Capital City Market building. The market is situated in Area 13, hence its name.



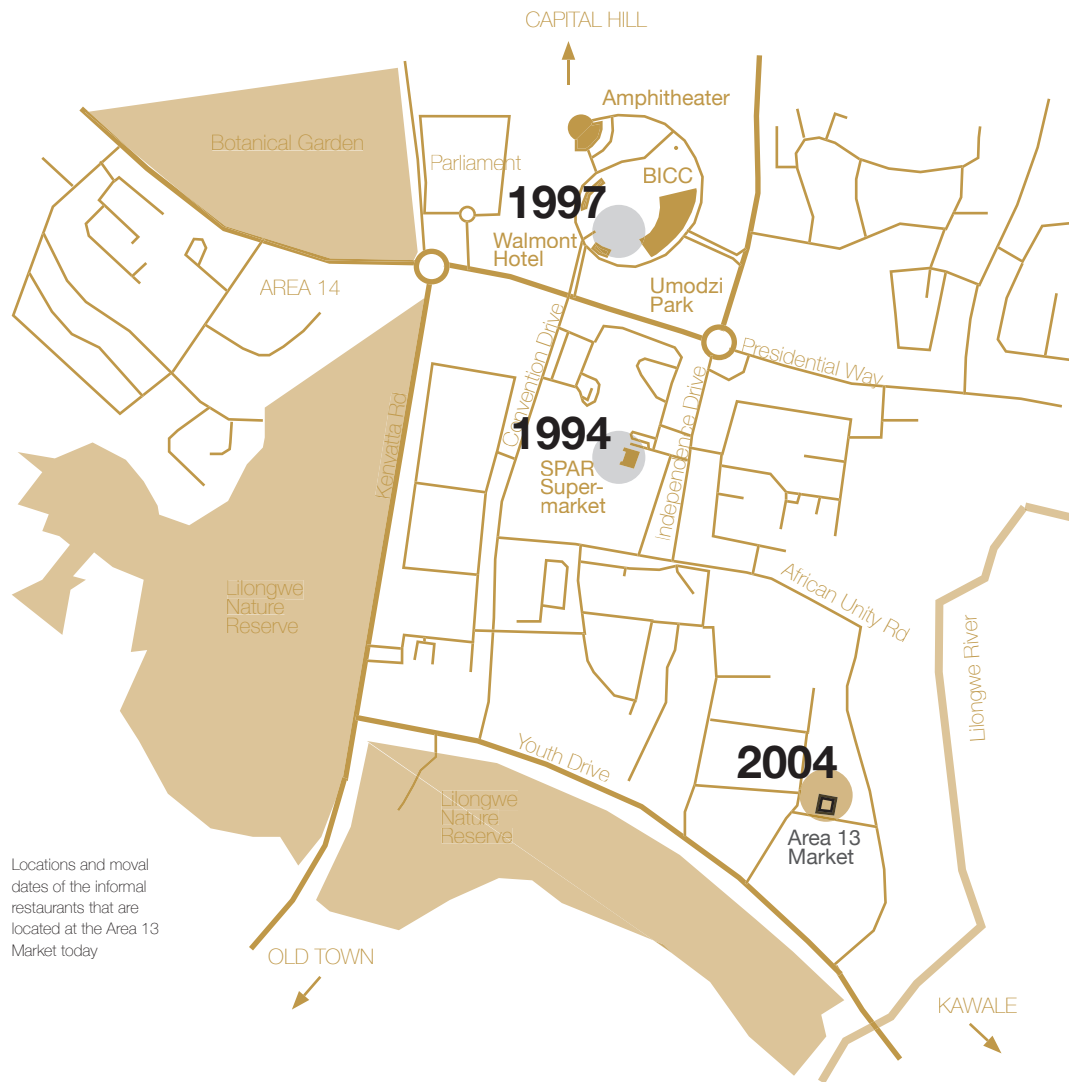
A single-level modernist building made of red brick and colorful metal gates stands slightly off-center within a wide open space that is marked by red earth and numerous large trees. A golden plate on a wall inside the building reveals its former glory. It reads: „This **Capital City Market** was opened by **His Excellency The Life President Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda** on the 12th of September, 1978". But nobody really refers to this place in that way anymore because, in all reality, it has changed. This used to be a vibrant place where **vendors** would sell vegetables, fruits, and other produce until large **Western-style supermarkets** moved to the City Center and won the battle of vying for **customers**. Set in close proximity to the more affluent parts of Lilongwe, many people started going to the supermarket, leaving the Capital City Market fairly deserted. Nowadays, only little produce is sold and, instead, the main commercial activity revolves around a small anomaly in Lilongwe's urban fabric that was able to unfold here. A total of **42 informal restaurants** have set up shop in the large courtyard inside the square market building as well as the wide open space around it. The self-built structures made of wood, branches, reed, wire, and plastic, decorated with lace curtains and colorful paint all sell local Malawian meals with a variety of dishes that is incomparable to any other commercial place in town and, therefore, forms a unique attraction for **Lilongwe's city dwellers**.

DESIRE RESTAURANT, one of the informal restaurants at the Area 13 Market, with the Capital City Market building in the background









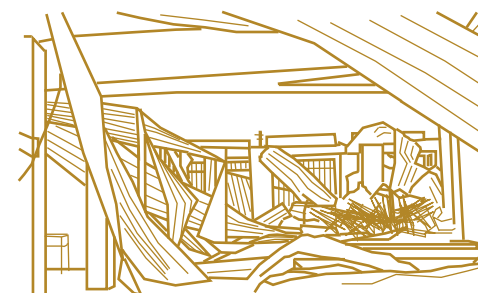
Locations and moval dates of the informal restaurants that are located at the Area 13 Market today

## POLITICS AND HUNGRY STOMACHS

Despite its central location, right in the middle of the City Center of Lilongwe, **visitors** to the Area 13 Market will have a hard time identifying its centrality other than by their own commute. No other building or infrastructure can be seen from the open space of the Area 13 Market. There is one main road from which most customers arrive and a few hundred meters further, there are some office buildings. But, generally, the Area 13 Market stands by itself. One might as well be somewhere on the city's outskirts for it seems rather remote and detached from any other kind of urban life. The market building was originally funded by the **German government** and four decades after its opening, the first informal restaurants appeared on the premises that are owned by the **Lilongwe City Council**. These informal restaurants used to have their base elsewhere before moving to its current location. In fact, they have a somewhat

nomadic past as they had to move several times due to construction plans on grounds that essentially belonged to the city. No security of tenure represents one of the key characteristics of informality and so these informal restaurants were and are not save from it either. According to interviews, the first restaurants were established around the year when Kamuzu Banda's presidency ended, in 1994. Similar to today, **a small group of people** started building makeshift restaurants, selling Malawian dishes in a vacant plot amidst the office buildings in City Center. During lunch hours, they sold meals to the **white-collar workers** and **civil servants** from the nearby offices and governmental buildings. They became increasingly popular thanks to affordable prices, qualitative food, and a lack of better alternatives. Eventually, around 1997, they were forced to leave this highly central location behind, however, in order

to make space for the construction of a building, which was to house a new supermarket chain. In a row of several tenants, the **SPAR supermarket** moved to these premises in 2015 and is still found there today. There was also another reason why the informal restaurants had to move. As some people recall, smoke was turning into a nuisance because the restaurants cooked and still cook their meals on wood stoves out in the open, using the open sky and wind as the only exhaust. Thus, there was also an interest in moving these restaurants to a less central location where they would no longer be perceived as a nuisance. But, interestingly, there seemed to be a common agreement that the restaurants should be able to continue their operations. On a side note, the supermarkets that displaced the informal restaurants were the very same that were in part responsible for the declining numbers of costumers at the Capital City Market, the current location of the informal restaurants. So, in a way, the Area 13 Market exists thanks to the decline of the Capital City Market and closes the cycle. During their first relocation, the **restaurant owners** were moved to Lilongwe's Chinese Garden, less than 1 km from its previous selling point and still within the vicinity of office and governmental buildings. Whether their **clientele** influenced this decision can only be a wild guess. By 2009, Lilongwe City Council asked and forced the restaurants to move once more. This time the restaurants had to make space for **Umodzi Park**, a massive site that includes the Bingu Wa Mutharika International Conference Center [BICC], the President Walmont Hotel, Malawi's only five-star hotel, the Malawi Square, a massive paved circular square mostly used for parking, and the Pabwalo Amphitheater, occasionally hosting open-air events (see page 64-65). From there, the restaurant owners were finally moved to the site of the Capital City Market, a bit over 2 km away from Umodzi Park, now slightly further out than before but still within a manageable distance for the restaurants' **main clientele**. On February 15, 2018 at around 11 PM a big fire, supposedly caused by electric cords that were unable to cope with the frequent power outages, occurred at the Area 13 Market and burned down nearly half of the building. The remnants of the fire are still very visible as destructed walls and roof parts are scattered all around the floor. But the market business goes on as usual, even without power, showing no visible traces of damages other than the material ones, though, the livelihoods of the **affected restaurants** clearly were harmed.

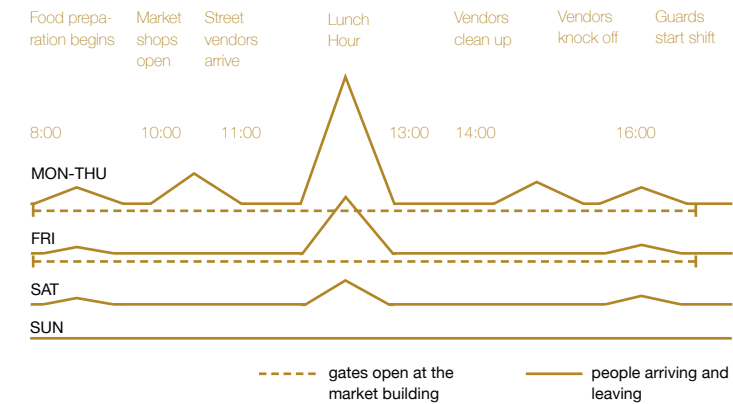
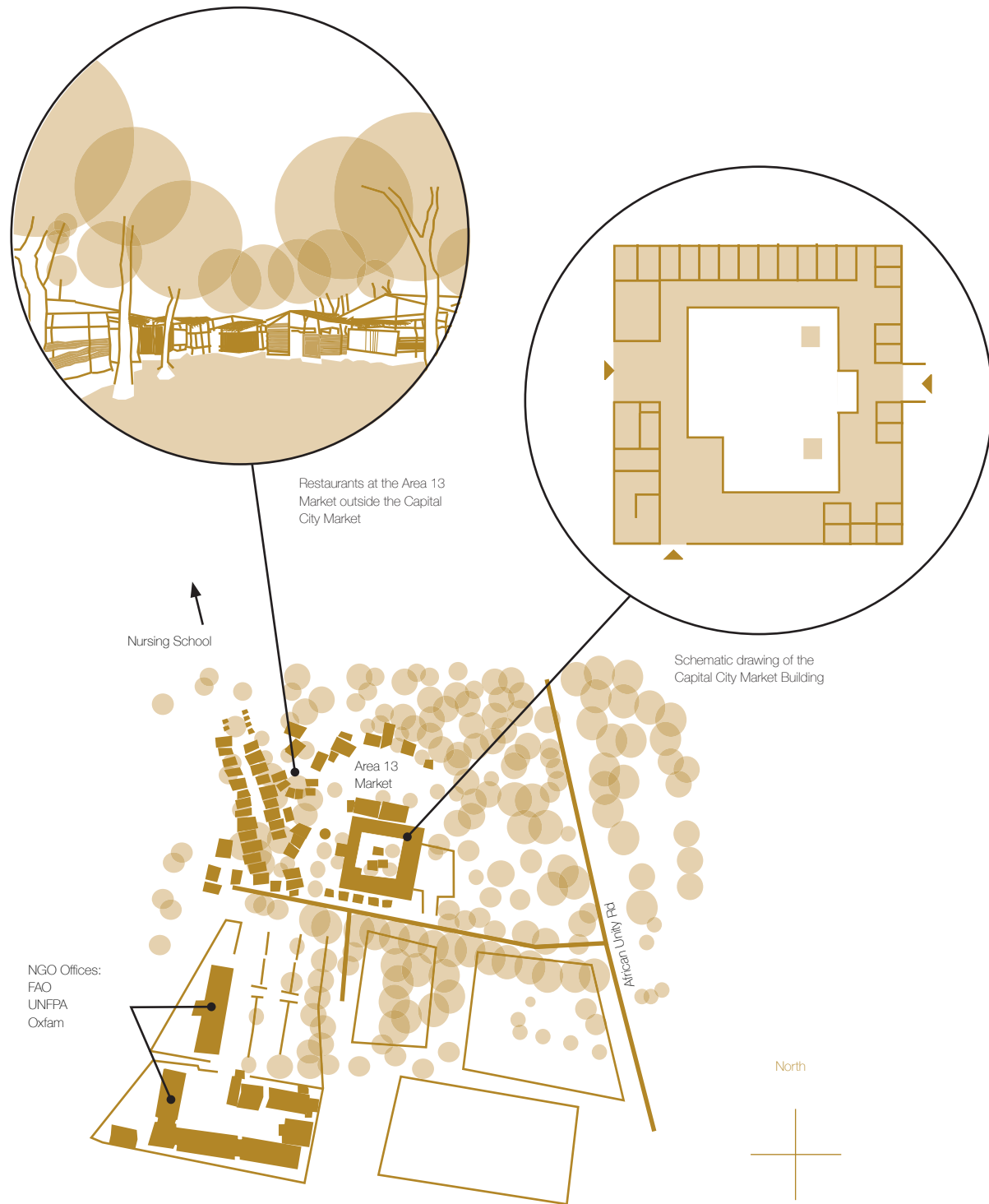


## A ONE-OF-A-KIND MARKET IN LILONGWE

Most visitors drive to the Area 13 Market. This will inevitably take them to the African Unity Avenue as two paths off the avenue can somewhat be considered the main entrance of the Area 13 Market. One of the paths is a tarmac road that leads to a parking lot in front of the market building, equipped with roughly 40 designated parking spots. The other path is a dirt path, significantly more bumpy and with a small but obstructive curb. It leads directly to the open space around the building where most of the informal restaurants are located. During lunchtime, nearly all of the open space is covered with **parked cars** as the incoming cars far exceed the parking lot's capacity. Private cars form the main mode of transport but only few customers come alone due to the tight parking situation and to save time and money on the commute. **Minibuses** also drive between the City Center and the Area 13 Market who have quickly detected the high demand for such a route. **Pedestrians** use a footpath on the opposite end of the market. The Area 13 Market runs from Monday to Friday, a few restaurants also open on Saturdays. Though technically the restaurants are open all day, only lunch is being served. How many people exactly take their lunch meals here each day is hard to say. Some restaurants claim to sell more than 200 meals, smaller restaurants sell around 60 meals. With a total of 42 restaurants and assuming that each plate equals one person, one could estimate that even in its lowest capacity, **a few thousand people** visit the Area 13 Market on any given day. As with many enumerations in informal contexts, however, this estimate is rather vague. Yet, it does provide some sense of the market's scale.

