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Social structures of urban governance: strategic spatial planning in Addis Ababa

Nuno F. da Cruz 🔾[a] and Philipp Rode[a]

ABSTRACT

Focusing on strategic planning for spatial development, this paper explores the social structures that underpin urban governance in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. To bridge the divide in the literature between studies that are narrowly focused on public service networks (typically more quantitative) and broader studies of urban governance (typically more qualitative), we use a social network analysis approach based on structured interviews to chart the actors and connections that influence the strategic planning process. Our results show that the governance network in this city is very homogeneous and centralised. The majority of actors at the core of strategic decision-making are city government entities, where most ties are structured around the Addis Ababa City Plan Commission and the mayor. With few exceptions (notably, the prime minister), other tiers of government, civil society organisations, the private sector and international donors are mostly peripheral. The fact that some powerful actors – such as international investors and the ruling coalition parties – are also playing a marginal role in the network may threaten governance stability and coherence. Although the mayor is a very powerful actor at the city level, the structural features of the governance network and the institutional power of the prime minister allow them to streamline their influence over the city's future. The current governance regime for strategic spatial planning in Addis Ababa seems to privilege the effectiveness of the developmental agenda over the inclusiveness of the governing process. This has troubling implications for participatory development and the emergence of a more democratic society.

KEYWORDS

Ethiopia; local governance; network analysis; network governance

1. INTRODUCTION

Anyone seeking to analyse in detail how governance works in a particular city, at a particular time, and across scales, will have to tackle the many different types of 'forces' shaping it, namely: the relevant laws, rules and institutions framing and enabling public policies and decisions (Schragger, 2016); the availability and access to resources – not just public finance but also other assets that are critical for governing, such as technical knowledge and skills, or the commitment to place of non-government actors (Raco et al., 2016); the place-based politics, ideologies and perceptions that emerge throughout history (Davies & Imbroscio, 2009); and the

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relationships between the various governance actors and traditions regulating those interactions (Neal et al., 2021).

In the absence of a grand theory of urban governance – defining the relationships between concepts across all these domains and stipulating explanatory links between them and societal outcomes (Pierre, 2014) – different disciplines have emphasised different domains. Research into all these domains remains critical to improve our understanding of how the governance process unfolds at the urban scale (McCann, 2017). But the lack of empirical evidence is particularly salient for the patterns of formal and informal relationships between the various actors with stakes in strategic public decisions – in other words, the social structures underpinning governance in a city (Neal et al., 2021). This paper is an attempt to buck the trend.

Contributing to making this aspect of urban governance less well-researched by comparison to others is the fact that the actors' capacity to *control* or *influence*, harnessed through their webs of relationships, is hard to ascertain. Consequently, there is still much to learn about how these patterns of interactions may impact on policy- and decision-making processes (Bazurli et al., 2022). This is especially the case for cities of the Global South, for which less data is generally available. Against this background, we explore the social composition and structure of the network of relationships shaping the strategic planning process in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city. Based on interviews with local actors, we employ social network analysis (SNA) to tackle the following research questions: who is involved in strategic spatial planning in the city? How are these actors inter-connected? What are the structural features of the network? How might these features impact on the information flows and decision-making processes? In tackling these questions empirically, we hope to find new ones for future research and to contribute to theory-development.

We chose to focus on strategic spatial planning because the ways in which governance shapes strategic infrastructure and the configuration of the city at the metropolitan scale are particularly relevant. Certain features such as urban form, land use and transport infrastructure, have deep and lasting effects on urban productivity, liveability, social equity and environmental performance (Rode et al., 2014). The long-term impacts of these decisions unleash path-dependencies that are difficult to escape from. Therefore, inquiries into the governance of strategic planning in fast-growing cities of Africa and Southeast Asia come with a special sense of urgency. Whereas retrofitting established cities into new patterns of development is extremely challenging, urbanising regions still have a chance to undertake more sustainable models of growth.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the recent literature on urban governance networks. Section 3 briefly illustrates the politico-institutional context of spatial planning and development in Addis. The fourth section describes the data collection and methodological approach. Section 5 presents the results and discussion. The sixth section concludes the paper and offers some implications for practice.

2. URBAN GOVERNANCE AND NETWORK ANALYSIS

Over the last two decades, we have been witnessing a sustained tendency in academic debates to consider governance from a network perspective – that is, to view it as a system of interactions between actors, influenced by both internal and external factors (da Cruz et al., 2023; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Provan & Kenis, 2008). This tendency gained traction along with the notion that 'stakeholders' other than government authorities have been increasingly able to influence policy-making – not just the private sector, but different civic actors, through more entrepreneurial and participatory modes of governance (Harvey, 1989; Pierre, 2011; Stone, 1989; Stoker, 1998). However, though it could be instrumental in operationalising this perspective and devising a new analytical research agenda in the field of urban governance, the scholarship on network studies has taken some time to enter this space (Neal et al., 2021).

Recently, studies from various fields have made significant progress. In particular, studies that have employed network analysis – a suite of techniques to investigate the relationships (ties) between actors (nodes) based on network and graph theory (Prell, 2012) – to formalise the social structures of governance. Scholars have used it to investigate inter-organisational collaboration in urban policy and planning networks (Shrestha & Feiock, 2018), service delivery networks (Hugg, 2020), networks of public officials (Marques et al., 2024), global knowledge networks (Acuto & Leffel, 2021), and a range of other types of formal interactions and exchanges (see, e.g., Serin & Irak, 2022; Whetsell et al., 2020). Many of these studies are descriptive and simply attempt to uncover features such as which type of actors are represented and how often they interact (e.g., Acuto & Leffel, 2021; Marques et al., 2024; Serin & Irak, 2022). Others explore the transaction costs, benefits and risks involved with collaboration as well as the network features or mechanics that bring actors together (e.g., Hugg, 2020; Shrestha & Feiock, 2018; Whetsell et al., 2020). Both in their more descriptive and more analytical strands, this generation of studies is taking empirical urban governance research into a new stage of development.

However, urban governance studies that use a broad lens to view a whole policy domain as a network are still rare (da Cruz et al., 2023). Though the abovementioned studies hold critical value in adding to our understanding of urban governance, their scope is usually narrower. Unlike traditional public management and administration approaches, the governance lens represents an 'open-minded' perspective regarding who the key stakeholders are and what role they play (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Pierre, 2014). By restricting the analysis to formal or pre-determined networks – e.g., of municipal employees, local governments and service operators – some of the potency of the governance concept is lost.[1] Studies of service or collaboration networks do this for methodological reasons, to define their network boundaries. But in striving for methodological clarity and data comprehensiveness, some context and nuance may be lost along the way. On the other hand, studies that embrace a broader governance perspective may be fated to be mainly exploratory or descriptive in their nature.

The divide between the more narrowly focused analyses of service networks and broader investigations of urban governance is often replicated in the research strategies adopted for each approach, and the disciplines that underpin them (Ramia et al., 2018). Whereas studies of service networks tend to be quantitative, often using sophisticated SNA techniques, a qualitative approach has been the preferred choice in investigations of network governance (Provan & Kenis, 2008). This gap is compounded by the fact that most network governance research overlooks the insights on theoretical mechanisms of network formation arising from the specialist literature on networks (see Siciliano, Carr, & Hugg, 2021 for a comprehensive overview). Many scholars have been calling for these threads to be combined into approaches that, whilst adopting a broad governance lens and valuing qualitative information about the network(s), do not shy away from exploring the usefulness of quantitative analyses (Neal et al., 2021; Provan & Kenis, 2008). These integrated approaches may be equipped to consider actor-level effects leading to tie formation (such as actor incentives and behaviour that are exogenous to the network itself) and network-level effects (that concern the self-organising properties of networks) together.

Denoting 'the process through which a city is governed without making any prejudgments about the locus of power or the relative significance of political and societal actors in that process' (Pierre, 2014, p. 867), urban governance operationalised through SNA places the emphasis on network composition and structure (Siciliano, Wang, & Medina, 2021). Network composition relates to the diversity of actors, and therefore to notions of pluralism, inclusiveness and justice (Fainstein, 2010). Network structure refers to the relative positions of these actors, as determined by the patterns of their interactions. Among the structural features of governance networks, centralisation is particularly relevant (Siciliano, Wang, & Medina, 2021; Whetsell et al., 2020). Centralisation reflects the extent to which network ties hover around a single or a small number

of actors; it will be higher when there is a strong demarcation between core and periphery (i.e., when the network contains very central and very peripheral actors).

