Planning Challenges Facing University Town Campuses

A case-study of Nairobi Central Business District-Kenya

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Abstract:

The Central Business District (CBD) of Kenya’s Capital City, Nairobi, has been confronting an unprecedented planning challenge of the proliferation of University town campuses. The challenge has been largely precipitated by an increasing demand for higher education in the country. The CBD, being the centre of all commercial and administrative functions in Nairobi, becomes the most strategic location for the university town campuses. The purpose of this research was to understand the context within which this phenomenon is unfolding, and its implications on the normal functioning of the CBD.

The university is considered a centre of knowledge, culture, aesthetic direction and the moral forces shaping the ‘civilized’ society. Universities also contribute in important ways to the economic health and physical landscapes of societies, serving as all but permanent fixtures of the urban economy and built environment. Such contributions to social formation, however, have not left the university in an unambiguous position relative to its urban environment.

A daily encounter with challenges facing town campuses in prompted a research on the topic and attempt to find solutions to deal with it. This was followed by formulation of a research topic surrounding the issue, and then a review of relevant literature. With a strong and informed background, field survey and data collection and analysis followed. Finally, there was analysis of the findings and recommendations made on how to deal with the problem.

The study revealed that university town campuses in Kenya and Nairobi CBD in particular, are not established within any defined planning framework. Their location within the CBD is at the discretion of the universities’ administrations and the City Council of Nairobi. Further, the universities are not adequately provided with the necessary facilities needed for learning. This has compromised the quality of education provided in the institutions. The Commission for Higher Education is currently working on a bill similar to the University Rules of 1989 for regulation purposes that will suit current needs. Urgent intervention measures are required so as to control this situation.

Keywords: Kenya, Nairobi, CBD, Higher Education, University Town Campuses, Facility Provision.

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1. Introduction

The campus is a phenomenon of increasing relevance to modern urban planning. In Nairobi CBD, new campus-style universities are shooting up like mushrooms. According to Kees Christiaanse, a prominent Dutch urban designer, the global controversy over the desirability of openness and interaction with the urban environment demonstrates the need for a radical debate on the shape and the position of the campus within its context.\(^1\) The relationship between town campuses and their respective cities is now referred to as a town-gown relationship.

Demand for places in higher education far outstrips supply of available seats globally. In many emerging economies the demand can be 20 to 50 per cent higher than places available in public institutions. It is predicted that the demand for higher education worldwide will have expanded from 97 million students in 2000 to over 262 million students by 2025.\(^2\)

In recent times, there is an increasing demand for higher education in Kenya as well. This is attributed to a number of factors including, improved standards of education at the lower levels, improved socio-economic status of people, and a growing demand for graduates of higher education in a highly competitive job market. It is in response to this demand that more town campuses are being established and this causes a strain on the functioning of Nairobi CBD.

This widespread demand for higher education in Kenya has been triggered by the massive expansion of primary and secondary education over the last three decades. An expansion which was itself propelled by demographic pressures: population growth rates remained just under 4\(^\%\) per year for most of the 1980’s and 1990’s. The increasing sophistication of the economy which demands a skilled workforce has also fuelled the demand for higher education. Changes in the education system e.g the change in the country’s education cycle from 7-4-2-3 \(^{(1)}\) cycle to the 8-4-4 \(^{(2)}\) cycle. In the new 8-4-4 system, a situation had been created where over 170,000 applicants for university entry were available as opposed to no more than 20,000 potential applicants in the A-level system.\(^3\) This high demand for higher education has in turn led to a response from both the public and private universities establishing town campuses in towns all over the country and most especially in Nairobi CBD.

According to the World Bank Report (2009), approximately 30 per cent of Global higher education enrolments are now in private sector institutions. In Kenya, the 1980s and 90s saw the emergence of some private institutions. As elsewhere in Africa, private expansion sprang forth largely due to the public system’s failure to meet the demand for higher education. Most of the town campuses in Nairobi CBD are private and if they are run by public institutions their fees are like those of private institutions. These are commonly referred to as parallel programs.