The physical structures of the restaurants cannot be compared to the polished and solid structures of Lilongwe's formal restaurants. They are makeshift structures, a fact that is clearly visible. Each restaurant often has a specific name which might be as temporary as the business but for the time being is colorfully displayed in different colors of paint. A number of restaurants are lined up along a more or less straight path, others have formed a semi-circle together, some have created a solitary corner and others prefer the direct vicinity of the market building, either huddling around its walls or using its inner courtyard as the foundation for their restaurants. Almost all of the restaurants offer sheltered and roofed seating areas, some even protect from curious eyes by means of higher walls. If one prefers to sit in the open space under the shade of the trees, even sit at a table that is build around a tree, that is also possible. As makeshift as the restaurant structures so are the facilities and utensils. From tables to chairs to pots and bowls, knives, cooking and serving spoons, cups, salt and pepper shaker, most of the things encountered here are of the least expensive kind and are of a quality that is not exactly made for eternity. But even if something gets broken, the





object will be repaired as will and skill permit and used as long as possible. As before, most customers who come to eat at the Area 13 Market, work in the offices in City Center. This becomes very visible in the outward appearance of the **main clientele**. Bright shirts, leather shoes, fancy dresses, and high heels are no rare sight here though it certainly is in most parts of Lilongwe outside the City Center. A restaurant vendor stresses, though, that it is not only office workers who enjoy their lunch offerings as **blue-collar workers** from as far as Kanengo, the industrial north of Lilongwe, or Old Town, the bustling commercial area in the south of Lilongwe, also make up their clientele. Moreover, **nursery students**, whose school is more or less located within vicinity, also form part of the customer base.

All of the restaurants have a similar set up, therefore, the code of conduct is always fairly similar, too. During peak hours, that is lunch time between noon and 1 PM, **long queues** form in front of the restaurants' entrances with customers waiting for their turn to be served. One is first confronted with a buffet-style table offering staples like brown or white nsima or rice and a number of side dishes, neatly packed up in medium-size containers. Their lids are kept closed to keep the food warm until a customer asks to see its contents. For lack of a menu, the containers represent the menu. The vendors then serve the selected dishes on plastic plates that have three compartments, an ideal utensil for the usual Malawian nsima-vegetable-meat trilogy. Vegetable dishes called *masamba* could be beans, pumpkin leaves, sweet potato leaves, okra, or egg plants. The meat options are beef, local and hybrid chicken, goat, offal and fresh and dried fish. White nsima is more popular than brown nsima despite its nutritious value as the latter is considered the "poor man's nsima". Beans belong to the Malawian culinary canon and are, therefore, cooked in greater quantities than other *masambas*. Hybrid chicken is different to local chicken in that hybrids are more meaty and tender. Local chickens are organic but they have less meat and are more chewy and, therefore, less popular. To eat meat is yet another luxury only few in Malawi can afford

to eat every day. But at the Area 13 Market, prices per plate are fixed so it does not make any difference whether one orders meat or not. A Malawian friend might have described people's attitude to meat most poignantly by saying „when there is meat, you touch the masamba last". While all restaurants serve similar kinds of food, each dish comes with its distinct flavors and modes of preparation. In their competitive fight for customers, some restaurants have specialized in a particular ingredient altogether that none of the others serve, for example bitter leaves or tofu. Once served with a plate of food, one can choose to sit down at one of the restaurant's tables or consume the meal elsewhere as a take-away. For those **sit-down customers**, there will be complimentary drinking water and buckets of water with soap to wash hands as Malawian dishes are eaten with your hands. Cutlery is only seen in the hands of the **workers** who prepare the food. Many people pray before they eat and those who enjoy spicy food add one or two *kambuzis* to their meal, small orange and very hot chilies that are grown in Malawi and given to anyone upon request. A few **soda vendors** roam the Area 13 Market in bright orange carts and umbrellas, selling sweet and cold refreshments. Coca-Cola and their products are as present in Malawi as in other countries. But Sobo, a Malawian soda drink that comes in different flavors, seems to enjoy a wider popularity for its tastes and its cheaper price. During a meal, one may be approached by one of the **street vendors** selling things like shirts, ties, belts, or leather shoes, clearly targeting the numerous **men who come and go in formal work attire**. **Female visitors** can likewise purchase make-up and purses. In addition to that, there are **Air-Tel** and **TNM** booths, both local phone service providers, where one can buy phone credit. Moreover, **groundnuts**, **bananas**, and **oranges** are sold to finish off a hearty meal with a snack or dessert. By 2 PM, latest 3 PM, only few customers are left and vendors begin with cleaning and packing up, preparing to knock off by 4 PM in order to be back home before daylight is gone. When the great numbers of cars have disappeared, the area's wide, open space becomes visible again.



7 AGRICULTURE

While most produce offered in the restaurants is sourced locally from various suppliers in the region, a few vendors are taking it to the next level by planting vegetables right on the premises of the Area 13 Market.



4 STATIONARY STREET VENDORS

Street vendors with more or less fixed locations, excluding restaurants, sell things like refreshments, phone credit, shoes and make up. Also, a few kiosk stalls have set up shop in one corner of the market. Some vendors make use of the market building and turn its stairs and walls into a point of display and sale.

5 MOBILE STREET VENDORS

Mobile street vendors roam the Area 13 Market area and sell a variety of things. Oranges, bananas and groundnuts are usually sold by female street vendors. Male street vendors sell anything from shirts, ties, belts, watches, mosquito nets, CDs etc.

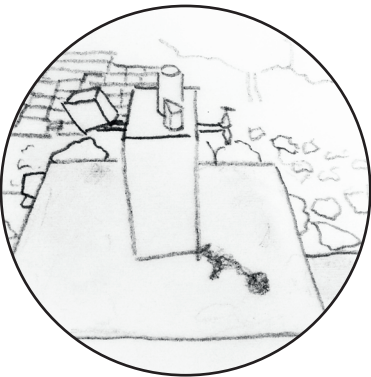
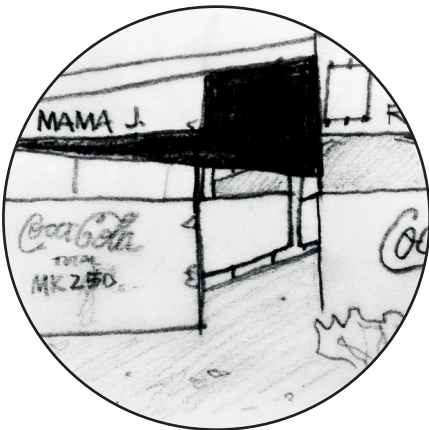
9 FIRE

On February 15, 2018 around 11 PM a fire, probably caused by malfunctioning power lines, destroyed great parts of the market building. The remnants of the destruction still need to be cleared and it remains uncertain at what point of time this is going to happen - if it will happen at all. There is rumor that renovations will commence in August or September this year. Until then, everyday life continues to revolve in and around the damage.



2 RESTAURANTS

All restaurants are set up in a somewhat similar manner. Food is selected at a non-self-service buffet where one can choose between different staples, meats and vegetables and pays 1,000 MK for one plate. Each restaurant provides roofed table and chairs as well as water containers with soap to cleanse one's hands before and after the meal. The majority of customers work in City Center or at Capitol Hill and can be referred to as white-collar employees though people from as far as Old Town or Kanengo come to the Area 13 Market for lunch.



6 WATER TAB

Just outside the market building, there is a water tab where one can fill up 20 liter buckets for 50 MK each. It is needed for cooking (e.g. rinsing ingredients, boiling water, plucking chicken), drinking water, and for customers to wash their hands as local Malawian food is eaten without cutlery.

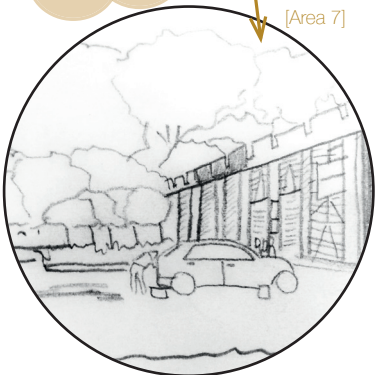
8 BAWO

This game of Bawo is played on the steps of a small red-brick-pyramid only few meters away from the bustling lunch commotion. Spectators sit around, either on a chair or on the pyramid itself. The owner of the game might also be around.



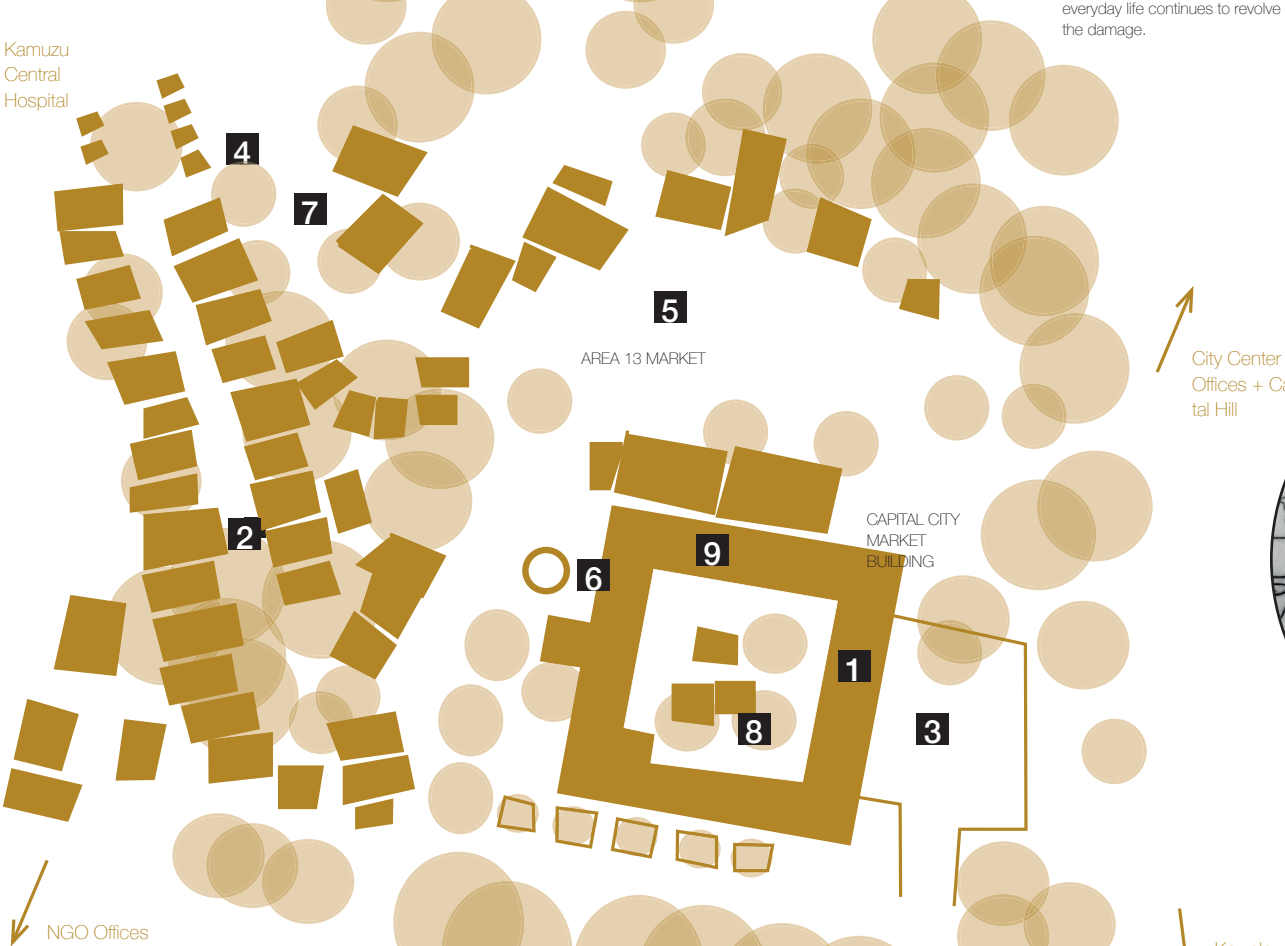
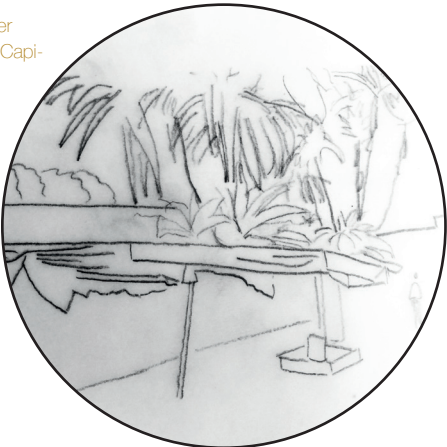
3 PARKING

The designated parking area stays nearly empty most of the time - ideal working conditions for a car wash business. Only during lunch hours, the parking lot becomes fully crammed and cars resort to parking in the dirt wherever one can find space.



1 MARKET BUILDING

Despite being a market, the stalls, booths and stands made of concrete and brick offer only few fruits and vegetables these days. Most of the market space is now occupied by all kinds of movable goods and used as storage, particularly for plastic chairs. Some parts have been converted into small shops, for instance offering shoe-making or tailoring, and selling plant seedlings, make-up, furniture and other things. Those parts destroyed by the fire are used as cooking and washing zones by nearby restaurants. Amidst the ever-changing market scenery, Maldeco Fisheries, a public company with Malawi's largest commercial fishing, has been selling fish from Lake Malawi for over 20 years in their Area 13 location as well as in Old Town. Some people, therefore, mistakenly believe the Area 13 Market actually belongs to Maldeco, though it is simply one shop among many.







Interior of an informal restaurant at the Area 13 Market located inside the market building

## THE CREATORS OF THIS SPACE

The restaurants at the Area 13 Market do not entirely operate individually but are also part of a **community organization or informal worker's union**, run by a **head chairman** and a number of **sub-chairmen**. For instance, one chairman is in charge of pricing, another one is overlooking community policing and security issues, yet somebody else manages the welfare fund. **Mr. Ngwira** was elected into his position as head chairman around five years ago, "because people trust him", he says. His restaurant is one of the oldest and he has been selling his meals at the Chinese Garden already. He also says that he is tired, though, and would like to pass the duties on to a new **candidate**. Until this candidate is found and communally agreed upon, however, he will carry on, which he does voluntarily for no pay in addition to his daily work at his restaurant. Among other things, he is in charge of settling disputes, mediating between restaurant owners and City Council, consulting with the other chairmen and speaking to externals. The welfare chairman collects a monthly donation from the workers at the Area 13 Market. Usually it is around 5,000 MK (ca. 6 Euros) and at the time of research they had already gathered around 500,000 MK (ca. 590 Euros) in total. The **welfare fund** is dedicated to providing financial assistance for those in need of greater sums of money quickly, for example, for **funerals**, **weddings**, or the construction of a house. If you pay in, you can be paid out and pay your debts after. 500,000 MK is „not much", because „a funeral can cost up to 100,000 MK (ca. 120 Euros). If there are five funerals coming up, the money is already gone", Mr. Ngwira explains. The **community poli-**

**cing chairman** ensures that guards protect the restaurant buildings and their interiors from theft or damage, particularly during the night. Despite such security measures, most, if not all, restaurant owners lock up their valuables after business hours. Particularly plastic chairs are meticulously stored away because they are relatively expensive to re-purchase. For this reason, some **vendors** inside the market building have made the storage of chairs an additional means of income by renting out their space overnight. Others carry their chairs back and forth from their homes by paying a **lorry driver** who does his business by driving chairs around. The **pricing chairman** decides on the fixed meal prices. Before January 2017, one plate cost 800 MK, then it was decided that a plate should thereafter cost 1,000 MK (around 1.20 Euros) as they had to adjust to Malawi's economy and increasing food prices. Despite the rise in price, the Area 13 Market still offers one of the most economic places in town for a lunch meal. Comparable restaurants outside the Area 13 Market but within City Center ask for 1,500 MK (ca. 1.80 Euros) or more for a similar meal without the same variety. Western restaurants with non-local meals ask at least 2,000 MK (ca. 2.30 Euros) and upward for a dish. The lack of affordable alternatives with comparable variety and quality appear to be limited in Lilongwe's City Center and, in this manner, ensure a steady flow of incoming customers.