Urban governance actors may achieve high centrality scores for different reasons. A key actor-level mechanism is framed by resource dependence theory: 'an organization in need of certain resources will try to access them by forming ties with the organizations that control those resources' (Siciliano, Carr, & Hugg, 2021, p. 70). This can include 'hard' resources, such as executive power, administrative capacity and financial capital, or 'soft' resources like legitimacy, trust, support and public acceptance. At the network-level, 'preferential attachment' is a particularly relevant mechanism for centralisation. It refers to the tendency for network actors to seek out connections to others that are already well-connected (or 'popular', Whetsell et al., 2020). This self-organising property of networks can enhance the political power of some actors, but it also poses challenges when others are removed from the core – not just in terms of lack of pluralism and inclusivity, but also in terms of network stability and consistency, if the peripheral actors are powerful in other ways. Further to this point, it is important to note that, though centrality may confer power (e.g., to influence strategic decisions), power does not necessarily equate to centrality. Resource control may confer considerable power to a particular actor even if it is not very central, especially if there are few or no alternative 'suppliers' of that resource (Neal, 2011).

From a practical point of view, as we have seen, centralisation raises democratic challenges. But it is also true that centralised networks tend to have lower coordination costs and higher outcome efficiency (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Whetsell et al., 2020). Looking beyond the analysis of who the actors are towards network structures allows us to explore 'acts of brokerage (…) that facilitate cooperation and information exchange' (Ramia et al., 2018, p. 335). These features can be gauged through SNA measures of network structure such as 'betweenness centrality'. As well as the quantitative parameters relating to structural features of the networks, SNA enables the visualisation of invisible phenomena. It allows researchers to create a material object out of immaterial relationships, to perceive the problem differently and craft new questions – to theorise based on new evidence (Neal et al., 2021).

Despite the academic interest, the question remains as to whether the 'network governance lens' may be useful for practice. Particularly, for governing cities in the Global South, since most of these concepts, theories, and methods come from Europe or North America (Zhang, 2020). This paper represents one of the first attempts to test this. If it travels well across borders, the SNA approach to urban governance could be instrumental to devising 'network interventions'. For example, government authorities actively 'adding or deleting nodes, adding or deleting links, and rewiring existing links' to 'accelerate, attenuate, or otherwise modify network development for public ends' (Whetsell et al., 2020, p. 451). Our research contributes to these debates and the growing body of knowledge on network urban governance by testing an SNA approach in a major city in sub-Saharan Africa.

3. ADDIS ABABA: INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

Considering that the complex political situation in Ethiopia – including the implications of the violent conflict in Tigray, the significant influence of party-politics and the ruling coalition, the role of foreign donors and investors – are discussed elsewhere (e.g., Aberg & Becker, 2021; Brown & Fisher, 2020; Gebremariam, 2020; Goodfellow & Huang, 2021; Weldeghebrael, 2021; Terrefe, 2020), this brief overview focuses on the administrative aspects of urban governance in/for Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia is divided into nine ethnolinguistically-based federal states and two charter cities that are ethnically diverse: the capital, Addis Ababa, and Dire Dawa, which is considerably smaller. The federal government sets national priorities and promotes coherence across lower levels of governance. In addition to being centrally informed by federal-level politics, governance

arrangements for the capital city are wrought by the demands of a rapidly urbanising, lower income, developmental state (Ayele, 2011, 2014). Ethiopia's urban population growth stands at four per cent (UN DESA, 2018) with Addis being exposed to the largest absolute population increase in the country. In turn, the city still faces major sanitation (Cirolia et al., 2021), housing (Goodfellow, 2017b) and transport (Rode et al., 2020) infrastructure shortages, with some debate about whether these unprecedented growth pressures require significant further horizontal expansion or increasing densification and new urbanisms (AACPPO, 2018; Lamson-Hall et al., 2019; Terrefe, 2020).

In many respects, Addis Ababa's chartered status equates it to that of a regional state government. Although the capital lost its statehood status in 1995, it still holds significant planning and tax-raising powers (Chewaka, 2019). Members of the city council are directly elected, with the mayor then elected by the council from within its members. However, both the current and the previous mayor were nominated by the federal government without being part of the city council.[2] As illustrated in Figure 1, sub-city government is comprised of eleven sub-cities overseeing 120 lower-level woredas, which administer some local planning, environmental and social services (Woldetsadik, 2022). Public bureaucracies across all levels
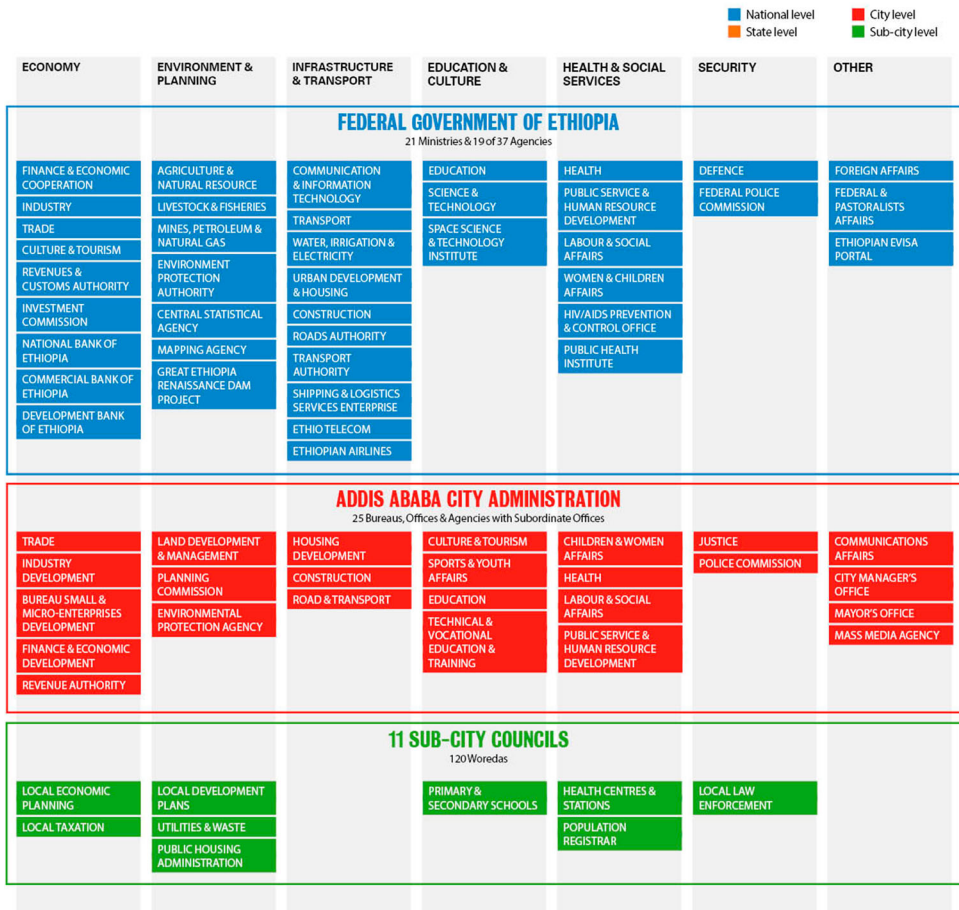

Figure 1. Addis Ababa governance structure
Source: Rode et al. (2018).

of government continue to be highly politicised and mostly led by the ruling party (Welde-ghebrael, 2021).

In terms of executive powers, Addis Ababa oversees strategic planning for the entire city as well as the issuing of individual building permits. The taxes it controls include local income tax, business tax, land and housing tax (Chewaka, 2019). The city administration has been responsible for delivering one of Africa's most ambitious public housing programmes and other infrastructure initiatives, including improving street surfaces and the public realm. National level engagement with urban governance in Addis Ababa is facilitated through a strong connection with the political leadership at the city level (again, many key positions have been political appointments by the federal government and the ruling party secretariat), the financing of major infrastructure projects and via the leading role of national authorities such as the Ethiopian Railway Corporation, responsible for the implementation of light rail transit (LRT) in Addis Ababa.

