

# LOOKING AHEAD: ASA 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING

## AFRICAN URBANITIES: MOBILITY CREATIVITY, & CHALLENGES

Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Marriott Downtown  
November 17 – 19, 2022

### Program Co-Chairs:

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The majority of the world's population currently dwells in cities, which also form dynamic hubs and vigorous centers of political, economic and cultural life. Africa is no exception to the remarkable escalation of urbanization nor to the crucial stakes of urban life, marked by mobility, creativity and multiple challenges.

Contrary to hegemonic clichés and local nostalgia, Africa counts the fastest urban growth in the world, with an overwhelmingly youthful population, expected to double in 30 years' time. Consequently, to think Africa is to think cities, not merely in terms of private and public spaces, but moreover as regards sustainable and healthy relations with rural and pastoral dwellers and spaces, which sustain cities and nations in myriad fundamental manners.

Clearly, the exciting and abundant academic, cultural/artistic and technological points of entry opened by the 2022 conference theme do not refer to contemporary Africa alone. To the contrary, cities in their various guises, histories and energies were important to Africa's pasts. They will continue to impact and shape the futures of urban and rural global Africa.

Historical and archaeological sources attest that cities have existed in Africa since ancient times, while others preexisted the colonial era. Aksum, Lalibela, Memphis, Berbera, Djenné, Benin City, Ile-Ife, Ancient Kano City, Zanzibar, Sofala City, Mombasa, Kumasi, Gao, Kanem Bornu, Zanzibar, Timbuktu are but a few examples of dynamic ancient or precolonial African urban, trading and cultural centers. These historical cities influenced the dispersion, mobility and circulation of African peoples, disseminated their cultures and technologies, spurred cultural hybridization, and positioned Africa in the history of longstanding mobility and globalization. They interconnected African peoples and polities, notably in the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds.

Scholars are invited to tackle multidisciplinary remapping of African urban history rising from the sites on which this living socio-cultural history emerged, bequeathed its legacies and currently evolves.

African states are predominantly situated in urban centers, which form oases of power, leaving huge chunks of national territories unserved and ungoverned. Their physical presence in cities fail to erase challenges of governance, health, education, infrastructure, architecture, and urban planning. How do particular political trajectories and practices of democracy, as well as science, technology and digital democracy play out in the cities of global Africa? Presenters are also invited to shed light on economic challenges, innovations, and on formal and informal solutions.

As in the past, mobility – including voluntary and forced, local and global, seasonal or permanent migration – is still a driving factor, which compellingly shapes and fuels African urbanities in social, demographic, political, economic, environmental and cultural ways. Over the last decades, several African cities have experienced particularly rapid urbanization and have become megalopolises rife with multiple challenges and extraordinary quotidian as well as cultural/artistic creativity. City dwellers often demonstrate unrivalled economic ingenuity in the quest to rise the towering challenges many people face in making a living within the spatially diverse and economically unequal realities of contemporary urban centers.

The challenges/obstacles to the enjoyment of a good quality of life include unplanned urban development, inadequate water and power supply, a paucity of public transportation, insufficient household waste management and health and education coverage, unemployment, inflation, religious radicalization, political conflicts, migration, etc. In the face of such challenges and that of the failure of the state, Africans continually “invent” and “re-invent” diverse, dynamic, youthful, and culturally vibrant cities.

As in other parts of the world, African cities produce both solutions and problems. Rapid urbanization, economic and population growth disrupt and degrade ecosystems, and exert nefarious pressures on natural habitats and on agricultural and pastoral lands. While cities often grow into and swallow adjoining rural land spaces, intermediate or rural,

agricultural interstices also emerge, or resist asphalt and concrete. We welcome presentations examining urbanization's encroachment on pastoral life and grazing lands, and impact on farming, nomadic lifestyles, and chaotic sedentarization.

Despite the challenges they experience, youth and other African urban dwellers evolve dynamic and distinct cultures, thus shaping unique and complex gendered identities. We encourage the study of cultural expressions such as music, dance, theater, neo-orality, literature, film production, popular culture and urban culture, social media, architecture, etc. These may be explored from the conceptual viewpoints of gender, memory and memorialization, toponymies, neo-toponymies and palimpsest, for example.

Social life in African cities is being fractured and rapidly reconfigured. Families as well as social and health sciences, among others, are confronted with challenging novelties and predicaments. Insecurity and new religious mindsets modify access to public space, based on gender, whilst internal and external movements and migrations expel many youth and rural migrants to the fringes and underbellies of cities. African cities are also arenas where women challenge patriarchy and fight for equal rights, thereby deconstructing practices and ideologies. Alternative masculinities, femininities, families and sexualities emerging in cities offer exciting worksites for Gender Studies. Scholars are also invited to consider the occurrences of loss of power and public presence which women also experience, due, in part, to disruptive hegemonies.

With the rise in connectivity and the use of computers and smartphones, the digital revolution has led to profound societal changes, including intergenerational fractures and disconnects. But Africa's digital age, with its new oralities and forms of communication, such as email, social media, blogs, and websites, create local and global electronic networks which reconfigure relationships, identities, and civic and politic struggles. Scholars are invited to submit proposals on digital sustainability and emerging smart enclaves/initiatives in African cities.

As always, submissions that fall outside the scope of this theme statement are welcome.

#### **2022 Sub-themes:**

Africa and International Relations  
Africa's Diasporas  
African Feminisms, Gender, & Sexuality  
African Philosophy and Thought  
Anthropology, Society, & Material Culture  
Climate Change and Sustainability  
Development and Political Economy  
Education and Pedagogy  
Ethnicity, Race, & Nationality  
Health, Healing, & Disability  
History and Archaeology  
Literature and Language  
Mobility, Migration, & Borders  
Music, Performance, & Visual Culture  
Parties, Politics, & Elections  
Peace, Law, & Security  
Popular Culture and Media  
Religion and Spirituality  
Social Movements, Activism, & Resistance  
Urban Africa Online  
Special Topics