### LUNCH PRICES IN LILONGWE'S CITY CENTER [SELECTED EXAMPLES]

Nsima + Vegetables + Meat	1,500 MK
Grilled Chicken	3,000 MK
Avocado Sandwich	2,000 MK
Chicken Salad	4,800 MK
Fresh Chambo (Fish)	5,500-7,500 MK
Falafel	4,200 MK

### LUNCH PRICE AT THE AREA 13 MARKET

Nsima + Vegetables + Meat 1,000 MK

The "**Bitter Leaves House**" inside the courtyard of the market building was opened by **Stella** about two years ago. She proudly mentions that she runs the only restaurant offering bitter leaves, hence its name. She opened her restaurant business after having saved enough money by working at a different restaurant in town. Upon visiting the City Council and the **civic offices in Kawale** [Area 7], filling out forms, paying a fee of 500 MK, and speaking to the chairman, she was given a space to set up her restaurant. There are no standards as to how exactly the temporary structures are supposed to be built. Stella had simply gathered the materials for the construction from different places and built it with the help of her **friends from Area 23**. Stella originally stems from Karonga in the north of Malawi and belongs to the **Tumbuka** tribe. In 2003, she moved with her then husband to Area 23 in Lilongwe and has never moved ever again. She lives rather central with her children in her own house. Her now **ex-husband** has moved back to Karonga and they platonically communicate via phone. This is the only remaining tie she has to Karonga ever since her **parents** also passed away in 2005. She enjoys city life and likes Lilongwe „too much", she says, in her colorful shirt and elaborately braided hair. She is a business woman and she cannot imagine living in a village again. "I am not strong", she explains, implying that she also thinks herself unfit for a rural farm life and, thus, believes to be better off in Lilongwe.

In her restaurant, Stella does the cooking but she also employs **five women from Kauma and Area 23** who help her prepare the dishes and run the restaurant. Each of them is paid 15,000 MK (ca. 17 Euros) a month, if business was better Stella would pay them 20,000 MK (ca. 24 Euros), she claims. Minimum wage in Malawi is 25,000 MK (ca. 30 Euros). Each day they sell about 60 or 70 plates but ever since the fire broke out Stella is trying to also juggle her debts with her **Tanzanian friend** who helped her with 100,000 MK (ca. 119 Euros) to pay for the damages the fire had done to her restaurant business. "Yeah we are making good business but not much. But we can say we are surviving", Stella says. Her employees work from around 7 AM to 5 PM from Monday to Friday, she works slightly less from 8 AM to 4 PM. Each weekday, Stella brings the ingredients for the meals from the **Area 23 market** by occupying one or two seats in a **minibus**. This

includes meats, vegetables, nsima and rice. From Monday to Thursday, they cook about 10 kg of nsima and rice. Fridays are more quiet as many offices close early and office workers tend to eat lunch at home instead at the Area 13 Market, so 7 kg of nsima and rice are sufficient. Since Stella's restaurant is located inside the market building, her opening times are tied to the building's opening times. This is why she cannot open on Saturdays but, on the bright side, her restaurant is safely locked up and **guarded** during the night and on weekends.

The dishes are prepared right next to the restaurant on the bare floor, walls, or wherever there is space. Since great parts of the building collapsed during the fire and the remnants have not been cleared yet, it is a slightly bizarre sight to see so many cooking pots and busy hands amidst all the rubble. But they „manage". Water is bought from a water tab right outside the building for 50 MK (ca. 0.06 Euros) per 20 liters and carried on the head in large plastic buckets. With the help of a wheel barrel a **young teenage boy** brings firewood that gets the portable cooking stoves started. When in full swing, they, literally, become burning hot and, on top of that, are the cause of large amounts of smoke that stings in the eye. Vegetables and meats are cleaned, cut, and spiced so the food is ready by 11 AM. A number of plastic and metal bowls are used in the most versatile way to accommodate all the different dishes that need to be prepared, including chicken, beef, fish, rape, eggplant, beans, cabbage, and the bitter leaves, of course, though she does not offer them every day. Knives are few and shared and the cutting is done in one's own hands without cutting boards while the ingredients never touch the dirty floors. The rice is cleansed from small rocks which are the cause of an extra crunch otherwise. Meanwhile, **Chichewa** chatter fills the air, sometimes sharing practical information, sometimes less work-related conversations, while everyone stays rather industrious. Much needs to be done and be ready before the first customers arrive.



A typical Malawian dish: nsima with vegetable and beans, optionally with Kambuzi chilly sauce



ACTANTS + AGENCY

This is a small selection of actants and assemblages as found at the Area 13 Market. In different constellations, they produce different kinds of agencies, all of which have an impact to a smaller or greater degree on the encounters experienced here.

MAKESHIFT STRUCTURES  
+ SEATING  
= FORMAL ROLE MODELS

OFFICE WORKERS  
+ CARPOOLING  
+ BREAK TIME  
= CANTINE

PRICE  
+ FOOD  
+ ACCESSIBILITY  
= PULLING POWER

LUNCH HOUR  
+ SERVICE  
= EQUAL EXPERIENCES

LUNCH HOUR  
+ RUSH HOUR  
= RHYTHMS

DISH VARIETY  
+ FIXED PRICE  
+ MEAT  
= VALUE FOR MONEY

CITY CENTER  
+ REMOTE  
+ LEFT OVER SPACE  
= INFORMAL MARKET

WHITE COLLAR WORKERS  
+ BLUE COLLAR WORKERS  
+ NO PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES  
= SHARED SPACE

PARKING LOT  
+ TOO SMALL  
= ALTERNATIVE PARKING

42 RESTAURANTS  
+ SIMILAR DISHES  
+ COMPETITION  
= HIGH FOOD QUALITY

SMART DRESS  
+ PEER GROUP  
+ INFLUENCE  
= IMAGE

During the peak selling period, the atmosphere turns slightly more intense. Plates need to be served neatly but quickly with portions that are not too big and not too small. After all, much **competition** is waiting all around. Some of the workers change their clothes, dodging chitenje for more modern and cleaner clothes. Stella retains her stylish appearance when cooking and when selling. It is also her who has a cheerful chat with the odd customer, relying on the fact that her employees ensure a smooth procession of filled plates. After the last customer has left, a calmer atmosphere returns. Employees get a chance to eat lunch before the cleaning starts. Plates, pots, knives and spoons are washed, the fireplaces are cleared, the plastic chairs, and everything is put in place so the next workday can start with a clean slate. Stella uses this time period to rest a little and to do the finances. Between 1 and 2 PM, **a civil servant from City Council** comes around to collect the daily market fee of 200 MK (ca. 0.24 Euros). Smaller restaurants pay only 100 MK (ca. 0.12 Euros). "If he doesn't show up, you do not pay", she adds with a smirk. Stella's relations to the Area 13 Market are purely business-related and though she gets along with her **colleagues** she considers them merely colleagues. "Here, I cannot make **friends**. If you make friends, business cannot work", Stella explains, "better to have no friends here, better to have friends at home". The vendors help each other out with small things like changing money or lending missing condiments and they talk "but not much". Other vendors, who have been part of this restaurant community for much longer, less surprisingly, do not share this notion. Despite the financial hardships Stella has to endure, she embodies **a single Malawian mother from the north** who is able to sustain a running business in Lilongwe that pays for her employees' salaries, her **children's** education and a fairly moderate lifestyle thanks to the existence of the Area 13 Market.

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC URBAN LIFE?

The Area 13 Market evolved from a few rather insignificant food stalls to a food market with a voice. From a simple business-oriented enterprise to a communally organized **gastronomic sector** in Lilongwe. But due to its informal status, it remains highly vulnerable and it lives off City Council's on-going tolerance for its existence. Its continuous existence, one could claim, is strongly tied to the market's customer base and how they are attracted by the space. As the market's past has shown, the informal restaurants have to make room whenever the **planning authorities** have other plans for the market's location in mind which are much driven by neoliberal logics. At the same time, parallel neoliberal logics ensure the continuity of the Area 13 Market since much of the market's attractiveness circles around its nearly unbeatable value for money. This even attracts those who, to put it bluntly, fill one hand with the restaurants' nsima and decide to change the future course of the market with the other as **City Council em-**

**ployees** as well as other **civil servants** spend their lunch times at the Area 13 Market. In the rise and fall of infrastructure projects in Lilongwe, the Area 13 Market also being one, demand and supply ensure its continuity. Thus, in the face of being of insignificant value to the city, the clientele of the Area 13 Market stands as its protective shield. Here, a double life comes to the surface, one that is presentable to **one public** and one to **another**. According to local vendors, the City Council has announced new plans in response to the fire's damages, claiming to renovate the market building soon. Moreover, they want to offer solutions with more permanent structures for the makeshift restaurants which would also bring a certain level of security of tenure. Whether these solutions will be a feasible option for the current restaurant owners or whether the caravan will move onwards to new pastures remains to be seen. As of now, the Area 13 Market represents a valuable attraction but, according to voices from City Council, its mode of conduct must be recalibrated. Formalization, regulation, hygiene and building standards as well as fees and taxes are only a few keywords that ring in the air. But what if the restaurant vendors do not comply with City Council's plans or simply cannot afford it? What will be at stake with regard to Lilongwe's public urban life at the Area 13 Market? When looking at Lilongwe's highly closed urban form that is marked by high levels of segregation and securitization, places like the Area 13 Market are in short supply. What is unique to this place is that, despite its makeshift character, it attracts **people from different socioeconomic groups** who tend to stay separate in other environments, either physically or in hierarchical terms. At the Area 13 Market, **different publics** are able to come together to share the same activities, premises, and interests, if only for a moment that lasts as long as a lunch break. It is here where **informal** and **formal worlds** do not collide but are blurred as they become part of an environment that is not explicitly based on underlying hierarchies. Through the production and consumption of food and through the shared space on the premises of the Area 13 Market, boundaries are turned into porous borders and several of Lilongwe's publics, both customers and vendors, come together who otherwise rarely do. It is the preparation of food that is done side by side, it is the smoke that stings in everyone's eyes, it is the carpooling, it is the washing and eating with your hands, it is the nsima and chicken, it is the plastic chairs, it is the open space, it is the central location, it is the temporal rhythms, it is the unsealed ground, and it is the shared feeling of being hungry at lunch hour, all of which create a common arena of life. In this sense, the Area 13 Market represents an unplanned common ground for a democratic public space that is so rarely seen in Lilongwe. As such it has the potential to work as a platform that does not simply carry on with inherited patterns of behavior of inclusion and exclusion but explores what other forms of public urban life could be possible, too.





Market building at the Area 13 Market, opened in 1978 as Capital City Market



Cars are parked wherever there is space at the Area 13 Market as the designated parking lot in front of the market building cannot accommodate all the cars entering during lunch hours.





Stella and her five employees are preparing lunch in the market building next to other restaurant owners

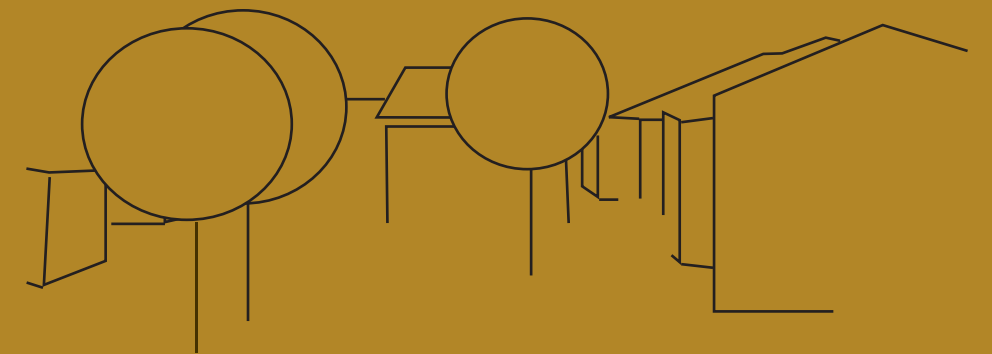


Stella's restaurant before the first customers arrive for lunch around 11:30 AM. Lunch is usually served until around 2 PM.



# HOME PLOT

[ING]



ZOOM-IN



It is estimated that over one million people call Lilongwe their home, three quarters live in high density residential areas. For this research, a family in Chinsapo has provided access to their home plot and enabled a glimpse into the daily public choreographies that occur in the privacy of their home. Another family's home in Kauma can serve as a contrasting example.