The city administration has been struggling to coordinate and integrate the main development initiatives in Addis Ababa, where common integration failures include macro-level connections between housing and transport, as well as micro-level infrastructure coordination between different utilities, such as water, electricity and transport. The latter have very different operational plans, do not conduct any shared planning, and have no data exchange or joined-up technological support (Rode et al., 2020). To face these issues, the city has started rolling out measures addressing coordination problems and restructuring key urban sectors, particularly through new joint planning and data sharing initiatives. For example, in an effort to break administrative silos and coordinate decisions and interventions in different infrastructure sectors, the city administration recently created the Addis Ababa Infrastructure Coordination, Building Permit & Control Authority.

The contemporary strategic planning efforts in Addis Ababa can be traced back to the Ethio-Italian Master Plan of 1986 which established the Addis Ababa Master Plan Office. However, given the limited institutionalisation of both the plan and the office, as well as the collapse of the Derg administration in 1991, the first plan fully led by the Addis Ababa city administration was the 2003 City Development Plan. The key urban initiatives and infrastructure developments of the last decade are all informed by this plan: condominium housing, arterial streets, bus rapid transit and LRT lines as well as the city's administrative structure with its sub-cities and woredas (Asfaw, 2018). In 2018, the Addis Ababa City Government Plan and Development Commission has launched the current Addis Ababa City Structure Plan 2017–2027 (AACPPO, 2018) which is currently being refined and updated. The plan establishes the Plan Commission's current focus on local development planning and sectoral implementation (including the recently completed City Centre project, the LaGare mixed-use development, projects in Piazza, and schemes for two main corridors). During the first phase of the Structure Plan (2017–2027), the city government is planning to build a total of 521,500 homes on 4050 hectares of land and, in the second phase, 446,500 homes on 2850 hectares of land. Over the last years, the Plan Commission has also utilised the structure plan to operationalise the second phase of Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP-II 2015/16–2019/20). The main aim of the GTP-II was to ensure continued, accelerated, sustainable and equitable economic growth in order to establish Addis Ababa as a middle-income city, to make it the 'best investment destination in Africa', as well as to promote a climate resilient green economy by 2025 (Aberg & Becker, 2021; Asfaw, 2018).

The urban governance regime emerging in Addis Ababa results from the complex interactions between the state apparatus and non-state actors (Woldetsadik, 2022). However, a lot will depend on what gets prioritised by political leaders in the pursuit of their vision for the capital (and the country, see Terrefe, 2020). According to Zhang's (2020) framework (see Figure 2), governance regimes can be understood along two critical dimensions: (1) the effectiveness of governance, i.e., 'the degree to which governing projects are successfully implemented', or (2) the inclusiveness of governance, i.e., 'the spectrum of social interests that are included in the
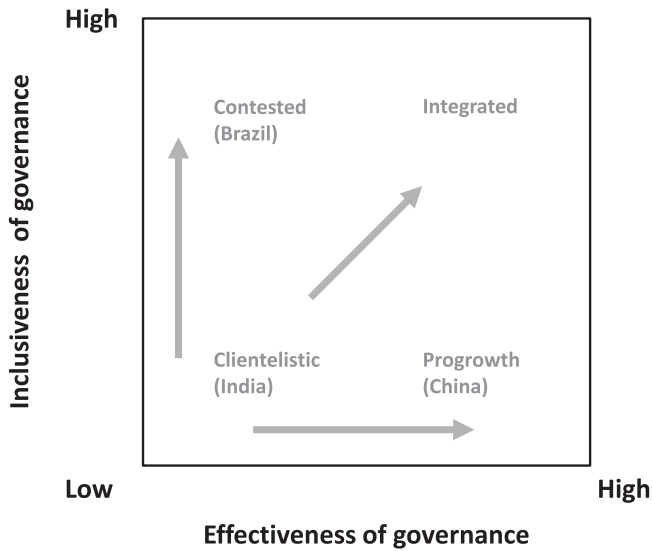
Figure 2. Which urban governance regime in Ethiopia?
Source: Adapted from Zhang (2020)

governing process'. Past research in Addis Ababa has suggested that, in their pursuit of a 'developmental state' model for Ethiopia, political leaders have sought inspiration from established approaches in East Asia (Goodfellow, 2017a). With our analysis, we hope to shed additional light on the path being taken by this emblematic city.

4. FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Since a key contribution of this study is that it adopts a broad lens to analyse the entire policy domain of strategic spatial planning as a network while avoiding strong assumptions about who the key governance actors are, the data collection and coding methods employed must uphold these properties. Network data obtained from coding formal exchanges (e.g., agreements, financial flows) or other types of exchanges that nonetheless respect a pre-defined boundary (e.g., one or a few different types of stakeholders, such as civil servants, or from a list of named individuals or organisations) is typically quite comprehensive, allowing for the use of sophisticated quantitative analysis. However, the former approach might not capture 'soft' or 'informal' relations that may also have a bearing on how information, ideas, influence or power flow through the network, and the latter risks limiting the 'open-minded' stance of the governance lens. On this basis, we adopted an approach that employed face-to-face, structured interviews, using a script of open-ended questions (see the Appendix in the online supplemental data).[3]

The questions were designed as 'name generator' devices (Prell, 2012), where respondents would refer to the individuals and organisations involved in or impacting their work as it relates to strategic spatial planning in Addis Ababa. In addition to network data, the interviews allowed us to collect qualitative information about the key challenges and perceptions of the respondents about the way governance works in the city. The 31 interviews that serve as our data source were carried out in English, between September and October 2019, in Addis Ababa. For ethical reasons and to encourage participants to be frank in their responses, anonymity was guaranteed to all interviewees.[4] However, we use the real names of the organisations involved.

4.1. Stakeholder mapping

The process of identifying potential interviewees started with a stakeholder analysis of the key agencies and actors with stakes in Addis Ababa's strategic spatial planning. As with other inquiries into the politics of the built environment of the city (Terrefe, 2020), we foregrounded this desktop research in the current Structure Plan for 2017–2027 (AACPPO, 2018) by scanning the entities involved in the preparation and implementation of the plan and by reviewing mentions to it in the press and other online sources. This exercise rendered a list of more than 130 actors grouped into 29 stakeholder categories (see Figure 3). It is important to note that how one selects the stakeholder categories and (sub)divides the various entities allocated to each of these categories has an impact on the analysis. For example, one could code the Addis Ababa City Government and its agencies and authorities as a single actor/node. However, this level of aggregation would not allow for a deeper understanding of the inner workings of local government and the actions, interactions and relative 'importance' of the various sub-units of the city administration for a particular concern or policy sector.

This preliminary analysis revealed that the city's institutional landscape is incredibility fragmented, with several departments, agencies, sectoral and project offices, and commissions operating in the same sector, often having overlapping responsibilities. It also suggested that these actors and their roles can be incredibly volatile. Many of the entities involved in the preparation and discussions around the new structure plan are no longer active, were merged with other entities, or simply do not exist anymore (e.g., Federal Urban Planning Institute, Addis Ababa Development and Improvement Project Office, Addis Ababa Plan Institute, etc.). Except for the 'Plan structures' identified in the Structure Plan Manual (UPSBB, 2012) – the Advisory Committee, Technical Committee, Public Forum and other public consultation structures, which were temporary by design – the fact that many other actors are no longer active suggests that Addis' governance is typified by low levels of 'institutional memory' (recent studies have also suggested this, e.g., Rode et al., 2020).