1.1 The Study Area:

The area under study is Nairobi CBD. Its location in Kenya and within Nairobi is shown in the map below (Fig. 1). Nairobi displays a complex surface structure, making it difficult to decipher the distinct land uses of the city surface. Inevitably, there are wide variations in population density reflecting different
land use patterns within what Obudho and Aduwo (1988) see as six distinct and different land use divisions, namely; the Central Business District (CBD); Industrial Area; public and private open spaces; public land; residential areas; and undeveloped land. The spatially divided internal structure is based on land uses and income levels.

The CBD is also referred to as the city centre or city square. It is the central hub for most of the important activities in the city. It houses the main government functions and institutions. The CBD land uses are not clearly separated but patterns emerge in certain sections of the CBD where certain functions tend to concentrate. The fact that this is where major high level functions are concentrated gives makes it a very important urban component in Nairobi city.

Figure 1: Location context of Nairobi CBD Source: Original map from the Survey of Kenya, 2010

1.2 Research Question

The following questions regarding the establishment and location of town campuses in Kenya constitute the core of this research: First, what challenges do the town campuses present to the general functioning of the CBD and does the CBD affect the learning environment in these universities? Second, what can be done to promote a good relationship between the CBD and the university town campuses?

1.3 The Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the factors contributing to the emergence of university town campuses in the CBD of Nairobi; spatial distribution of universities in the CBD and its effect on other CBD functions, adequacy of facility provision in the town campuses in relation to the set standards and the planning implication of these changes to the CBD.
1.4 Research Methodology:
The Data collection methods included both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data collection included: direct observation, oral and written interviews, questionnaires, taking an inventory of facilities in the universities and direct measurement of certain parameters e.g. traffic counts of vehicles on certain streets at specific times especially during the evening and counting the number of parking spaces occupied after working hours in buildings and open parking spaces near buildings occupied by town campuses.

The main method of primary data collection used was the questionnaire. In order to attain a representative number of respondents a sampling frame was used. Out of the 9 universities three public and three private universities were picked. The three public universities were: University of Nairobi (being the mother town campus), Moi University, and Kenya Polytechnic University College (Now Technical University ). The three private universities were Kenya Methodist University, Mt. Kenya University and St. Paul’s University. The data collection instruments were administered in each university as follows: 1 university administrator’s interview schedule, 2 lecturer’s questionnaires and 4 student’s questionnaires. This amounted to a sample of 6 interview schedules for the university administrators, 12 questionnaires for the lecturers and 24 for the students.

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<td>Mt. Kenya University</td>
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<td>St. Paul’s University</td>
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Table 1: Sampling frame for questionnaire administration

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Secondary data collection involved literature review of documented information from the City Council of Nairobi, the Ministry of Higher Education and Commission for Higher Education. Literature review was also done on education planning design, case studies on university planning, standards and guidelines for design and provision of university facilities.

In Data analysis the following techniques were used: SPSS for representation of questionnaire data in graphs and charts, Geographic information system (GIS) and specifically ArcGIS, was used for mapping analysis and Qualitative data was presented using photographs, sketches, illustrations and maps.

2. Study Findings:
The study findings focus on answering the questions mentioned in the purpose of this study. The findings of this study are outlined below:
2.1 Spatial Distribution of Universities in Nairobi CBD:

In the CBD there is a total of 9 university town campuses (Fig 2). There is one main university (University of Nairobi) which is located in the CBD. There is also one main university college (Kenya Polytechnic University College). The other universities are: Kenya Methodist University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology, Mount Kenya University, Moi University, and St. Paul University.

As the map shows, there is an emerging concentration of universities in the North of the CBD. This creates a sort of university district with many town campuses preferring to locate here.

2.2 Facility Provision in the Universities:

An inventory of basic institutional facilities was done. These included: library facilities, classrooms and lecture theatres, parking facilities, ICT facilities, parking facilities and public health and safety facilities.

2.2.1 Library Facilities

All the universities in the CBD are provided with library services. The issue however is the capacity of the libraries. According to the Commission for Higher Education which is the body responsible for
certifying universities in Kenya, the universities claim to have the facility but in actual sense they are referring to the facilities in their main campuses and not the branch town campuses. The Universities claim that the library services can be accessed online, but in some cases it cannot be done. This raises questions about the quality of training given to students in the town campuses compared to those in the main campuses. Only the main universities have adequate library facilities e.g Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library at the University of Nairobi.