HOME PLOT „CHISALE“  
Area: 57 [Chinsapo]  
Status: HDR  
Inhabitants: 5-8  
Gates: no

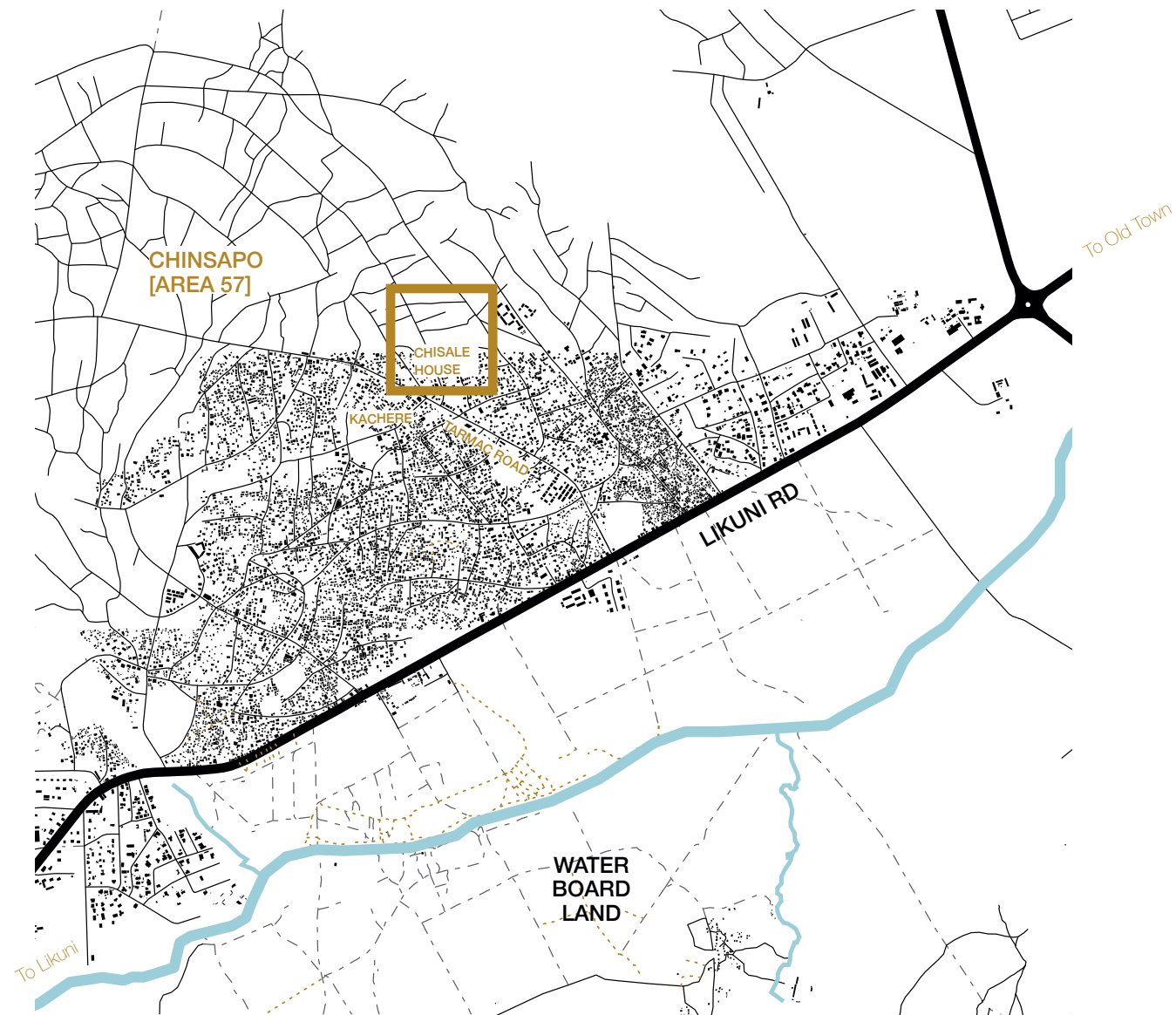
HOME PLOT „DOROTHEA“  
Area: 43 [Kauma]  
Status: HDR  
Inhabitants: 3  
Gates: no



Strolling is the general mode of conduct when walking on Chinsapo's small dirt paths. Tugged between the loosely scattered residential plots, they are everywhere. Uneven patches occasionally cross the path, residues from the heavy rains that regularly flood them during rainy season. A fast-paced sprint could therefore easily turn into a stumble. So, even when walking routines have long been memorized, careful and cautious steps set the general pace. Strolling has yet another advantage: one will notice what those in a hurry will not. Here is an example: When leaving a side road in **Chinsapo's Catholic area** behind and turning into one of the small dirt paths, one walks past a small yet sizable maize field to the right. Soon after, a small toilet booth made of red mud bricks and a wooden door appears to the left. A clear beaten path in between the maize field and the toilet booth hints at a good amount of foot traffic, regardless of the fact that one is technically intruding into **somebody's** private plot. Going straight, one will pass side-wall after side-wall. But generous glimpses into people's courtyards wrapped in open space will sprinkle the view. If one makes a right turn after the maize field, however, one inevitably enters one of the many courtyards that lie half-hidden behind the house walls of somebody's home. There is little that could actually stop anyone from entering, no walls, no gates, no fences, no barriers. This particular one belongs to the **Chisale family**, that is **mother** and

The Chisale family lives in a single-level house in the Catholic area of Chinsapo [Area 57], a high density residential area in the southwest of Lilongwe. In order to get to their house, one has to leave the main road and walk along a smaller dirt path. It lies slightly hidden behind a maize field.





Note: There are no official maps of Chinsapo, indicated locations are mere estimates based on aerial photos.



Home plot of the Chisale family

**father** and their **six children** between the age of 6 and 24. It is the space in which the family welcomes **friends** and **relatives**, invited or uninvited, and where **nextdoor and nearby neighbors**, and other **familiar and less familiar faces** regularly get together. No pre-arrangements are necessary. When approaching the sudden clearing, trying to spot somebody in the courtyard, the residents of the house might have likewise already spotted the visitor. Promptly everyone involved reacts with a greeting that is adjusted according to who is speaking and who one is speaking to. The standard greeting „Muli bwanji?“ (How are you?) is suitable to use with anyone, younger generations might simply ask and respond „Bo?“ - „Bo!“ (short form for „bonjour“ or good day in French). Depending on how well one knows the **spontaneous visitor**, the person will stop and come around for a longer chat. Others will simply say „zikomo zikomo“ (thank you, thank you) and continue their stroll, still speaking as they walk off. Ear contact seems sufficient. Those who are new to the place might have to deal with the **three dogs** at first who turn all tame once a family member gives them a gentle shout: „Babo! Brigadeer! Spike!“. Since most faces are at least somewhat familiar, the dogs usually stay fairly calm.

## THE PUBLIC IN THE PRIVATE

Red is the color of the soil under one's feet, the color of the mud brick walls which are made of the very same soil, and the color of the dust that lightly covers the green plastic buckets under the washing lines, the beige sandals next to the veranda, the veranda's smooth and black-painted floor, the wooden and torn stools standing around here and there, the metal cooking stove placed behind a column, the white woven plastic mat on the ground, and the green leaves of the plants that are found in the large courtyard of the Chisale family. Most objects around have a rusty look, no matter if they have been exposed to the soil for ten days or weeks or months. So, regularly, all members of the family will at one point or another grab a hand duster made of reeds and sweep the floor clean from whatever waste might have piled up until the red ground is only red again. The young ones seem to enjoy playing with the sweeper, the older one's will grant them their play so long they do not realize that it is not a toy but a tool for a daily chore, namely *akussessa* („sweeping“ in Chichewa). In Chinsapo, an unplanned high density residential area of Lilongwe, the Chisales have constructed three separate houses on their plot. One for themselves, the largest building, one neighboring building that is rented out, and another building which still needs to be finished and is meant to be rented out in the future. All of them are single-story buildings like nearly all of the houses in Chinsapo and most of Lilongwe, no matter whether in a low, middle, or high density residential area. The courtyard,



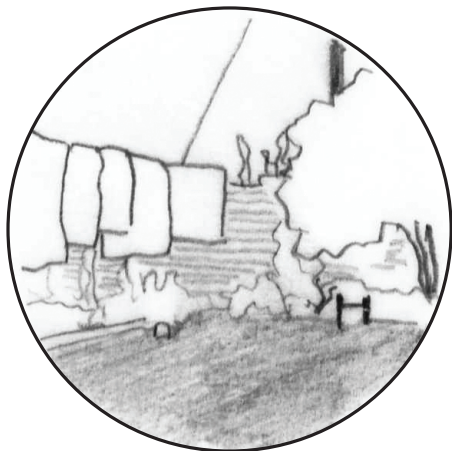


**5 KITCHEN**

The functions of the Kitchen are split into an outdoor and indoor part. Doing dishes and cooking is done outside while the dishes and the food is stored inside the house.

**1 KHONDE**

The veranda or, more commonly known, the *khonde*\* forms one of the center pieces of the house. It is its outdoor entrance and it can be seating, table, plate, board, etc. all at the same time.



**2 OPEN SPACE**

The Chisale family has a fairly large plot with a fairly large open space. When sitting on the *khonde*, one has the best views as one can overlook everything that is going on. On the further end of the plot, the Chisale's face a wall, however, it is not meant for enclosure but to draw borders.



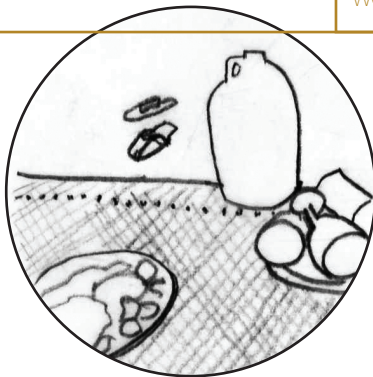
**6 STOVE**

The majority of Malawians cook on metal stoves that run on charcoal. They produce a lot of smoke and are therefore better to be lit in the open space of the plot.



**7 GAMES**

There is a number of ways children and youths can play with the materials nature has provided for. The red soil, for instance, functions as a great drawing board. One could also dig soil, build things, and, play a variety of games.

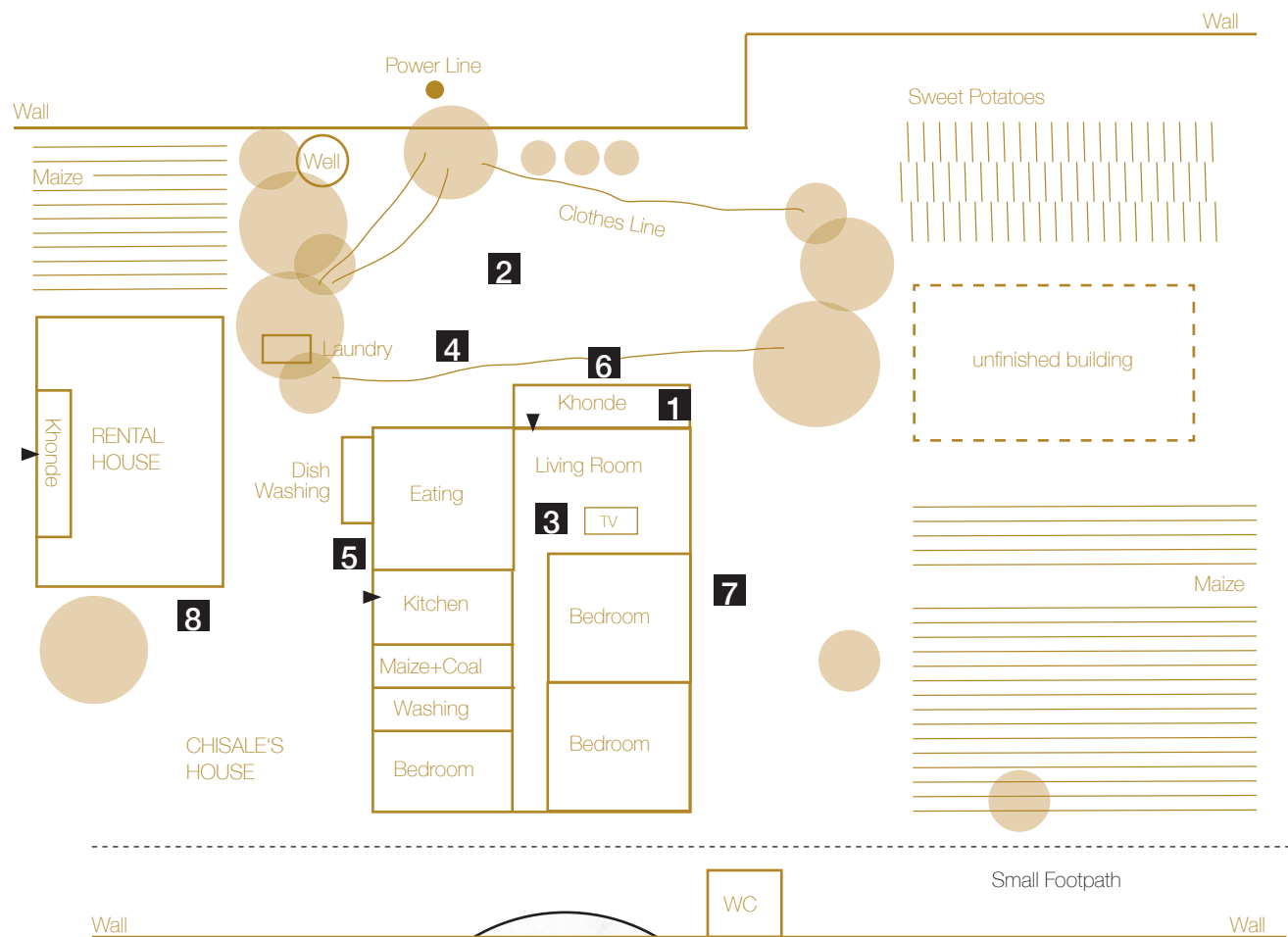


**4 PLASTIC MAT**

Most activities are done outside. If it is dry and not too hot out, a mat is placed on the floor in order to keep the red soil off one's clothes and to sit on it while one is staying around. Food is also dished outside.

**3 LIVING ROOM**

The Chisale family has a fairly large house with a large living room. The TV set receives a lot of attention though oftentimes it is only running so one can listen to music or a show. TVs are just as entertaining to be listened to, less watched.







Food is prepared and cooked on the khonde while sitting on the floor on a plastic mat. As the food is being prepared, everyone can watch, help, and wait for it to be ready. Sugar cane is being chewed as an „appetizer“.

tugged between the three buildings and an open-ended wall, is fairly large and forms the central space on the plot. Although the Chisales have a relatively large living room into which one directly enters when stepping through the main door, most activities and encounters occur outside in the open space of the plot. Or on the veranda, commonly known as *khonde*\*, an in-between space between indoors and outdoors. **Efed Chisale**, 42, from the **south of Malawi** and mother and wife, can be regarded as the head of the Chisale household as most of the time she is „around“, as people say. She oversees everything that goes on in her home and, in this manner, fulfills her role as a housewife, mother and host. „Auntie“, as her children call her with ironic affection, used to work in a China shop. But since her **husband**, a **Chewa**, works for a NGO in Lilongwe and can sufficiently provide for the family, she mostly stays at home. She seems continuously busy with domestic duties like washing, cleaning, cooking and doing dishes, all of it done outside. Busy, however, might not exactly describe it as the chores appear to be the backdrop to her conversations, her fascination for her mobile phone, and give her reason to frequently rest. It is almost as if she were doing the chores on the side while her attention is actually dedicated to something or someone else. Her children help her with the chores, the **younger ones** help the **older ones** so, no matter how small the contribution, **everyone** is involved. The eldest daughter, **Lunia**, enjoys cooking very much and so she prepares the dishes for her family on the *khonde*. Sometimes she posts images of her food in one

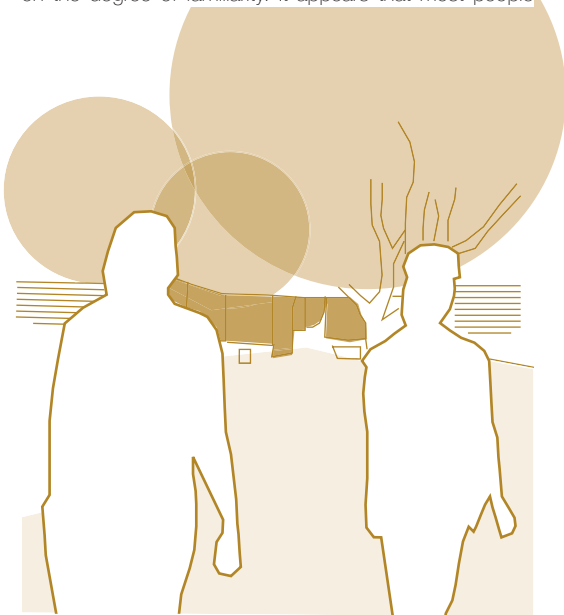
of her **WhatsApp** groups called „Best Kitchen Ever“ where its **members** share recipes and cooking advice. While **Lunia** prepares the food, her mother fires the stove, and her **siblings** sit or play around to keep each other company. Sometimes they have a look at **Lunia's** smartphone since she is the only one of the siblings who has one. She is also the one who goes into town (well dressed up) to apply for a job. When she returns from town, she sometimes brings female condoms and slips them overtly into her mother's hands who then takes them into the house. It is a private matter but not so private that one feels the need to hide it. **Efed** is involved with a **community savings group** called *Ndikundani* („love“ in Chichewa) with 15 other women in the community. For that reason, she regularly attends meetings that occur in somebody's home, alternating among the group members. On weekdays, she gets up at 4 AM to prepare porridge for breakfast which is not an unusual waking hour in Malawi. She goes outside in the dark, starts a fire on a portable cooking stove with a handful of charcoals and slowly stirs maize flour or nsima into a pot. As the sun rises, one by one, the family members get up. Soon the **father** leaves for work just to return after 4 PM or later. On weekends, he likes to go out drinking. Hence, he is rarely home. Only three out of the six children actually live with their parents, the **youngest two** and the **first born**, who works in a garage in town. The **fourth born** goes to a boarding school outside Lilongwe and comes home only during school breaks. **Lunia** and her **younger sister** moved to Area 36 as it is closer to school, one studying HIV

Management and the other Catering. As of now, the oldest daughter lives in Zomba, another city altogether, because she found a job. All of them regularly go back because they „miss home badly“, to say it in **Lunia's** words.