National and supranational government stakeholders	1. Intergovernmental / multilateral	African Union, World Bank, UNECA, UNDP…
	2. Foreign governments / bilateral engagements	Chinese Embassy, GIZ, JaICA, FCO/DFID…
	3. Federal government	Ministry of Urban Development & Housing…
	4. National agencies, public companies & authorities	Ethiopian Roads Authority, Federal Housing Corp…
Sub-national government stakeholders	5. Other states & cities	State of Oromia, Regional Urban Planning Institute…
	6. Addis Ababa city government	Mayor, City Plan Commission, City Council…
	7. City agencies, public companies & authorities	Infrastructure Coord. & Building Permit Authority…
Sub-city level government stakeholders	8. Sub-city administrations	Kirkos, Lideta, Addis Ketema, Bole, Gulele…
	9. Woredas	100+ woredas
	10. Kebeles	800+ kebeles
Other stakeholders	11. Plan structures	Advisory Committee, other (public consultation)…
	12. Citizens' associations & cooperatives	Edirs, condominium cooperatives…
	13. Informal sector	Informal workers, waste pickers & scavengers…
	14. Media	Fana Broadcasting, ETV, Addis Standard…
	15. Law enforcement & military	Addis Ababa City Courts, Addis Ababa Police…
	16. Academia / academics	Addis Ababa University, Ethiopian Civil Service Uni…
	17. Financial institutions	Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Exim Bank of China…
	18. Unions	Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions…
	19. Parties / politicians	EPRDF, ODP, OLF, NAMA, EZEMA…
	20. Activists / advocates	Baladera Council, Greenery & Beautification Movmt…
	21. Other public figures	Jawar Mohammed, Mohammed Al-Amoudi…
	22. Professional bodies	Association of Ethiopian Architects, EUPA…
	23. Business associations	Chamber of Commerce, Taxi Owners Association…
	24. National think tanks / NGOs	Forum for Social Studies, Policy Studies Institute…
	25. International philanthropies & NGOs	WRI, NACTO, C40, ITDP, Bloomberg Philanthropies…
	26. National construction companies & developers	Sur Constr., Flintstone Homes, Sunshine Real Estate…
	27. International construction companies & developers	China Civil Engineering Construction Corp, Eagle Hills…
	28. Other national companies	RIDE, RAAS architects, Mathewos Consult…
	29. Other international companies	Egis, Arup, Lyon Town Planning…

Figure 3. Stakeholder categories developed through desktop research.

4.2. Interviewing and coding of network data

The interviews were conducted in three phases. After an initial set of eight interviews spanning a diverse set of actors identified through the stakeholder analysis, we conducted seven more targeting individuals in other organisations which had been highly cited in previous interviews. The last batch of 16 interviews also targeted organisations that had been frequently mentioned by the previous participants. However, to ascertain whether we were confining ourselves to an 'echo chamber', we also included a few representatives from other, less mentioned stakeholders. Figure 4 shows how the total number of unique entities mentioned by the participants evolved with each additional interview (in chronological order, and according to each respondent's willingness to nominate other actors).[5] After around 10 interviews the addition of new actors to the dataset began to plateau.[6]

According to our data, there are a total of 167 different actors that are in some way relevant for the governance of strategic spatial planning in Addis Ababa. However, this does not tell us much in terms of how their relative capacity to influence strategies in this policy sector may differ (this is why we must look into measures of network structure, explored in the following section). In terms of the prominence of different stakeholder groups, the composition of the set of interviewees seems to slightly over-index categories such as Addis Ababa City Government's departments and agencies, when compared to the full set of actors (see Figure 5(a) and (b)). However, the mixes of actors are much more aligned if we consider the number of times each of these 167 actors were mentioned during the interviews (see Figure 5(a) and (c)). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the participants are representative of the overall governance network.

The interview notes were used to produce the network data. The various actors (i.e., network nodes) and the way they are connected was extracted from the participants' answers to the questions of the interview script (online Appendix).[7] Therefore, the ties represent different types of exchanges, such as information, authority, advice or other governance resources of various types. The respondents were coded as 'senders' of ties (though they may also be 'receivers' if other interviewees mention them or their parent organisation). This means that, when we use directed data in the analysis, the ties represent where the actors are 'sending' their attention to (or consideration, allegiance, respect, etc.). Regarding the 'strength' of the ties, we assume that if an actor is cited by an interviewee in several of the script's questions, then the relationship is stronger than if that actor is mentioned in only one question. Thus, the strength of the tie between the interviewee's parent organisation and a particular actor equals the number of questions for which that actor was mentioned as part of the response.
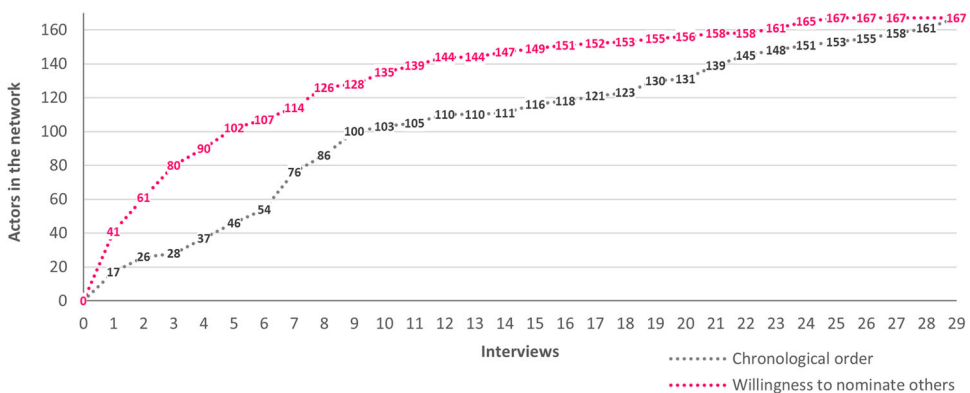

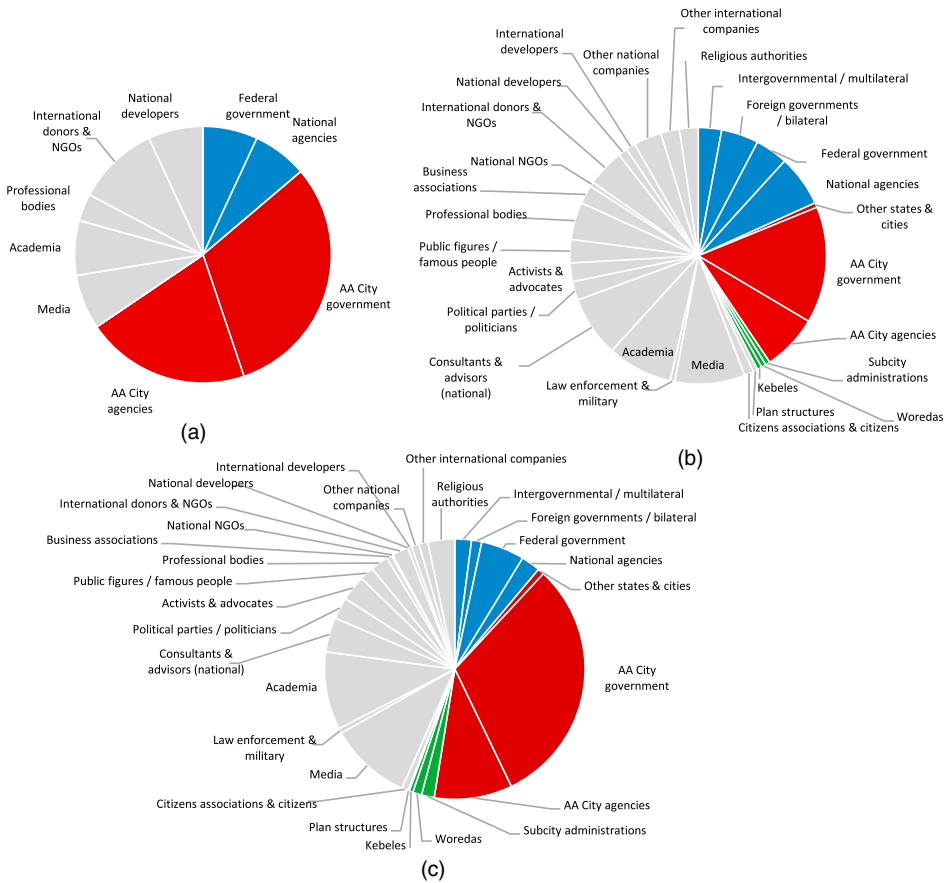**Figure 4.** New actors (nodes) mentioned by the interviewees.