2.2.3 Parking Facilities:
The parking facility is definitely an under-provided service in most of the institutions. It emerged that these facilities, were provided to university staff only and not to the students. Where students had access to parking it was at a fee. Some town campuses which own buildings in the CBD have parking spaces provided in the same building that house the institutions. This is a good way of solving the parking problem. Kenya Methodist University for instance opens its parking space to the public at a fee, it gets money and relieves the parking problems in Nairobi as well.

2.2.2 Classrooms and Lecture Halls:
Space provision in classrooms did not emerge as a big problem in the town campuses since the average class sizes are relatively low. However in the universities which have their main campuses in the CBD the learning spaces are inadequate due to the high students’ enrollments. In the University of Nairobi; Taifa Multi-purpose Hall, students were observed standing outside during lectures since there was no space in the lecture theatre. From the data collection, 70% of the classes had an average of 21-40 students.
2.2.4 ICT (Information Communication Technology) Facilities:

According to the data collected through questionnaires, 60% of the institutions are provided with ICT facilities, however, even for those with these facilities, they are not provided adequately. Inaccessibility of internet services in the institutions was the biggest problem, followed by use of outdated computer facilities which cannot meet the demands of students. Access of books via the internet also emerged as a problem due to lack of internet services. However the staff in these universities had access to internet facilities all through. In general, 50% of the respondents in the town campuses said their ICT facilities were inadequate.

![Figure 5: Adequacy of ICT facilities in universities. Source: Field Study: 2010](image)

2.2.5 Public Health and Safety Facilities:

The Kenya University rules of 1989(4) expect that every university should have a dispensary whether it is a contiguous university or a main campus. However 100% of the town campuses in the CBD do not have a health facility. Safety in the institutions in the event of a fire, and other disasters is not well provided for. There is also a 100% agreement among the respondents that the universities do not provide fire safety education measures/drills for their student and staff. From the study only 3 of the 6 town campuses sampled are provided with fire safety equipment.

2.2.6 Security in Institutions

The study revealed that different institutions employ different security measures, but the use of guards emerged as the highly used security measure. All the 6 institutions sampled employed day and night security guards. Insecurity incidences however are still present within and around the institutions. A good example of an insecurity hotspot is the tunnel at the University of Nairobi. Muggings were the most common form of crime experienced by the respondents.

![Figure 6: University of Nairobi Tunnel; hideout for muggers. Photo by Author 12/01/2010](image)
2.2.7 Sports, Recreation, and Entertainment Facilities:

These facilities are absent in all the town campuses except University of Nairobi (UON). The students however utilize facilities provided by the City Council of Nairobi (CCN) and also facilities in University of Nairobi main campus. The recreation facilities are provided by City Council of Nairobi include: Jivanjee gardens and Uhuru Park. University of Nairobi on the other hand has spacious sports grounds which other universities utilize at a fee. In addition, the University rules of 1989 stipulate that at least one auditorium should be provided in each university. This however was absent in 5 of the 6 universities picked as a sample for the study. Only The University of Nairobi had this facility.

![Adequacy of sports and recreation facilities.](image1)

![Lack of recreation facilities at KPUC.](image2)

Figure 7: Sports, Recreation and Entertainment facilities. Source: Field Study 2010

2.2.8 Transport and Access to Universities:

The study showed that the students attending these universities come mainly from within Nairobi and their main mode of transport is public transport. Convenience of location and time of an education institution is what influences people to choose or reject it as a viable option. Accessibility is influenced by many factors among them being time taken, safety, security, frequency of modal change and level of comfort experienced while trying to access an educational institution. It emerged that insecurity, traffic jam, unpredictability of public vehicles operations and weather changes (light showers cause huge traffic jams in Nairobi) are some of the factors that were considered as causes for inconvenience. Average time of commute from residential areas in Nairobi to the CBD for the students was 30 minutes during off-peak hours i.e 10.00 am to 3.00 p.m and 1hour during peak times i.e 7-9.00 a.m and 4 - 6.00 p.m on weekdays.
3. Relationship of the Universities with the CBD