Besides the immediate family members who call this place their home, a number of other people spend a good amount of time on the Chisale premises. First off, there is **Efed's mother**, called „agugu“, who comes by nearly every day after she finishes selling refreshments near the hospital. In all reality, she belongs to the immediate family. Then there are the **nextdoor neighbors**, a **mother** with a young **daughter** and a little **boy** to whom the Chisales have rented their additional house on the plot. As children do, especially infants, they stumble where they want to stumble and their mother either faithfully follows or somebody else keeps an eye on them. The Chisale children surely do not mind and often play with Sandra and little Mike, squealing in excitement particularly whenever they see the baby boy. Likewise, **neighboring children** are attracted by the other playmates and by the TV set in the living room of the Chisale house. Being able to watch TV, i.e. own a TV set and have electricity, is not the rule but more of an exception in high density residential areas. The volume is set on loud so one can easily make out the sounds coming from whatever is currently on TV. It could be a *TERMINATOR* movie, a Bollywood soap opera or a music channel showing music videos from Malawi and beyond. But only because the TV is turned on, it does not automatically mean that there is an interested audience. It could also simply serve as background noise, white noise, or music to dance to - outside, not in front of the TV. Who, after all, is going to be the dancer's audience? Just as their neighbors pop their heads around, the Chisales also stop by their neighbor's house. It is a much smaller building with a much smaller courtyard, facing away from the Chisale house. It appears less convivial though no less welcoming perhaps due to the fact that there is no other neighbor or path attached to this space. It is engulfed by greenery, a residential cul-de-sac, one could say. To visit each other, one has to walk around the house. But since there are also no boundaries between the Chisale's and the neighbor's space, traversing between spaces comes automatically and naturally. Boundaries seem to exist only in terms of courtesy. For instance, when food is served, the Chisales and their neighbors do not eat together, even when both parties prepared the food at the same time on the same plot outside. Sharing food with neighbors, a means of showing companionship but also of saving on expenses, used to be common practice all over Malawi but with a more and more urbanizing society, *chidyerano*, i.e. the communal practice of sharing food and eating together, is seen less these days. Some engage in *chidyerano* out of necessity as they might have to save money out of poverty. Being a fairly well-to-do family in comparison to **other inhabitants** in the area, the Chisales do not engage in *chidyerano* as such. Instead, they share food when they have guests

over. And they often do. Besides the next door neighbors, there are also **other neighbors** who live just a few meters further and are often seen on the plot, too. This is because the Chisales own a major attraction: a personal well as water supply. Since there is enough water for a few other families to use as well, the neighbors regularly come by with their buckets in order to fill them up with water. Upon asking whether the neighbors pay for the water, the answer is no. One might want to note here that **Efed** makes and sells soap. For that reason, she leaves a small basket of soap pieces in front of her neighbors' house whose house is right next to the main road. The basket stays more or less unattended until a potential **buyer** comes by. **More people** pass by on the main road so **Efed** has better chances of selling soap by leaving the bars with her neighbor while her neighbor keeps an eye out for her. **Efed** simply collects the money later on.

The list of people who can be met on the Chisale premises goes on. There is, for instance, the **household employee** who comes around every Wednesday and Friday to help with the laundry and cleaning. Like second nature, she enters chats and discussions with the family and their social circle. There is also the **photographer** who pays the family a visit to drop a few photo prints he made of the family a while back. He does not only deliver the photos but pulls a chair, or rather a small stool, sits down and stays for a chat. Then there is the **people who incidentally make use of the path** that goes past the house. Oftentimes, faces are familiar, and a simple passing slips into a more or less elaborate chat (or flirt even?), depending on the degree of familiarity. It appears that most people



Two friends of Sabina come by for a visit. They both live in the neighborhood and enter the home plot unannounced.



ACTANTS + AGENCY

This is a small selection of actants and assemblages as found at the analyzed home plot in Chinsapo. In different constellations, they produce different kinds of agencies, all of which have an impact to a smaller or greater degree on how a domestic, private space switches to a public space and back.

KHONDE  
+ HOUSE  
= INDOOR OUTDOORS

WATER  
+ ELECTRICITY  
+ PEOPLE  
= ATTRACTIONS

TIME  
+ SPACE  
+ SOCIAL TIES  
= WISH TO STAY

WALKING  
+ SLOW  
+ VISIBILITY  
= CONTACT

AGE  
+ CHORE  
= HIERARCHY

PRIVATE PLOTS  
+ NO BOUNDARIES  
+ PROXIMITY  
= CURTEOUSY

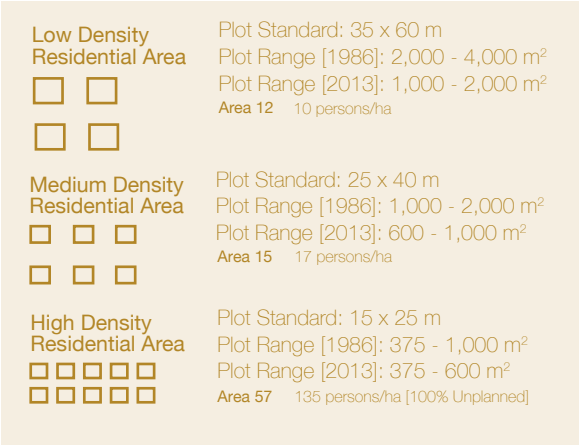
SPONTANEOUS  
+ GREETING  
+ HOSPITALITY  
= CULTURE

OPEN SPACE  
+ RED SOIL  
+ SWEEPING  
= ATTRACTIVE SPACE

DOMESTIC SPACE  
+ PRIVATE ISSUES  
= UNVARNISHED PRESENCE

PROXIMITY  
+ VISIBILITY  
+ FREQUENCY  
= FAMILIARITY

INCOME  
+ MATERIALITIES  
+ LOCATION  
= CONTAINMENT



Plot size standards as prescribed in the OUTLINE ZONING SCHEME 1986 and the URBAN STRUCTURE PLAN DRAFT 2013 with selected examples of population densities in the respective residential areas.

in this community know each other one way or the other while **strangers** are quickly spotted and familiarized. „We know everyone in this area and we say hello, bring food from the market and so on“, an inhabitant in a high density residential area remarks. To see **friends** it is common practice to simply pop by entirely unannounced at their homes. So it comes to nobody’s surprise when **two girls** slowly stroll towards the Chisale’s courtyard, greeting the family and looking for their friend **Sabina**, the third born. Sabina promptly approaches them, standing slightly away from the rest of the present people, to have a more intimate chat with them right on the spot. The girls know each other from school and live nearby. One of the girls is holding a phone in her hands which she wants to sell. Although she has graduated from school already, she still has not found employment. „I only stay right now because of financial problems at home“, she explains her situation, seemingly without a hint of disconcertment. Finally, there is the **people who actually come over on invitation**. Surely streets, markets, and other known landmarks could serve as a meeting point, too, but it is more common to invite somebody to one’s home when the meeting is to last longer. If finances permit, Malawian hospitality is usually framed by some form of consumption which, in the end, is most conveniently and economically done at home. This may come in the shape of liquids like tea or *tobwa* (a milky drink made of fermented cereals) or a full meal with nsima and relishes, usually entirely homemade, or a snack like sweetened avocados. The architecture and layout of most dwellings seem to offer the most enjoyable spaces to simply be or *kukhala* („to be, stay“ in Chichewa). This could mean anything from sitting together while not doing much else but observing one’s surroundings to a number of more active practices though all occur within one space. The open space of a plot or the khonde, attached to most Malawian houses, offer a good platform to do just that. Usually a

mat is placed on the ground before one takes a seat. On the khonde one is protected by the sun and rain as it comes with a roof. Without the khonde, the bare ground of the plot’s open space would suffice and perhaps, instead, a tree would provide some shade. As one simply stays, being outdoors comes with several practices one would not usually do indoors: eating with your hands without worrying about dropping something on the ground, biting on sugar cane and spitting out unwanted parts of it after the juice has been sucked out, tossing empty groundnut shells, picking on a pile of dried maize cobs, playing with your pets, drawing in the red soil, playing games that require objects like rocks and sticks and so on and so forth.

WORLDS APART IN LILONGWE

Lilongwe’s neighborhoods differ greatly in appearance, form, use, and experience when one compares the extremes in high and low density residential areas. So much that it is hard to believe that they belong to one urban entity. High density residential (HDR) areas, that is to say those which were and/or are unplanned, are generally located the furthest away from the central business districts. They particularly expand to the south and southwest of the city but are found all around Lilongwe. Low density residential (LDR) areas are much more central, nevertheless, motorized vehicles are the standard mode of movement for its residents. This can be explained by the fact that a) Lilongwe is such a sprawling city, even in a central location commutes can stretch to several kilometers just to reach a place „close by“ and b) their residents generally belong to a **higher income group** as they can afford this kind of living. Conversely, those living in non-central locations have to commute even longer with the additional impairment that for its residents motorized transport oftentimes is simply not affordable. Thinking in black and white rarely fares well as reflections of realities but in this case it might be closer to the truth than usual. Income disparities are high in Lilongwe which materializes in real estate prices, in the costs of living, and in the racial make up within one area. HDR areas largely form the home of **Malawians** and other **African communities** whereas **Lilongwe’s inhabitants of Asian or Western descent** almost exclusively reside in middle to low density residential areas. In Lilongwe, planning of residential areas is embedded in the prescribed standards set in the OUTLINE ZONING SCHEME FROM 1986. It is still being used regardless of the existence of a new master plan that employs smaller plot standards because the new plan has not been gazetted yet. Accordingly, HDR plot sizes range between 375 to 600 m² and standard LDR plots range around 2,000 to 4,000 m² (JICA 2010). Houses in HDR areas are usually made of sun-dried or burned mud bricks with reed or corrugated iron roofs. Buildings in LDR areas use more durable construction materials that are naturally more expensive. Consequently, rental prices in HDR areas range somewhere between 5,000 to 15,000 MK (ca. 6 to





Top to bottom: Low, middle, and high density residential areas in Lilongwe [Area 43, 18, 57]



House in Area 43, a low density residential area in Lilongwe: This building is surrounded by a large garden and a long red brick wall. It is not being shared with another household. Guards protect the gate 24/7 but there is also an additional alarm system that goes off when intruders try to enter. All gates, doors, windows as well as the khonde come with burglar bars. Each of the three bedrooms is equipped with an „emergency button“ and flood lights are switched on during the night for extra protection. There is ample space for parking in front of the main entrance. The main road outside the plot's gate is paved and reveals views onto the neighbors' walls but the neighbors' homes themselves remain hidden.



House in Area 57, a high density residential area in Lilongwe: This building is surrounded by open space that is marked by a flat surface, red soil and very little green. The road is only a few meters away from the house. The house itself has two rooms, in total they are slightly bigger than the size of two double beds. To sit outside, the residents put a reed mat on the ground for lack of a khonde. Nextdoor neighbors live in similar buildings. Their entrances face the same courtyard and together they share one space. With a simple padlock, the wooden door is locked up and a few lace curtains protect from unwanted glances through the windows.





Streetscape in a low density residential area of Lilongwe [Area 3]



Streetscape in Kauma, a high density residential area, and home plot without shared courtyard

HOUSES 4 SALE	
Area 24	MK 6 million
Area 23	MK 3.5 million
Area 23	MK 1.5 million
Area 21	MK 20 million with deed
Area 23	MK 40 million
Area 7	MK 26 million
Area 12	MK 180 million
Area 43	MK 150 million
Area 49	MK 10 million
Area 18	MK 22 million
Area 1	MK 10 million
Area 7	MK 15 million
Area 47	MK 65 million
Area 47	MK 68 million
Area 23	MK 23 million

Housing prices in Lilongwe as advertised on a poster

18 Euros) per month, renting a room in a middle income area (MDR) may cost 25,000 MK (ca. 29 Euros) and more, and a rental room in a LDR area can already cost 200,000 MK (ca. 235 Euros) and beyond. These numbers are not based on statistics but examples from the field that roughly illustrate the income disparities at work. Do people in Lilongwe live in worlds apart? In a way, one could say so. In legacy of Lilongwe's planning past, up to today, residential areas are not designated to mix HDR and LDR plot types, creating rather homogeneous urban forms *within* and fundamentally different urban forms *across* different density areas. Most houses in LDR areas, for instance, are walled and gated, creating streetscapes that hardly enable passersby to spontaneously engage with what occurs behind the walls. Yet it is still possible to roam the open space around the walls rather undisturbed. Gated communities, perhaps the next level of fortification, currently form more of an exception than the norm in Lilongwe. Despite its openness, LDR streetscapes appear rather hostile when it comes to conviviality. Streetscapes in HDR areas paint a very different image. Many plot entrances are more open or rather porous, simply through the fact that most houses are not fully enclosed. Thus, what occurs inside a residential plot is hypothetically visible to a wider public all the time. This is not to say that open plots can be equated with more conviviality and closed plots with less. Other factors certainly have a role to play too. What can be observed in the streetscapes of HDR and LDR areas, however, is that the *potentialities* for encounters are more frequent or highly limited, depending on the density type of the respective area. At least, this can be said about the current state of urban development in Lilongwe. Higher density does not naturally go hand in hand with precarious living conditions that bring about spatialities as described above. Rather, for the moment, it can serve as an indicator for the specific lifeworlds that are illustrated here.

### WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC URBAN LIFE?

In areas like Chinsapo, it is hard to ignore that the home plot appears to play a significant role in the social life of its **inhabitants**. One can even perceive them as *the* dominant place where people meet and where spontaneous encounters are stretched to prolonged ones. As such, accessible open spaces on private plots within HDR areas form a string of meeting points that go beyond public grids like markets and water kiosks. Understanding them as mere substitutes to coffeehouses, restaurants, and hotels, however, where it is more common to meet in more Western-oriented and higher income contexts of Lilongwe, would not do justice to the nature of these spaces. After all, Chinsapo does offer a gastronomy and entertainment infrastructure for smaller budgets too, for examples in the form of tea houses or street food vendors, but they seem to lack certain „stay“ qualities that make them less attractive for meetings. Spending remains a great influential factor. No matter how small the price, a price is still more than no price. Since spending is such a determining factor, meeting outside of Chinsapo is also not the general mode of conduct as it is tied to expenses for transport or to long and tiresome walks as an alternative. Subsequently, one is somewhat confined to a certain radius from one's home plot.

Why the home plot remains the preferred site of being and staying is also tied to the lack of suitable alternative places within one's area. Chinsapo, for instance, does not have playgrounds so children play wherever they see fit. Thanks to the open space of the home plot, children can play right there on the spot. Many **households** do not have access to water and electricity (for light bulbs, to watch TV, and to listen to music) so those who do become an attraction. Further, a number of streets in Chinsapo are rather polluted and garbage piles can be seen sprinkling the roads and corners of the area. The home plot is well taken care of, swept clean, and therefore a more attractive place to be. These are only some of the reasons why the home plot may be the preferred site for meetings. Fact is, ungated home plots in HDR areas are comparably more often frequented by different people as opposed to those in other density areas and those homes who have gates.

On another note, the concept of going out, leaving one's home for a good amount of time, is not particularly engrained in Malawian culture, given that the streets used to be a place to fear under the **Banda** regime. Though governmental **militias** no longer tend to stop and frisk people on the street, the national psyche has not yet forgiven. As a result, unconsciously or out of sheer habit, people rather stay at home. Unless there is something to be gained, financially, spiritually, politically, or recreationally, they seem to see no reason to go out. Instead, one paradoxically waits in the private sphere for the public to come by and,



TREES  
PLANTS  
OPEN  
SPACE  
ADOBE  
BRICK  
WALLS  
PILE OF  
EXTRA  
BRICKS  
MUD  
MORTAR  
MAIZE  
FIELD  
UNTREATED  
FACADES  
SINGLE  
LEVEL  
BUILDING  
CORRU-  
GATED  
IRON  
ROOFS  
ROOFED  
KHONDE /  
VERANDA  
ELECTRICITY  
UNSEALED  
GROUND  
RED  
BROWN  
COLORS  
UNSEALED  
ROAD  
NO GATES  
SHADE  
NO  
ENCLOSURE  
SEATING  
MATS  
WASHING  
LINE



A typology of houses in high density residential areas in Lilongwe



Half-enclosed khonde  
with views onto a wall

likewise, only goes out when one can enter another private realm shortly after. Perhaps another brief example from Lilongwe's urban lifeworlds can make the importance of a private open space for one's public life a bit clearer.

**Dorothea** lives with her **husband** and her three year old **daughter** in a rather untypical plot in Kauma, another HDR area in the north of Lilongwe. Her house does not overlook a spacious courtyard and the khonde is walled in on all sides, leaving only a small opening for the entrance. Instead of wide views, the inhabitants face the green wall, or the „jungle“ as Dorothea calls it, of her neighbors when they sit outside. Her **neighbors** are Rastafarians, own a large plot and have planted all kinds of produce on their land, encircled by a bamboo fence. Though the scenery might appear rather picturesque, Dorothea does not enjoy it at all. Barely any people come by on the small, hidden dirt path that winds between her house and the neighbor's plot. **Thieves** have taken advantage of the house's remoteness and stolen valuable things like a car battery or cooking pots from Dorothea's household which she is unable to replace. „I'm alone“, Dorothea exclaims at one point and simultaneously explains the root of her pain. While the setting of her home technically offers all the facilities she needs, its remote character and feeling of enclosure causes her discomfort as she grew up with a different way of living. In consequence, Dorothea frequently visits her **good friend and neighbor** who lives in a building that overviews a fairly open space and where a plethora of people are found day in and day out. Among people who are busy washing their baby in a plastic bucket, sowing their broken sneakers, doing their hair, while chatting with her friend on the elevated khonde, this is where she feels more at ease.

Being on home turf does not automatically imply that one enters a private, domestic space. A residential plot much more fluctuates between private and public modes and

moments. They can switch and be distinguished through the most subtle changes like visibility, sounds, silence, intimacy, familiarity, and temporality. As much of the domestic work occurs outdoors and unconcealed, private practices often become part of a wider public and thus are not perceived as private. The private plot that invites the public, however, represents a public space that rarely becomes the site of encounters with strangers, therefore, being the site for a very selected public. In a way, this is owed to the very existence of such vast publicness in the private sphere of HDR areas. But it is also owed to the fact that HDR areas are spatially contained and secluded from wider publics that would facilitate more encounters with the other. This can be attributed to the city's urban sprawl and its planning background.

As such, the social urban framework in Lilongwe is less one that is interconnected on multiple layers. It is much better understood in terms of several distinctive social urban frameworks, a plurality, that is merely loosely connected. Within such landscapes, gated housing becomes yet another game changer as it solidifies the privateness of a private plot, disarming its power to also be open to a public. In Chinsapo, more and more plots are constructing such walls. Not necessarily to keep people out, though this surely can be a significant aspect. Another more practical attitude drives up the construction of walls. As a former police man living in Chinsapo explains: „If you don't make this fence, the government will take it from you“. Given that land rights can be highly vulnerable in HDR areas and do not strictly follow the rules of formal land tenures, inhabitants protect their lands by simply demarcating clear boundaries, in the hope that they will formally be respected.



This is a plot in Chinsapo, a high density residential area which became part of Lilongwe in 2010 with the introduction of the new master plan. Several households share the open space that is directly looking onto a main road. There are no gates, no walls, only a few trees slightly frame the plot.





ANALYSIS + RELEVANCE

5

THE PRODUCTION  
OF PUBLIC SPACE





Having introduced singular moments, or snapshots of public urban life in Lilongwe through selected case studies, this appears to be a good moment to take stock and to look back on what motivated this research and in how far I was able to find answers to my research questions. Driven by my inability to find public spaces in Lilongwe's planned landscape that were for the public and also used by the public, I embarked on a research journey to find out why this was the case and where they could be instead. When I discovered that none of the leading and guiding planning documents even mentioned nor hinted at the composition of Lilongwe's publics, I was slightly less surprised then. How is a city to have public spaces when the city planners have not made room for it in the first place? But since there is always some form of public urban life as long as there are people in Lilongwe, I continued my journey with a certainty that I would find public urban life, though, the question only remained how. Eventually, I have found some of Lilongwe's public spaces by advancing an understanding for public space as a public practice. The case studies are a result of this approach. Examining public practices or public urban life more closely, further enabled me to arrive at a better understanding for Lilongwe's urbanity which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. To sum up for the moment: Lilongwe's public spaces are not planned by urban planners and, subsequently, public urban life moves between informal spheres. Among others, they are marked by modes of survival, acts of conviviality, homogeneous lifeworlds, temporariness, and shared experiences and challenges. In the end, there are traces of public spaces in Lilongwe, one must only know where to look for it or know the people who can show you where and who can take you there.

In order to expand on how the specificities of the case studies can be applied to produce clearer images or imaginaries for Lilongwe, I will take my findings as a cue to linking them to wider trajectories (Cinar and Bender 2007). In appreciation of the versatility of public urban lives found in Lilongwe, this work offers no best practices, scenarios, or potential drafts for future public spaces. There can be no one-size-fits-all solution for public spaces. Especially so, when none of the previous sizes have fit, given that EuroAmerican perspectives so often override Malawian point of views. Instead, five *Food For Thoughts* are assembled here, extracted from an axial reading of the case studies which address issues around urban mobility, temporalities, private and public distinctions, gender roles, and the invisibility of planning. These extracts are not exhaustive, any additions are therefore most welcome. But it is important to note that they do not represent stringent rules to how public spaces can be created or „improved“. As its use of the term suggests, they are meant to stir the mind. They can, more usefully, be read as *frameworks* for future decision-making processes that deal with public urban life and public spaces in Lilongwe or, more generally, urban Malawi. While the *Food For Thoughts* are applicable to all case studies, with a few exceptions, some examples serve as a clearer lens than others. Examples of public urban life that have particularly informed a *Food For Thought* are, therefore, given a particular mention. As a whole, they are especially directed towards the urban planning sector, not as a form of criticism but as inspirations for future public spaces that are truly born from the public and therefore for the public.



# INVENTORY OF PUBLIC URBAN LIFE PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SPACE

PUBLIC PRACTICES as extracted from the case studies

source water  
supply the city with water  
target high density residential areas  
design a water kiosk  
install a water kiosk  
remain vulnerable to water-born diseases  
being affected by a water-born disease  
(not) keeping up with the demand  
face shortcomings  
spike water prices  
(not) having access to clean running  
water at home  
open a water kiosk with a key  
keep a key  
living close by a water kiosk  
collect water fees  
advertise price in handwriting  
check the water meter  
receive a steady income  
carrying a purse  
collect banknotes  
wrap a chitenje around  
get in line by placing a bucket  
roam around  
cut the line  
using one out of four pipes only  
wait  
chat  
go one's way  
meet again a little while later  
fetching water  
join  
be „most welcome“  
opt for a 40 liter bucket  
assist one another  
placing bucket on one's head  
carry water home  
seek clean water  
walk more than 20 minutes  
forge footpaths  
familiarize faces  
exchange news  
meet at a water kiosk outside  
opening hours

mingle underneath a water tank  
listen to music  
dance to music  
appropriate a water kiosk  
turn a water kiosk into a bench  
have a better chat  
share hardships  
  
say „Rabor“ instead of „Labor“  
pass through  
sitting around in the dry green grass  
sitting underneath trees  
leaning at walls  
waiting for something  
flock to the Labor Office  
contract somebody for work  
freelance  
make quick and big money  
come regularly  
walk back and forth  
being employed  
earn more or less money  
find a piece worker  
wait for work  
compete  
show you are looking for a job  
seek somebody who is looking for a job  
know the rules  
sit separately  
have same intentions  
mingle  
wait for a (good) job  
sit on bare ground on chitenje  
not being bored  
exchange news  
chat  
listen to radio  
play Bawo  
eat sugar cane  
eat groundnuts  
play with phone  
listen to the preacher  
stay quiet  
think about the family

share food  
notice a missing face  
hang backpack on a tree branch  
signal one is ready to work  
be ready  
construct new building  
enter a building  
make a living  
create a meeting ground on formal  
premises  
  
use trees  
use roots and stems  
sit on tree trunks  
use steam as a table  
use branches as hangers  
use crowns as umbrellas  
protect from the climate  
gain symbolic significance  
be sacred  
visit a tree  
worship a tree  
meet at a kachere tree  
share problems  
help each other  
assemble  
make announcements  
gather in the shade  
listen in the shade  
expand use  
evolve in use  
become a synonym  
name a place after kachere  
associate kachere with a specific place  
mark a specific location  
attract crowds  
attract crowds attracted by the crowds  
form a nucleus of public urban life  
stop for a chat  
exchange news  
show face  
to see and be seen  
identify a location  
become a minibus stop

have no sign  
not showing up in maps  
exist in the minds of the people  
know people who know  
tell  
(not) materialize in formal geographies  
be born from a tradition  
accommodate transformations  
turn into something else  
retain „kachere character“  
build organically

construct missionary schools and  
hospitals and churches  
be Christian  
be Muslim  
attend church service on Sunday  
attend church service on Saturday  
worship outside school  
regularly pray  
pray before eating a meal  
pray after a meeting  
make references to God  
be a devoted Christian  
be a faithful service attendant  
not miss a week of church service  
(not) disgrace the family  
die  
smoke  
drink  
close business  
close office  
put down work  
replace chitenje with fancy dress  
wear a suit  
meet each other on weekends  
attract crowds  
rest assured to meet family, friends,  
neighbors  
meet unknown faces of the same  
denomination  
sit separately according to gender and  
status  
mingle before service  
mingle after service

raising eyebrows  
play in the last row of the seats  
buy popcorn from a street vendor  
snack popcorn in church  
go to church early  
attend bible school  
exchange anecdotes from the past week  
witness God's workings  
fill up a square  
empty a square  
not feel overcrowded  
spot familiar faces  
have a chat  
parting  
see each other next weekend again  
go to a wedding invited or not  
think you are invited to a wedding  
serve snacks  
serve drinks  
pull a chair (or not)

use WhatsApp  
communicate through WhatsApp  
chitchat with friends  
speak to superiors  
contact the government  
send images via WhatsApp  
send videos via WhatsApp  
send recordings via WhatsApp  
send messages via WhatsApp  
share information via WhatsApp  
offer mobile broadband internet  
enter the Malawian market  
offer daily WhatsApp bundles  
offer weekly WhatsApp bundles  
offer monthly WhatsApp bundles  
purchase a WhatsApp bundle  
use WhatsApp with a smartphone  
use somebody else's smartphone  
communicate with one person  
communicate with multiple people  
enter a WhatsApp group  
leave a WhatsApp group  
overcome certain shortcomings  
have access to a WhatsApp compatible  
mobile phone  
have access to electricity  
being able to afford phone credit  
(not) own a mobile phone  
(not) own a smart phone  
message in real time  
connect on all matters of concern  
refer on social media to WhatsApp  
groups  
ask for WhatsApp group invitations  
(not) boycott WhatsApp groups  
take advantage of WhatsApp  
finding likeminded people  
exchanging news  
exchanging knowledge  
do business  
sharing time  
be in different locations  
meet after communicating on WhatsApp  
meet with a selected person or group  
share information with a selected person  
or group  
invite somebody into a WhatsApp group  
kick somebody out of a WhatsApp group  
wanting to enter a group that is already  
full  
communicate with up to 256 people at  
the same time