Figure 5. The prevalence of actors from different stakeholder groups in (A) the set of interviewees, (B) the complete network and (C) the total number of times each actor was cited.

4.3. Network parameters

As we have seen, our research aims and our methodological approach points us to parameters that can speak to the composition and structure of the governance network. 'Degree centrality' is the basic measure of centrality and corresponds to the total number of ties a particular actor has. It represents involvement or activity in the network (Neal, 2011; Prell, 2012). However, given the 'open ended' nature of our snowball sampling approach (we did not impose constraints on who/ what the participants could nominate, i.e., a network boundary), not all actors included in the network were interviewed. In fact, it would be virtually impossible to interview 167 representatives of the various actors (and this number would likely increase with additional interviews, even if not substantially, as Figure 4 suggests). Therefore, not all actors had the chance to reciprocate the ties or nominate other actors. This means that the interviewees will tend to appear to be more highly connected than others that were not interviewed, especially if the direction of the ties is ignored.

A way to alleviate this limitation is to consider 'indegree centrality', which only accounts for the number of ties received by an actor. Being a measure of prestige or popularity, it allows us to probe more deeply into the nature of the cast of characters at the core of the governance network. If the strength of the ties is considered, this centrality measure is called 'weighted indegree'. To explore other structural features – such as 'acts of brokerage' (Ramia et al., 2018) – we also explore

'eigenvector', 'betweenness' and 'closeness' centrality scores.[8] Eigenvector centrality gauges the connection to high status actors, being therefore in line with the notion of preferential attachment discussed in the theoretical section. Betweenness centrality is related to placement in the network and the capacity of actors to play a brokerage role (e.g., bridging the gap between different types of actors and/or facilitating coalitions). Referring to the ease of reaching all other nodes, closeness centrality is an indication of actors' independence, information level and/or capacity to mobilise a network. When considered together, these network parameters allow us to analyse how different actors may be able to access/harness key governance resources based on their network placement (Siciliano, Carr, & Hugg, 2021). All quantitative parameters and network visualisations were produced through the open-source software Gephi (Bastian et al., 2009).

5. NETWORK ANALYSIS AND QUALITATIVE DATA: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The governance network of Addis Ababa's strategic spatial planning, reflecting the linkages elicited by our interviewees, is shown in Figure 6. It has a network density (proportion of network ties that are present out of the total number of ties that could be present, if all nodes were interconnected) of 2.2% if the direction of the ties is considered, or 3.9% if it is disregarded. This suggests a fairly disjointed network, with many 'structural holes' (Siciliano, Carr, & Hugg, 2021), potentially placing the onus of connecting the various types of actors upon a few central nodes. We explore this in more detail in the following sections.
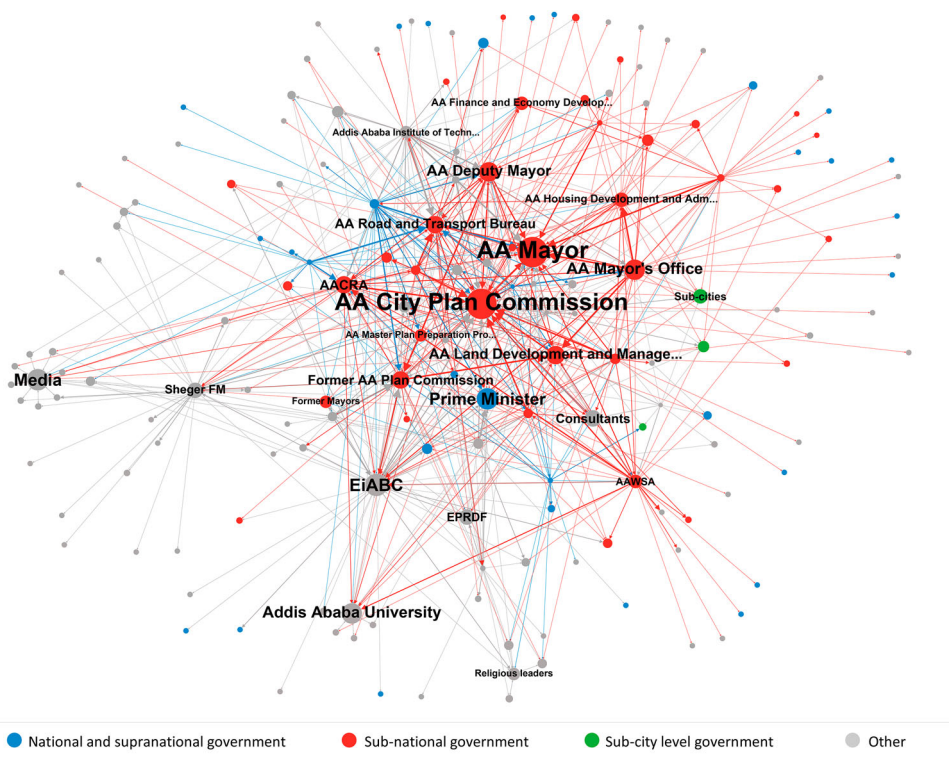

Figure 6. Addis Ababa's strategic planning and spatial development governance network (node size reflects indegree centrality).

5.1. Central actors

A visual analysis of Figure 6 suggests that the most central nodes of the network are largely Addis Ababa city government actors. The indegree centrality scores shown in Table 1 confirm this. Out of the 12 nodes with highest indegree centrality (top 10 scores), eight are city administration structures or agencies. This notion is further emphasised if we consider tie strength (weighted indegree). Links to actors such as the City Plan Commission and the mayor are not only numerous but strong. The few non-government actors exhibiting high indegree centrality scores[9] seem to be interconnected with weaker ties. This suggests that, in what concerns strategic planning and spatial development, *governance* in Addis Ababa is very much focused on *government*. At the same time, the prime minister is the only national-level government actor featured in the top central nodes, and no supranational or sub-city level government stakeholders are featured at all. Therefore, when it comes to information, authority, influence, advice or other governance resource exchanges, governance in this policy sector does not appear to be significantly 'multilevel' (Bazurli et al., 2022; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

The prominence of the City Plan Commission and the mayor of Addis in relation to other actors is also reflected in additional measures of centrality (see Table 2). Not only are these actors more connected, but they are also well connected to other 'high status' actors (see eigenvector centrality scores). The only two non-city government actors in the top 10 nodes in terms of eigenvector centrality are academic institutions (from where city government officials are often recruited).

Since some of the actors that control important resources do not appear in the top positions of these rankings – such as Chinese players and their financial prowess (Goodfellow & Huang, 2021), the ruling coalition and their political weight (Terrefe, 2020), or federal institutions and their know-how and executive power (Rode et al., 2020) – more than resource dependence theory, this network structure may be explained by a network-level preferential attachment process (Whetsell et al., 2020). The result is a very homogeneous network core where certain sectors and types of technical expertise over-index.[10]

Table 1. Indegree (directed, binary data) and weighted indegree (directed, valued data) centrality for the top 10 nodes in terms of indegree centrality.

Nodes	Indegree	Nodes	Weighted indegree
AA City Plan Commission	26	AA City Plan Commission	78 –
AA Mayor	26	AA Mayor	72 –
EiABC	18	AA Road and Transport Bureau	37 ↑
Prime Minister	17	Former AA Plan Commission	34 ↑
Media (sector)	17	AA Land Development & Management	32 ↑
AA Mayor's Office	16	EiABC	32 ↓
Addis Ababa University	16	AACRA	30 ↑
AA Deputy Mayor	15	AA Deputy Mayor	29 –
AA Land Development & Management	14	Prime Minister	27 ↓
AACRA	13	AA Mayor's Office	23 ↓
AA Road and Transport Bureau	13	Addis Ababa University	21 ↓
Former AA Plan Commission	13	Media (sector)	18 ↓

Note: AA – Addis Ababa

Table 2. Eigenvector (undirected, valued data), betweenness (directed, binary data) and closeness (undirected, binary data) centrality for the top 10 nodes for each parameter.

Nodes	Eigenvector centrality	Nodes	Betweenness centrality	Nodes	Closeness centrality
AA City Plan Commission	0.369	Sheger FM	2122	AA City Plan Commission	0.581
AA Mayor	0.315	Media (sector)	1588	EiABC	0.545
AA Deputy Mayor	0.256	EiABC	1379	AA Mayor	0.518
EiABC	0.25	AA City Plan Commission	1134	AACRA	0.517
AA Road and Transport Bureau	0.227	AA Mayor's Office	812	AA Mayor's Office	0.515
AACRA	0.225	Addis Ababa University	727	AA Road and Transport Bureau	0.499
Former AA Plan Commission	0.224	AA Road and Transport Bureau	591	Prime Minister	0.496
AA Mayor's Office	0.217	Addis Ababa Institute of Technology	559	Former AA Plan Commission	0.494
AA Land Development & Manag. Bureau	0.216	AACRA	543	Sheger FM	0.487
Addis Ababa Institute of Technology	0.187	AAWSA	483	AAWSA	0.484

Note: AA – Addis Ababa

Perhaps due to the low network density and the homogeneity of the central actors, the media and academia often play a brokerage role, linking together different types of actors, some of them quite removed from the core (see Figure 6 and betweenness centrality in Table 2).[11] Despite the recent deployment of the Addis Ababa Infrastructure Coordination, Building Permit & Control Authority (Rode et al., 2020), within the city administration this role seems to be mostly played by the City Plan Commission and the mayor's office. These two actors could, therefore, be well positioned to elevate others beyond the city administration – from other tiers of government but also from civil society at large (during our interviews we spoke to and heard about many professionals and organisations that feel side-lined by the core decision-makers) – making peripheral actors more ingrained in the governance network.

When it comes to closeness centrality scores (and thus to independence and information levels or capacity to mobilise a network), the cast of characters remains mostly the same (see Table 2). Notably, the prime minister re-enters the top-ranked actors for this network parameter. The fact that the institutional figure of the prime minister does not display higher scores in the other centrality measures does not mean that it is any less 'powerful'. As mentioned in the Introduction, urban governance is shaped by many forces, where the relationships between the various

Table 3. Tenures of Addis Ababa's Mayors.

Mayor	Tenure	Period
Makkonen Mulat	3 years	1974–1977
Dr Alemu Abebe	7 years	1977–1985
Zewde Tekle	4 years	1985–1989
Gizaw Nigusse	2 years	1989–1991
Mulu Alem Abebe	2 years	1991–1993
Tefera Waluwa	5 years	1993–1998
Ali Abdo	5 years	1998–2003
Arkebe Oqubay	3 years	2003–2006
Berhane Deressa	2 years	2006–2008
Kuma Demeksa	5 years	2008–2013
Diriba Kuma	5 years	2013–2018
Takele Uma Benti	2 years	2018–2020
Adanech Abebe	2 years	2020 – present

governance actors is but a type. If an actor has a strong legal or coercive mandate and enforcement capacity, it does not necessarily need to invest in its social network to harness the ability to influence strategic decisions.

On the whole, the centrality scores show that, with regards to Addis Ababa's strategic planning and spatial development, the Plan Commission likely holds the best information, connects the various departments in the city, and has access to powerful actors. But the political/executive power resides with the mayor, who simultaneously has a strong legal mandate and is placed at the centre of decision-making. This suggests that Addis Ababa has a 'strong mayor' form of government (Sweeting, 2003). However, centralised networks such as this one are vulnerable to failure or to capture if the central node is ineffectual or under the influence of a third party, respectively. Looking back since the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 (Table 3), we can see that the position of the mayor is quite precarious (the average tenure is 3.6 years). This raises questions about the true autonomy of the mayor – and, thus, the whole local administration – to shape the future of the city. By being able to 'control' the mayor, the prime minister may be able to control the whole urban governance apparatus. The same reasoning can be applied to any interests or groups that, in turn, may be able to coerce the prime minister.

5.2. Peripheral actors

In a study that emphasises the social composition of a governance network, equally important to analysing the cast of characters forming the set of most central actors is considering the people or organisations that are peripheral or altogether absent from to the web of connections. As shown in Figure 7 (see the online Appendix for a full list of network actors ordered by weighted indegree), some of the actors that we might have expected to be influential in Addis Ababa's spatial development are not very ingrained in the governance network.

Recent empirical research has pointed out the clout of federal-level departments and agencies such as the Ethiopian Railway Corporation (Rode et al., 2020) and of the ruling party itself in the development of infrastructure, real-estate, and other megaprojects in the city centre (Terrefe, 2020; Weldeghebrael, 2022). Our results suggest that these actors may harness their power through means other than their social networks. On the other hand, the peripherality of other seemingly powerful actors in the sub-Saharan context in decision-making networks of Addis
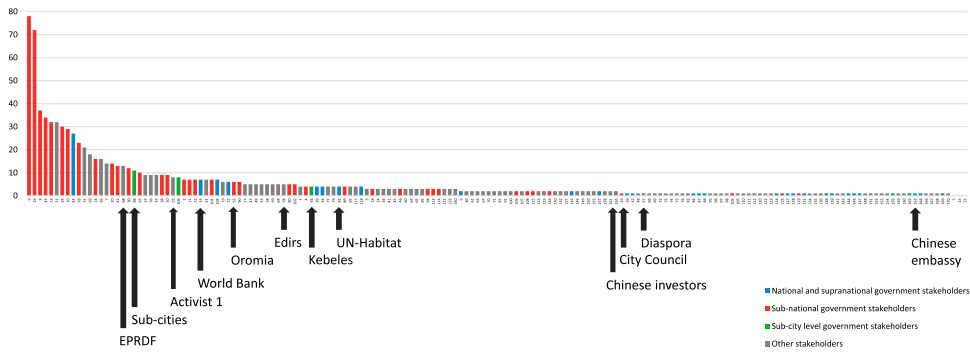
Figure 7. Weighted indegree scores for all network nodes.

Ababa echoes the findings of other authors. Brown and Fisher (2020) have described the frustration of supranational institutions such as the World Bank and UN agencies trying to influence policy in Ethiopia. With regards to the perceived powerful influence of Chinese actors, Goodfellow and Huang (2021) conclude that it may be overestimated when it comes to shaping the political projects embodied by the urban infrastructure developments enabled by Chinese capital, expertise and labour.

The apparent irrelevance of the City Council and other civil society actors that could take on a scrutiny function is further evidence of the nearly absolute power of the mayor in the city. The extremely centralised governance of strategic spatial planning in Addis Ababa, with its strong demarcation between the Plan Commission and the mayor at the core and the rest of the network, leaves little room for both vertical (e.g., with federal agencies and formal or traditional government structures below the city level such as sub-cities, *woredas* and *edirs*) and horizontal coordination (e.g., with the neighbouring regional state of Oromia). A contributing factor for the disconnect with community representatives may be that they are not organised at the city-wide level. For example, there is no entity representing the sub-cities or *woredas* as an interest group.

Out of 29 interviewees that responded to question 'Q13' (see the online Appendix), 12 (41%) have stated that 'professionals' or 'technical people' have been side-lined. Most of these referred to individuals who have formerly worked on the development of the masterplan or in the Plan Commission: 'Particularly genuine professionals that would not dance with anyone' (interview with EiABC academic, 16 October 2019). Unlike at the federal government-level, where careers appear to be more stable, top- and middle-level professionals/bureaucrats from the city administration tend to have very short tenures in their positions. Even when they remain in city government, they are regularly moved to different departments and agencies. More than uncertainty, our respondents view this as a problem of lack of institutional memory that hinders policy credibility and continuity. 'Academics', 'intellectuals' or 'universities' were cited five times (17%), the same as 'civil society' representatives.[12]

Finally, as outlined above, this study is centred on power – understood here as the ability to control or influence strategic decisions. More specifically, it is centred on the 'softer' mode of power, arising from the interconnections between governance actors on the ground (as opposed to 'harder' modes, such as control of resources and strong legal mandates). Therefore, by design, powerless actors, disconnected from the locus of power, are not the focus of our analysis. But this is not to say that they do not have a meaningful impact on how the city looks and develops spatially. In fact, despite the prescriptions of formal plans, a significant proportion of urban expansion in Addis Ababa has been informal (Mahiteme, 2007). Furthermore, in addition to the spatial impacts of informal actors and new city dwellers looking for shelter and work, state-sponsored 'exceptions' to the plans are common in the Ethiopian capital (see, e.g., the Eagle Hills project

in LaGare, Terrefe, 2020). This 'state of exception' regime, as put by Roy (2005), is another useful tool for a central government reluctant to let go of flexibility and discretionary power.