play Bawo  
play nearly everywhere

transport a Bawo board  
transport Bawo seeds  
play with different kind of boards  
play with different kind of seeds  
dig your own board  
collect your own seeds  
tapping with your seeds  
hearing tapping  
move seeds  
finish last move with a smash  
lure in spectators  
finding Bawo players  
play on boards with four rows  
play on a district, regional, national level  
play in the city  
play in the countryside  
know the rules  
count  
count seeds  
count pockets  
play basic version  
play advanced version  
have time  
waste time  
kill time  
be surrounded by other men  
not stay alone  
entertain  
play outside  
set up in prominent place  
spot a Bawo player  
paying attention to moves  
commenting on the game  
stay silent  
last 15 to 20 min  
make out your next move  
gamble  
scan spectators  
slip a banknote under the board  
stay below the radar  
pay market fees  
be jealous  
sell crafts  
make crafts  
pack crafts  
unpack crafts  
chat  
sit and wait  
watch people in the parking lot  
speak to potential customers  
bargain  
stay under a roof  
collect documents  
park a car  
spend money on arts and crafts  
spend more money  
catch somebody's attention  
roam the streets  
being a nuisance  
refrain from entering  
pay guards  
pay parking fee  
collect parking fee  
hand out parking ticket  
roll down window  
sit on a wooden bench  
sit on concrete slabs  
sit in the shade of a tree  
set up seating area  
wait around  
set up shop  
keep valuables secure  
have an eye on the crafts  
play first round of Bawo  
ask for a good price  
extend game to long hours

cover for somebody  
jump up for customers  
keep an eye out for customers  
see Bawo for the first time being played  
sell Bawo game  
play regularly  
take Bawo very seriously  
carry a large bucket on the head  
sell lunch meals  
wait for plate  
eat on the spot  
eat somewhere else  
keep stomach empty  
play in the dark  
have light

sell vegetables, fruits and other produce  
win a battle  
set up shop  
sell Malawian meals  
build makeshift restaurants  
stay on a vacant plot  
stay in a central location  
sell to white-collar workers  
sell to blue-collar workers  
sell to civil servants  
sell to nursery students  
cook meals out in the open  
be relocated  
be displaced  
drive to the market  
take one of the two paths  
park in parking lot  
park in an open space  
park wherever you like  
come with company  
take the minibus  
walk  
use a footpath  
serve lunch  
form a line  
form a circle  
stay in a solitary corner  
sit  
eat  
use no cutler  
eat with your hands  
repair things  
wear high heels  
keep food warm  
use containers  
eat brown nsima  
eat white nsima  
eat meat  
order take away  
buy sodas  
buy an orange or banana  
knock off by 4 PM  
being chairman  
paying a donation  
receiving welfare  
lock up valuables  
store away chairs  
like Lilongwe too much  
cook  
employ  
bring ingredients from the market  
occupy two seats in the minibus  
cook between rubbles  
buy water buckets  
pay a boy who brings firewood  
sting in the eye  
cleanse rice from rocks  
serve plates  
change clothes  
have a cheerful chat

have a chance to eat  
clear space  
collect market fee  
(not) making friends

strolling through the neighborhood  
stumble  
intruding on somebody's plot  
make a right turn  
enter a courtyard  
not stop  
spot the visitor  
spot the guest  
greet politely  
greet somebody younger  
say Bo?  
respond Bo!  
sweep the ground  
construct several houses on one plot  
(not) watching TV  
listening to TV  
sitting on the khonde  
cutting food on the khonde  
respond to „Auntie“ and „Agugu“  
.doing chores  
washing clothes  
hanging them on the washing line  
communicate via WhatsApp  
go into town  
at a community meeting  
wake up at 4 AM  
make porridge  
come home  
come by every day or week  
play with other children  
dancing  
prepare food  
(not) share food  
grant access to well  
sell soap on the road  
work to make a living  
take photographs  
use the path  
know somebody  
know everybody  
say hello  
bring food from the market  
promptly approach visitors  
meet here  
(not) spend money  
have a snack  
bite on sugar cane  
trying to sell a phone  
play with one's phone  
sit in the shade  
chase away the dogs  
chat  
take a bath  
stay  
do nothing  
wait for somebody's return  
go for a walk  
visit a friend  
heat water  
pull up a chair  
bring water in a small container  
play with the cat  
watch the kids play games  
ask about news  
exchange news  
go to the market and come back again  
fix something that is broken  
draw a line in the red soil  
make some tea with ginger and lemon  
sit on a wooden stool



FOOD FOR THOUGHT 1

MOBILITY  
DETERMINES  
PUBLIC URBAN LIFE

Being a city that is highly marked by urban sprawl as well as high containerization in its urban form, one's mode of transport strongly influences the potential intersections of public urban life one can traverse in Lilongwe. Whether one makes use of a private vehicle, bicycle, minibus, *kabaza*, or simply walks by foot, one's dominant mode of transport outlines the parameters of one's public urban life as well as one's exposure to other forms thereof. Since one's mode of transport is also strongly connected to a person's spending power, the parameters are further indirectly tied to a person's socioeconomic background.

While all modes of transport hypothetically are capable of taking a person from A to B, each representing a form of urban mobility, each mode's maximum scope is explored to varying degrees. The majority of Lilongwe's inhabitants walks, often for hours, as the city was built to accommodate more motorized, less manpowered forms of mobility. But since walking long distances is a rather strenuous task, it is avoided until it can no longer be avoided.

The success and failure of public spaces in Lilongwe is tied to a public that is (im)mobile as it shapes where one can engage in public urban life and where not. Public urban life in Lilongwe is, therefore, restrained and acted out in homogeneous publics. Lilongwe's *Community Grounds*, for example, could present itself as an attractive site for Lilongwe's communities, as its designated function implies. However, it ignores the fact that not all communities have a means to regularly travel to the grounds and, therefore, loses its attraction for public urban life. Moreover, limited modes of mobility, have the effect of intensifying the containerization of social lifeworlds as exemplified in the *Home Plot[ing]* case study. Home plots foster public spaces within one's home area but less beyond. As a result, they are marked by rather homogeneous public urban lives and, simultaneously, deprive other inhabitants of Lilongwe of the opportunity to also partake.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT 2

PARTICIPATION IN  
PUBLIC URBAN LIFE  
DEPENDS ON TIME

Leisure time is a precious good among Lilongwe’s inhabitants. This has several reasons. For one, the landscapes of poverty in Malawi as well as in Lilongwe are vast. Making a living in order to „survive“ (as people say in direct translation from Chichewa to English) thus often prescribes how many city dwellers spend their time. And „it is a struggle“, as one inhabitant puts it. To find employment that pays sufficiently for one’s living expenses is something that the majority is not lucky enough to find as Malawi’s economy is struggling all the same. As a result, informal economies thrive in Lilongwe’s urban fabric and come with its benefits and vulnerabilities. The *Labor Office[ing]* and *Bawo[ing]* examples showcase some informal economies, many other forms can be encountered in Lilongwe’s public sphere, driven by the fact that the dominant mode of transaction is direct and face-to-face. As such, informal economies are also strongly linked to Lilongwe’s public urban life. Being in public often forms a requirement for those who are „hustling“ to make a gain (Thieme 2017). How else will potential customers, employers, or generally, a pool of people with enough spending power to conduct a transaction become aware of one’s economic activity?

But informal economies do not only require a public, they also take up time, a lot of time. Transactions may or may not come in on a rolling basis. To be there when transactions do come in is therefore essential to one’s income generation. Hence, one cannot afford to be elsewhere and spend time on much else. Except for *Church[ing]*. Religion plays such an important role to many Malawians, so there must always be time for worship and prayer. Lilongwe’s operating hours accommodate this public practice.

Another component that influences public urban life due to time constraints stems from a more gendered perspective as was made visible in the *Water Kiosk[ing]*, *Bawo[ing]*, and *Home Plot[ing]* case studies. In Malawi, it is largely women who dedicate their time to domestic chores, such as getting water, doing the washing, cooking, and the general upkeep of the household. This, in turn, leads to little time for much else, too (this aspect is picked up in *Food For Thought 4*).

In a final comment, it is important to recognize that time constraints may be perceived as detrimental to the public urban life that could emerge if one was given more time. In a different reading, however, limited time could also be perceived as a crucial element of Lilongwe’s public urban life as it likewise produces a kind of public urban life in which inhabitants can „waste time“ within the limited time given.



### FOOD FOR THOUGHT 3

# THE PUBLIC ASSEMBLES IN THE PRIVATE

People in Lilongwe assemble in pockets, that is to say, they mostly remain in their respective areas and only rarely traverse pockets or areas outside their habitual radius. The city's urban form and its enframing tactics greatly contribute to this condition. As is the nature of segregated cities, this statement holds particularly true for lower income groups. One's finances may not permit to extend one's radius and they are also not meant to (see *Food For Thought* 1). Higher income groups, in a way, also assemble in pockets - in gated pockets mostly - but they can span their horizons further which enables them to tap into greater quantities and varieties of pocketed public urban life. As a result, for those who are more or less confined to their domiciles, private spaces in the shape of residential plots in private "ownership" (ownership in its most flexible sense) turn into alternative sites of encounter.

The *Home Plot[ing]* case study illustrates the workings behind the public urban life that occurs in the private space of somebody's home. It further outlines the potentialities that lie in such private spaces or, to pick up the previous terminology, public private pockets. By producing temporary or rather momentary public spaces, the private space oscillates between being the domestic site of a family and being a meeting place. These kinds of public private spaces follow more convivial logics and are not to be mistaken with those that follow corporate interests and neoliberal logics as one would generally associate public private spaces with, occasionally also dubbed *pseudo*-public spaces. This is not to say that neoliberal logics are not to be found here but it is not its prime focus. There is little „pseudo“ about the publics that assemble in these private realms as the publics found here are not lured in with hidden private interests in mind but, quiet contrary, rather show up spontaneously and unannounced without the owner's knowledge. In this manner, the publics have a greater chance of being perceived as a nuisance, even when general courtesy does not reveal it, than to turn into the owner's next cash cow.

What can be learned from these private public spaces is that a certain degree of porosity in terms of accessibility is a crucial element of public urban life in Lilongwe. When a city succumbs to vast landscapes of enclosed private space, for instance through gating and securitization measures, without simultaneously offering potential moments of public urban life within its private sphere, it will lead to the detriment of public urban life as a whole.

The *WhatsApp[ing]* case study could make an argument for how enclosed private spaces could maintain porous borders without tearing down walls. Through WhatsApp groups one can invite and grant a familiar or unknown public access to one's private sphere, even if it is highly selective. In this manner, WhatsApp groups (or other similar modes of communication) might be able to facilitate a virtual backdoor to the public urban life that would otherwise remain enclosed and fully private.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT 4

# GENDER ROLES STRUCTURE PUBLIC URBAN LIFE

Matrilineal and patrilineal patterns are part of Malawi's culture. Gender divisions are therefore much engrained in the psyche of most Malawians and carried beyond the traditional practices they originated from. The *Labor Office[ing]*, *Water Kiosk[ing]*, *Bawo[ing]*, *Area 13 Market[ing]*, *Church[ing]*, and *Home Plot[ing]* case studies all depict in one way or another how gender roles are acted out in Lilongwe's public urban life. Already the fact that six out of eight case studies speak of varying gender-based practices hint at how deep gender roles run through Malawi's society. In this context, gender is understood as the division between men and women. Other gender markers are not acknowledged in Malawi's conservative publics and generally tabooed into the private realm. Yet, pockets of exceptions are emerging among younger generations.

Gender divisions materialize in Lilongwe's public urban life in different ways. It is the physical distancing from one another, e.g. at the Labor Office when both men and women are searching for employment at the same time but not exactly in the same place, or at church when unmarried men and women do not sit together and take a seat on opposite ends. It is also the dominance or reign over a specific space in which only one gender group acts in, e.g. in the practice of playing Bawo, getting water from the water kiosk, adopting the role of a chairman, going out on weekends, and taking care of the household.

While gender divisions are actively lived without much resentment on either sides, it must be noted that gender divisions are not always as clear-cut as it might appear. Though men's and women's lifeworlds differ greatly in Lilongwe, public spaces are nonetheless being shared. Direct contact and physically being in one space does not necessarily form a requirement for shared spaces. Instead, shared public urban life can emerge from practices of approximation. One may sit separate but both men and women sit together in a common arena of life. Also, gender divisions rather represent porous borders than strict boundaries as exemplified in the Bawo game which is mostly played by men but women are just as much invited to play, too. Gender divisions are, therefore, better perceived as guidelines for general modes of conduct and mannerism within Lilongwe's public urban lives, not as strict codes and rules.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT 5

# URBAN PLANNING IS INVISIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

The final *Food For Thought* in this work, yet not nearly the final insight that could be extracted from this work, revolves less around the processes *behind* the specificities of Lilongwe's public urban life. It is much more informed by what the processes *around* public practices in Lilongwe are, revealed by the practice of research itself. Part of doing research was to dig in Lilongwe's maps, plans, and drawings at the respective planning bodies. It proved to be no easy task and, finally, not very fruitful either as some plans were slowly falling apart and „misplaced“. What was revealed in the planning offices, however, is that the majority of Lilongwe's inhabitants do not know and also have no means to know how Lilongwe is currently being shaped on paper and what plans urban planners keep in their drawers. Part of Lilongwe's public urban life, consequently, are the invisible plans, unfinished projects, unheardof ideas that so tremendously have an impact on public urban life once the plans are revealed and implemented. Malawi's capital relocation to Lilongwe tells its own tale but there are also a variety of examples of smaller scale in Lilongwe's urban fabric.

The *Kachere[ing]* case study illustrates how meeting points, so present in the minds of so many city dwellers, are not represented in formal planning. What is represented in formal planning, is presented only to the few. How many people in Lilongwe did not know about the plans of the Botanical Garden or Umodzi Park before it was drafted and built? How many people knew that the Area 13 Market was meant to become a fire station before the idea was dropped and shoved into a shelf? Who can tell the craft vendors next to the *Bawo[ing]* setting when they will also be given the promised permanent market stands? Who knows what happens with *Labor Office[ing]* when the District Council moves into its new building? At various intersections of public urban life, the lack of knowledge about Lilongwe's planning sphere becomes clear through its invisibility. Reversibly, one could wonder whether the public is likewise invisible to Lilongwe's urban planning sector as current plans and understandings seem to suggest.



# URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN LILONGWE

One could stop here and take the theories and methodologies applied, the insights and *Food For Thoughts* straight to office in order to promptly follow suit to this works demand to create room for public spaces in Lilongwe. Before one enthusiastically starts this not so minor endeavour, however, there are a few things that need to be addressed with regard to public space and Lilongwe's urban development. As stated before, public space is only one of many elements that make up a city. In order to be able to produce public spaces in Lilongwe, one must first also understand the parameters in which it is acting in. This inevitably leads to questions around urbanity and urban planning which will be the focus of the last chapter in the book with the hope that it could become the first chapter in a new kind of public space found in Lilongwe.