5.3. Respondents' perceptions

When asked about the main strategic, spatial development challenges faced by Addis Ababa (question 'Q1'), our interviewees essentially voiced issues of four different types. First and foremost, institutional shortcomings. In addition to the already mentioned lack of institutional memory that makes it difficult to see projects through to completion, respondents referred to the lack of coordination among the various stakeholders in the city, the limited technical capacity of city government staff, the land tenure system and related problems with tax collection and risks to investors, and the absence of 'strong regulations to govern the mayoralty' (interview with top-level manager at the city administration, 17 October 2019) and/or inability to enforce existing regulations. Second, demographic pressures and economic performance. Addis Ababa's rapid population growth is perceived as a threat to social stability if the city fails to provide the jobs and economic dynamism sought by young Ethiopians. Third, and also connected to population growth, the infrastructure gap. The key actors have been struggling to meet demand for housing, transport and utilities, which has led to informal urban expansion (Mahiteme, 2007). Finally, political challenges. The political uncertainty in Ethiopia is felt across all scales of government and the violent clashes that resulted from the planned expansion of the metropolitan boundaries into Oromia foreseen in the previous version of the masterplan is still fresh in the memories of many of the respondents. This is but an example of how Ethiopia's ethnic struggles are also manifest in the spatial development of the capital.

Despite the incommensurability of the network actors and parameters discussed above and the categories used in 'Q16' for the rating exercise done by the interviewees, it is still possible to distinguish a few coherent results as well as inconsistencies. 'Politicians' were unarguably regarded as the most influential actors for the city's strategic development (see Figure 8). Our findings strongly support this perception. The mayor of Addis Ababa is very influential at the city governance scale. They amass substantial power, both of the hard (institutional) and soft (relational) types. However, the prime minister is able to override the visions and plans developed at the city scale and deploy their own projects that shape the city according to certain political ideals (see also Rode et al., 2020; Terrefe, 2020; Weldeghebrael, 2022). Instead of having to navigate a complex web of multi-scalar configurations shaping how decisions are made, by having *de facto* control over such a central node in Addis' governance network, the prime minister – and potentially others that may have their ear – is able to streamline their influence over the city's futures.
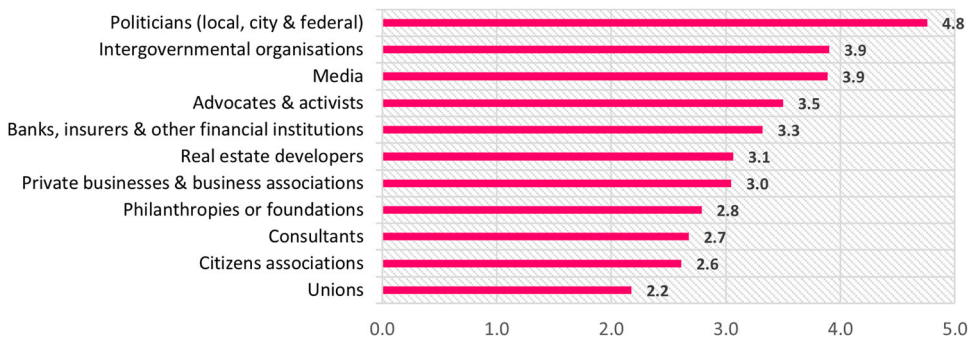

Figure 8. 'Please rate the level of influence on a scale from 1 to 5 (5 being the highest) of the following actors with regards to Addis' strategic development.'

Our network results indicate that the media are indeed among the few other types of stakeholders that manage to exert some influence over strategic development debates. However, the influence of actors such as intergovernmental organisations, advocates and activists, and financial institutions may have been overstated by our respondents. Like community representatives (e.g., citizens associations) and professionals (e.g., consultants), most of these actors have no insider access to the governance network. Of course, this situation may change in the future. Some interviewees pointed out the fact that organised civil society was not allowed until very recently. It is possible that, as the city develops, many existing structures may coalesce to form more interconnected and therefore influential non-government actors – especially if the city and federal governments embrace this diversity and see the benefits of including different experiences and perspectives, instead of perceiving it as a threat (Weldeghebrael, 2023; Woldetsadik, 2022).

5.4. The potential for comparison with other sub-Saharan African cities

Our research confirms that interview-based SNA can be an effective way to empirically formalise the intuitions of practitioners and shed light on who the powerful actors are in cities of the Global South. As we have seen, certain expectations about governance dynamics in Addis Ababa find support in our empirical evidence. But there are surprises. Allowing us to visualise and quantify the structural features of governance networks and to position them within the qualitative information collected in the process, this sort of approach can complement formal institutional analyses that, by themselves, may not be able to capture informal dynamics crucial to explain why certain skills, perspectives or interests are prioritised over others.

Replicating the approach in other sub-Saharan African cities could, therefore, allow us to develop a richer understanding of urban governance regimes in the region. But before this research agenda is realised, our findings only allow us to draw some comparative reflections on a speculative basis – as it is possible that governance networks will differ substantially from city to city, especially in terms of network composition. In terms of network structure, we would expect that the deeply centralised/hierarchical nature of governance in Addis Ababa can also be found in many other geographies across sub-Saharan Africa (and the Global South, more generally). However, the Ethiopian-style 'developmental state' model coupled with the complexities of federal-level politics, and what the capital represents in a country structured administratively around ethnolinguistic lines, may prod Addis Ababa towards a particularly homogeneous network core. A government-dominated governance apparatus for spatial planning in Addis Ababa, with nods to a Chinese-style approach, will not come as a surprise for scholars and practitioners well-versed in African urban politics and development (Cirolia et al., 2021; Goodfellow & Huang, 2021; Terrefe, 2020). But our findings certify this beyond expectations. The homogeneity and centralisation of governance in the city has troubling implications for the consolidation of a democratic society and the emergence of participatory development.

In terms of broader theoretical contributions, our study demonstrates that it may be unwise to overlook the composition and structure of social networks as part of a more sophisticated understanding of urban governance. By not imposing pre-defined network boundaries or limiting the analysis to a specific type of exchange/relationship, this approach adds an important analytical layer to the comprehension of the processes through which urban strategies and policies are shaped (da Cruz et al., 2023). In generating new empirical insights, it also allows us to pose new research questions that zero in on the soft power of actors and the design of network interventions to reform complex policy domains such as spatial planning.

In addition to theory-development efforts, exploratory network analysis approaches could be particularly useful to new incumbents aiming to understand the local context – how things work, who to reach out to and make alliances with. This is especially so when the bureaucracy is a bureaucracy. That is, when change is incremental, civil servants remain in their posts for some

time and progress in their careers in a consistent manner. However, this does not seem to be the case in Addis at the moment. In fact, the nature of governance in Addis Ababa is prone to make empirical research findings on its workings out-of-date by the time they are published. Particularly, research that focuses on the social connections between practitioners and other actors involved in shaping decisions in the city. The extent to which the network of stakeholders in Addis Ababa is highly personalised is a key question for future investigations. When individuals move, does the governance network shift with them? Or are they moved precisely to avoid this shift? How widespread are these practices in other rapidly urbanising cities in sub-Saharan Africa or, more generally, the Global South? What can be done about it?

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper investigates the key actors, the networked structures that arise from the way they are intertwined and how these social structures help shape the governance of strategic spatial planning in Addis Ababa. The research contributes to the interdisciplinary field of urban governance by empirically testing the usefulness and applicability of the network perspective in a Global South city. Our findings show that, alongside 'harder' modes of power (such as control of resources, strong legal mandates, or coercive power to appoint key people), urban governance theory must consider the 'soft' power emerging from the positions that the various actors occupy in the network where different types of governance resources are exchanged (such as information, reputation, authorisation, inspiration or advice), either formally or informally. Whereas exploring the mechanisms of 'hard' power remains crucially important, only focusing on those may not tell the whole story of why certain political interests and choices are prioritised over others (da Cruz et al., 2023; Pierre, 2011). Adopting an interview-based SNA approach with no pre-defined boundary allows us to explore these features systematically whilst upholding the key properties of the concept of governance – namely, it does not require making any *a priori* assumptions about who the influential actors are (or of what type), and how they exert this influence. The approach, therefore, offers some promise for future comparative research and for empirically-based theory development.

Our empirical results suggest that urban governance in Ethiopia's capital is characterised by a centralised and homogeneous network with many structural holes, where the city administration's entities dominate information flows and other governance resource exchanges – most notably, through the mayor and the City Plan Commission. The analysis shows that network composition should be considered alongside structural features. The network positions of the various actors help to shed some light on the diversity/inclusivity of governance, devolution arrangements, and multi-scalar configurations.

The lack of pluralism among the most the central actors may be caused by the preferential attachment mechanism inherent to social networks – a self-organising property that leads actors to seek out connections to others that are already well-connected. In a city historically embedded in a system of state-led planning and development (Cirolia et al., 2021; Terrefe, 2020), and where civil society and domestic private sector actors have only recently started to emerge (Weldeghebrael, 2023), this seems plausible. However, it is also possible that this centralisation is 'by design'. A straightforward way of steering governance in the capital city (by effectively controlling the office of the mayor) may be a feature cherished by the prime minister/federal government/ruling party. The same could be argued regarding the well-known issue of lack of institutional memory in the city. It could be a strategy to avoid allowing social networks to crystalise over time and thus harness more power – which may be perceived as a threat by the ruling class. This network structure and the breaking of consolidating social networks could be intentionally fostered to preserve a certain governance style; a hegemonic apparatus (Davies, 2021) that is potentially able to resist

shifts in ideologies and political priorities. Further research would be required to distinguish between these explanations.

Whatever the mechanism behind this governance system, it comes with advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the network literature suggests that centralised networks tend to privilege outcome efficiency (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Siciliano, Wang, & Medina, 2021; Whetsell et al., 2020). The empirical literature on infrastructure roll out in Addis Ababa supports this notion (e.g., Rode et al., 2020) – with fewer actors to coordinate, plans and projects can be delivered more swiftly. Recalling Zhang's framework (Figure 2), it is reasonable to assume that the urban governance regime in Addis Ababa follows a 'Chinese-style' pro-growth pattern, privileging the successful implementation of governing projects over including a wide spectrum of voices and interests in the governing process (Zhang, 2020). On the other hand, excluding a great number of different stakeholders, their specific knowledge and lived experience means untapping a very large pool of resources readily available to the governmental entities tasked with the strategic spatial development of Addis Ababa (Woldetsadik, 2022). The homophily of the governance network core prevents new ideas and concerns from filtering into the plans and, ultimately, the physical configuration of the city. And with regards to the high volatility of the city administration's entities and their staff, planners and implementers are continuously faced with steep learning curves. In favouring political agility, many of our interviewees perceive the system as disempowering to professionals. 'Politics rather than rationality', many of them claim, guide the spatial development of the city – which inevitably impacts the credibility of plans and policies.

Despite the institutional fragmentation and organisational volatility, our findings indicate that when it comes to strategic planning, 'governance' mostly means 'government' in Addis Ababa. The urban governance system is typified by a *strong* mayor, and a *stronger* prime minister. But is the status quo sustainable in the long term? Is the traditional hierarchical model still feasible in rapidly changing twenty-first century urban societies (da Cruz et al., 2019; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016)? At the operational scale, the delivery of essential services and 'the practices which animate infrastructural systems' (Cirolia & Harber, 2022, p. 2431) are enacted through heterogeneous, complex and multi-scalar relationships. By joining up these scales and diversifying what voices are heard, what values prevail and what visions and approaches are adopted, network interventions fostering a more collaborative and inclusive governance arena could come with some benefits, such as generating trust, legitimacy and a sense of common purpose (Davies, 2021).

While the SNA approach adopted here offers multiple advantages and enables the collection of rich quantitative and qualitative data, it also has some significant limitations. First, the snowball sampling strategy that enables us not to impose a network boundary at the outset means that it is virtually impossible to interview all actors named in the interviews. This will not be a disqualifying feature if one conducts enough interviews and achieves data saturation (see Figure 4 and related discussion), and if the analysis mostly focuses on the most central (and/or most peripheral or absent) actors. Still, it introduces some bias that precludes the use of other quantitative analyses more demanding on the data. Second, referring to the situation at a given sociopolitical time, it presents all the usual problems of cross-sectional data – with the added complication that, in contexts like Addis Ababa, where bureaucrats and institutions are in constant flow, it is hard to determine how 'sticky' the network governance features discussed here really are. And third, taken too literally, the results of this approach may lead to a misunderstanding of who the powerful actors are in a particular city. As we have highlighted several times above, positioning in the governance network is but one of many channels through which actors can exert influence. We have often mentioned coercive control and access to resources, but the case of Addis Ababa is also instructive about the role that ethnic identities play in the spatial development of the city. Although the qualitative data we have collected does touch on this issue (particularly, in answers to question Q1), for the most part, the network analysis is unable to capture these dynamics. On this point, we emphasise that this approach should be regarded as a complement, not an alternative, to other analytical frameworks.

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NOTES

1. The data sources employed by these studies tend to be archives of formal agreements, records of financial flows, group membership (e.g., professional networks and associations, conference attendance, etc.) or questionnaires sent out to representatives of the relevant stakeholders where they can record exchanges (typically using a roster of individuals or organisations from which respondents can choose from).

2. For this reason, both Adanech Abebe and Takele Uma Benti initially took the title of 'Deputy Mayor'. In September 2021, Adanech Abebe was formally elected as mayor of Addis Ababa.

3. Using an open-ended survey distributed through snowball sampling (to include 'unexpected' actors named by respondents) could also have mitigated these risks. However, not imposing restrictions on who the key stakeholders are and/or what types of interaction matter (i.e., not using a roster of organisations from which respondents could choose from) would likely affect response rates and the quality of data. Furthermore, interviews allow researchers to adapt to the personality or concerns of the respondents, change the order or even skip some of the questions, clarify any queries or misinterpretations, and focus the discussion on the relevant theme(s).

4. Informed consent was provided by the interviewees in written form. Participants were granted anonymity and were free to decline or withdraw participation at any point of the research.

5. To maintain the anonymity of participants and because the positioning and interlinkages of the various organisations and institutions involved in the governance network are more relevant to our aims, the analysis focuses on organisational-level data. This means that, whenever possible, individuals mentioned during the interviews were coded as their parent organisation. For the cases where this was not possible, or would not make sense, these individuals were given codes (e.g., 'Activist 1', 'Activist 2', 'Writer 1'). In other cases, the coded actors are not formal organisations/institutions but rather more informal social groupings (e.g., *Edirs*, 'Famous individuals', 'Consultants').

6. Though we carried out 31 interviews, the graph in Figure 4 shows only 29 because we interviewed two individuals from the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC) and two individuals from the Addis Ababa Infrastructure Coordination, Building Permit & Control Authority, and each pair was coded as a single entry (all individuals were coded as their parent organisation).

7. The answers to all questions were considered and aggregated to produce the network and conduct the analysis, with the exception of questions 'Q13' and 'Q16'. Question 'Q13' was excluded because, by prompting the participants to recall 'irrelevant' actors, it indicates a 'negative' tie (whereas all other questions account for 'positive' relationships). Question 'Q16' is a rating exercise designed to cross-reference our network parameters with respondents' perceptions.

8. For the mathematical formulae of these and other parameters used in this paper see, for example, Prell (2012).

9. The Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC) at Addis Ababa University, the university as a whole and the media sector.

10. E.g., the case of road and traffic management, with the Addis Ababa City Roads Authority (AACRA) and Road and Transport Bureau often represented.

11. See also Weldeghebrael (2023) and Di Nunzio (2019) for recent qualitative research supporting these findings (on the role of the media and a few academics, respectively).

12. Many other stakeholders were mentioned in responses to 'Q13' but only by one or two of the interviewees.

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