## A WORD ON LILONGWE'S URBANITY

Allow me to pause here for a brief mind game and to dwell on a question that imagines alternative pasts, presents and futures for cities in Africa: What would African cities look like today if colonialism had never happened? What if African urban areas had evolved from African regions and had not been imposed by colonizing powers? European cities and current conceptions of public space surely did not grow and transform fully detached from transnational influences and without conflicts, however, European cities did have the chance to evolve more gradually without external powers (perhaps from Africa?) abruptly imposing their values onto them. So again, what would African cities look like today if colonialism had never happened? What would have Africa's urban (r)evolution been like if it specifically catered to African terrains and lives only? Just to spin a thought in the style of Italo Calvino, would there be roads and cars at all? Or, in all honesty, could we imagine an elaborate funicular network in its place, saving cities from the task of fixing potholes year after year on half-broken tarmac roads? Would there be market squares or could there be underground markets that shield off the hot sun and heavy rains? Would there be more nomadic cities without a fixed and permanent location, catering those who resent being bound to one location but in want of enjoying the advantages of city life as they travel? Fact is, we will never know what could have been if European colonizers had not arrived on African lands as much as we will never know what would have happened to European cities if African colonizers had come to Europe. History happened as it happened and a return to precolonial Africa, a move back to ancient or vernacular cities, would denounce the evolution that did take place and the lifeworlds that are a product of exactly the road taken, including everything that pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial history has produced and is still producing in a much less linear way than these terms might suggest. Indulging in nostalgia, alternative worlds, or what-if-games as above are, therefore, rather

counterproductive and should be treated with great care in order to avoid building pipe dreams that are finally no use to anyone. But it is important to understand where today's cities in Africa are coming from and after what logics they have been shaped. Naturally, cities in Africa (as much as any other city in the world) need to be regarded and closely examined in the way they are now in order to come up with truly productive ideas and visions for where the continuous urban evolution is going to.

So, what kind of city is Lilongwe? This question looms largely over questions around public space, too. After all, it is the public and their urban lives that essentially make and shape a city. Questions around public space, therefore, also simultaneously invite questions around a city's urbanity and are just as much related to my research question. When master plans are being ignored, building projects only halfway finished, and zoning laws tend to perpetrate more dysfunctions than functions, Lilongwe's plans, maps and drawings tell very little about what Lilongwe actually stands for. In order to find representations of Lilongwe that are better suited to depict its realities on the ground, the most reliable source, in the end, may simply be one's own pair of eyes. Yet, even they can easily be deceived by Lilongwe's surface. Much of what is part of Lilongwe is invisible to the simple observer and one must dig deep in order to find clearer reflections of Lilongwe's public urban life. While there are limits for this kind of excavation as public urban life does not always want to be found, this work can be perceived as an attempt in excavating and representing the kind of Lilongwe that is seen off planning grids and architectural visualizations. Embarking on a quest for Lilongwe's public spaces by digging through its leading planning documents, by looking for it in its designated green spaces and recreational spaces, and finally, by following the public to where the public goes, this work has sharpened the view for Lilongwe's public urban life as well its urbanity. In this manner, the approach applied here can also be read as a means to re-learn learning, that is how knowledge can be generated when knowledge about a city's urban lives is scarce (McFarlane 2018).

In how far is it relevant to understand Lilongwe's public urban life and urbanity? Because it outlines and sets the parameters in which the city operates, whether its inhabitants and urban practitioners agree with it or not. As my work has shown to some extent, Lilongwe's inhabitants have learned how to carve out pockets of public urban life for themselves and how to cope with the varying public urban lives the city holds - with or without formal support from the city. Lilongwe's urban planning sector, however, seems to shut its eyes to Lilongwe's urban realities and, thereby, watches the ongoing urban evolution pass by without playing an active role in it. It plays an active role in so far that it remains largely passive or becomes active in ways that are not exactly driven by public interests. The motivations might range from innocent ignorance

„Planners and politicians are always in competition. Also the elite and the planners are in competition...Now everybody, including the local person, is in competition with the planner. Previously, during the Kamuzu Banda rule, when Malawi was a dictatorship, planning had space...No local person could speak against planning so it was possible to implement what was in the law.“

A Malawian urban planner commenting on the state of planning in Malawi

over deliberate oversight to political and neoliberal power plays. Whatever the case may be, at the end of the day, Lilongwe's planning sector reserves only few seats for its performing actors and actresses. While public urban life produces public spaces, at worst, urban planning seems to reduce them. Is urban planning then a solution or part of the problem that Lilongwe does not seem to have public spaces that specifically cater to the public? If it is part of the problem, the planning sector loses ground on being able to do what their profession at least stipulates to be doing, that is to formally create and produce livable urban space. So, instead, public space and urban space is produced informally, unguided and unaware of the challenges that come with it as those who produce these spaces have little means to seeing the bigger picture. The increasingly densifying peri-urban areas and sparsely populated central areas set in a highly sprawling urban environment are only one of many effects that can be ascribed to the planning sector's passiveness.

## ALTERNATIVE FUTURES FOR LILONGWE

Once planning has turned passive, what is the role of urban planning in a city like Lilongwe then? Ultimately, cities do not need to be planned in order to be cities and to carry on with their daily lives. The case studies in this work are a testimony to that. Does this make urban planning redundant in Lilongwe? The answer is no. The profession of planning, in the end, has come to its existence because it is planners who have been trained to keep a clear view over how a city is developing. Not to be abused in order to fulfill individual interests and visions but to ensure that the quality of life in a city can be maintained, ideally going upwards and not downwards. This task begins by providing basic infrastructures but also extends to less tangible projects, one of which is providing public spaces that serve the public and less private developers. When planning visions are produced without taking a city's public urban

lives into account and the kind of urbanity emerging from it, it will inevitably override public urban life. But since public urban life is a resilient phenomenon, it will always find ways how to break through a city's urban fabric. No matter how hostile it may be, it will emerge one way or another. It is then more a matter of whether those who have drafted a planning vision are flexible enough to accommodate the emergent public urban lives or whether, instead, they are being pushed into modes of informality because they are given no room in the visions of those in power. If urban upward mobility is made possible only for the few, planning has failed to fulfill its duties - and finally become redundant. The beauty in the production of space, however, is that cities are able to forgive, to acknowledge that planners are also humans who might have been employed by a public sector but, in the end, are private individuals with individual interests, too. With this in mind, failed planning is never a dead end. It is much more an urgent call to view and review what has (not) been planned. To pay attention to what is going on in a city and to trace the demands people pose for their lives in a city. For Lilongwe's pocketed public urban life, this entails that the pockets are better off to be connected, to be transformed from dots into lines of public urban life, allowing the city of Lilongwe to grow together and not apart (Simone and Pieterse 2017). This is not to romanticize public space as a catalyst for more democratic publics as the notions of segregation run deep in Lilongwe and can hardly be overcome overnight. It much more acknowledges that the city needs breathing spaces in order to avoid a social combustion, given that the landscapes of inequality are just as vast as the city's segregation (Amin and Thrift 2002). With this in mind, social cohesion might not embody a practical attainable goal for Lilongwe's public spaces. Instead, Richard Sennett's appraisal for spaces of sympathy and empathy can serve as a useful guideline for Lilongwe's future public spaces as his approach is guided by cultural understandings of space and, therefore, closely tied to Lilongwe's public urban lives (2017: 598).

„Sympathy he understood as identification with the ways of life, and particularly the suffering of another, as in the adage ‘treat thy neighbor as thyself.’ Empathy he took to be a different kind of regard: curiosity about lives the observer cannot pretend to understand.“

Richard Sennett 2017: 598



Drawing Office at Lilongwe City Council

One could argue that Lilongwe's public urban life has been deprived of exploring its full potential. In one way, this work shows that it has not because it has found means of expression despite or because of no formal recognitions and accommodation in Lilongwe's urban fabric. In a way, this work also shows that there are certain aspects to how public urban life has been deprived of what it could have otherwise been if the city's urban form would not spatially segregate and cluster its inhabitants to fulfill a vision of the city that is embedded in a „clinical degree of orderliness“.

In the course of my field research, I was able to assemble an inventory of public spaces by going along with Lilongwe's inhabitants. I then narrowed down eight case studies of which three were examined more closely on the basis of depicting different modes of public urban life in Lilongwe. From there, I was able to extract five *Food For Thoughts* that are relevant for Lilongwe's future urban development, not only with regard to public spaces but also for understandings of the city's urbanity. With this being said, none of the answers I have found, provide a final and definite answer to my research questions. As I need to emphasize again, it is my interpretation, my understanding, and, there is no right or wrong answer. There are simply many answers to these questions. This is what I have learned and take from the overall research process: Thinking in binaries, in public/private or planned/unplanned rarely sheds more light into any field of inquiry. Where it gets interesting, albeit tricky, is what lies between the binaries. This is where people's realities can be found and should be looked for.

As a European scholar researching in an African context, it seems natural to also ask what cities in Europe can learn from cities like Lilongwe. Perhaps, it is a lesson in broadening the lens for public urban life for it is highly diverse, yet, it seems under-appreciated. Public spaces are much more

than squares, parks, public facilities, and streets. Public urban life is more than drinking coffee in the sun, going for a run, or sitting on a bench as formal planning sometimes seems to imply. Naturally, other pockets of public urban life exist in European cities, too. However, I would argue, that it is harder to find. Formal planning has a much stronger grip on European cities than it has in Lilongwe. Lifeforms deviating from the plans are therefore not as „openly public“ as in Lilongwe where life nearly always deviates from the plans.

In research, oftentimes the end of a research project splinters into more questions than answers and this work is no different. How can grounded urban realities, such as Lilongwe's public urban life, find a heightened recognition in decision-making processes with regard to urban planning? How can public interests overcome private interests that are pushed in the prevalent planning practice? How can planning realities and practices be united with other urban realities in order to arrive at a planning practice that does not work against but with the public? These questions require to know who is planning planning and how the planner/s go about it. As such, examining planning practice as opposed to planning systems can serve as an entry point for further research. Moreover, this work as well as much of its theoretical frameworks have primarily dealt with public urban life in Lilongwe during daytime which is much owed to the fact that research on everynight life comes with a few not so insignificant security concerns, particularly as a woman. Nonetheless or particular so, this forms yet another point of entry for further research worth exploring as so little is known about the workings behind it. Based on a few first observations, Lilongwe's nocturnal life appears even more pocketed, more compartmentalized than its daytime equivalent. This naturally invites a comparative approach.





CHIEF KILIPULA BUILDING

MADZI HOUSE

Mr Lilongwe Shop

Nanacchi Investment

POMPO-POMPO  
ID & PASSPORT  
PHOTOS  
0991077904  
0991444925



# 6

## REFERENCES



# GLOSSARY

## AZUNGU

Azungu or also Mzungu is the Chichewa term for “white person”, i.e. anyone who has no black skin color. Azungu is more polite than Mzungu but both terms are frequently used. In its original sense, azungu supposedly referred to the “wanderers” or European explorers who came to Malawi. As they all happened to be of light skin color, the term azungu became equivalent to “white person”.

## BAWO

Popular boardgame in Malawi that is played with a bawo board and 64 seeds. See *Bawo[ing]* case study for more details.

## BLANTYRE

Second largest city in Malawi and economic center located in the Southern Region. It is named after David Livingstone’s birthplace in Scotland and predates cities like Nairobi.

## BOMA

In its original sense, boma refers to the enclosure of livestock. In British colonies, boma additionally signified government offices with fortifying walls. Though, today, bomas no longer necessarily refer to some form of enclosure, the term is still commonly used in Southern Africa in reference to governmental offices, particularly in remote areas.

## CHICHEWA

A Bantu-language spoken by the Chewa tribe which is predominantly found in Malawi but also outside the country. The Chewa form the majority of Malawi’s population and Chichewa is one of Malawi’s official languages.

## CHINSAPO

High density residential area located in Area 57, in the south west of Lilongwe.

## CHITENJE

Colorful piece of cloth that is being worn by Malawian women in a variety of ways, most commonly as a skirt. These kinds of cloths can be found in one form or another in a number of African countries while each has a specific name for these cloths. In Tanzania, for instance, they say *kanga*, in Mozambique it is *kapulanas*.

## CONSTITUENCY

A voting district demarcated by the Electoral Commission under Section 8(1) (a) and (b) of the Electoral Commission Act in order to determine the number of representatives in the National Assembly.

## COUNCIL

Malawi is divided into 35 councils from city, town, and municipal to district level. They have been mandated under local government law to undertake urban planning, surveying, rating and land development (Manda 2013).

## KABAZA

Bike taxi found all over Lilongwe. They usually wait at a fix stop for customers. Their bicycles are equipped with cushions and a mount to hold on to.

## KAMUZU BANDA

First president after Malawi gained independence from Britain. The autocratic leader and life president reigned over the country for 30 years and fostered a culture of fear among Malawi’s population.

## KAUMA

High density residential area located in Area 43, in the north of Lilongwe.

## KHONDE

General term to describe the veranda-like plinth in front of Malawian houses. Though they differ greatly in shape, size, and appearance, a khonde is always slightly elevated from the ground and usually covered by a roof.

## LAKE MALAWI

A lake located in Malawi, hence its name. It also borders Tanzania where the lake is named Lake Nyasa. It is the world’s ninth largest lake and also known as Lake of Stars or Calendar Lake.

## LILONGWE

Malawi’s capital and largest city in the country. It is located in Malawi’s Central Region.

## MALAWI

Landlocked country in Southern Africa. It shares borders with Zambia, Tanzania, and Mozambique.

## MZUZU

A city in Malawi’s Northern Region. It is the third largest city in Malawi after Lilongwe and Blantyre.

## NDATHOKOZA

Chichewa term to say THANK YOU VERY MUCH. It is more polite than ZIKOMO KWAMBIRI and literally translates to „I am grateful”.

## NSIMA

Pulp made from maize flour and national staple in Malawi. Different forms of nsima can be found in many other countries in Africa.

## PANG’ONO PANG’ONO

Chichewa term for SLOWLY, SLOWLY.

## PEPANI

Chichewa term for SORRY.

## TAKULANDIRANI

Chichewa term for WELCOME, literally translating into „you are most welcome”, and often used when somebody wants to extend an invitation, e.g. to enter somebody’s home.

## URBAN AREAS

There is no clear definition of what comprises Malawi’s urban areas by Malawi’s administration. Different institutions use different definitions. The National Statistics Office categorizes urban areas on the basis of non-agricultural activity, population concentration and the level of service delivery and a minimum total population of 5,000. The Physical Planning Department considers declared planning areas and townships as urban areas as well as central place functions with regard to a hierarchy adopted in 1987. This leads to a confusion of urban and rural boundaries, creating a challenge for urban authorities.

## WARD

A voting district demarcated by the Electoral Commission under Section 8(1) (c) of the Electoral Commission Act in order to determine the number of representatives in the local council. Lilongwe can hold a maximum of 30 wards. In 2020, the ward boundaries are up for review after the upcoming elections in 2019.

## WHATSAPP

A real-time messenger application that can be used for free to send messages, images, videos, voice recordings, locations to other WhatsApp users via internet.

## ZIKOMO

Generally Chichewa term for THANKS, however, it can also be used to say HELLO, SEE YOU LATER, YOU ARE WELCOME, EXCUSE ME and in a variety of other occasions depending on the context and situation. Hence, it is said and heard many times a day every day. Alternatively, to say THANK YOU VERY MUCH, one can say ZIKOMO KWAMBIRI or use the more appreciative NDATHOKOZA.

## ZOMBA

Former colonial capital of Malawi and today the country’s fourth largest city. It is located at the bottom of the Zomba Plateau in the Southern Region.



A kabaza driver with his bicycle

NOTES

Page 12	Image by Google Earth
Page 13	Image by Google Earth
Page 24	Image by Kwekudee 2013
Page 27	Image by Andrew Brukman 2014
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