3.1 Driving Force behind Emergence of Universities in the CBD

From the research it emerged that, the location of the universities is a calculated effort from the commission for higher education to improve access to higher education in the country. It is also a response to demand by the universities who want to be close to their clientele and provide the services asked of them. These two reasons show that the location of universities within the CBD is justified however, an important element was left out in the process and that is formulation of a guiding framework based on the principles of urban planning within which the location, design and operations of University town campuses would take place. The Commission of higher education is not responsible for accreditation and regulation of public universities. These institutions have their own legislation that guide their operations, with each university being bound by an Act of Parliament. Therefore, the public universities do not have to get consent from the Commission for Higher Education before opening a new town campus. This has been a bottleneck to enforcement of regulations to these universities. However, for the private universities and the constituent colleges, these rules apply, but the demand forces for higher education seem to take precedence over enforcement of planning regulations.

3.2 Areas of Conflict:

3.2.1 Traffic Interferences:

Noise caused by unnecessary hooting, heavy vehicle engines, and loud music, is very detrimental to the urban environment in Nairobi let alone to a learning environment. Most of the buildings housing the universities are located close to the major traffic spines and hence they are prone to a lot of noise.
pollution. In addition, to access their institutions students and university staff alike have to cross many roads. Some of these roads are have high volumes of traffic moving at high speeds. This has been a major cause of road accidents involving students.

3.2.2 Incompatible CBD Functions:

St. Paul’s University is located at Church house, Moi Avenue, which is next to the Railways bus-station. The station generates the biggest public transport traffic in the CBD. The station handles about 4,000 matatus(5) and buses in a day. Thus, there is heavy human and vehicle traffic, noise and air pollution generated here making it a very unsuitable location for a learning institution. Another case is Mt. Kenya University which is located at Uniafric House, a building that also used to house Fridays, a popular entertainment spot. During the evenings the club begins to play loud music and this interferes with the learning activities of the students.

3.3 Areas of Convergence:

Despite the many conflicting uses that the CBD presents to the universities and vice versa, a compromise can be reached to allow these two activities co-exist well. There are opportunities that the universities present and likewise the CBD that allow for a mutual relationship. Facilities that can be co-shared include: recreation facilities, and traffic infrastructure.

3.3.2 Social, Cultural and Entertainment Facilities:

For social, and entertainment facilities, there are a number of these in the CBD. These are good areas for students to explore their artistic skills. These include; Alliance Francaise, Goethe Institut, and Kenya National theatre.

3.3.2 Recreation Areas:

The City council of Nairobi is in custody of various recreation areas which can be utilized by the students. This is in the event where the concerned institutions do not have these facilities. These facilities include: Jivanjee gardens (Fig 10), and Uhuru Park the biggest park in Nairobi CBD.

3.3.3 Traffic and Student Pedestrians:

There is existing infrastructure at University of Nairobi and Kenya polytechnic that allows for students to cross the roads safely. These are; a fly-over above Haile Sellassie avenue for use by Kenya Polytechnic University College (now Technical University-Kenya) students and a tunnel under Uhuru highway for UON students. This infrastructure is not well utilized by the students who like short cuts of crossing the road directly.
4. Conclusion:

The study initially hypothesized that the emergence of Universities within the CBD is basically a demand driven phenomenon that is not occurring within any planning framework. The findings of this study collude to this and in addition it emerged that the legislation for guiding and regulating higher education institutions is present but it is not customized to fit the dynamic higher education sector. Therefore, there is a need to put in place regulations which are realistic and there should be proper institutional frameworks to ensure the enforcement of these regulations. There is also need to design approaches which are not conservative and rigid but those which are flexible and in up to date, to be able to meet the requirement of the growing demand for higher education. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- **Provision of Proper Education Infrastructure**: Universities as Higher learning institutions should be provided with proper infrastructure. New design of facilities is required so as to accommodate the needs unique to town campuses.

- **Creation of Flexible Spaces**: The CBD is currently experiencing major space constraints. Innovative ways of using the available spaces for various learning needs is necessary. Spaces currently used for single purposes only can be converted to accommodate other functions e.g The case of Nairobi law courts parking space which is utilized as Maasai Market during the weekends. These spaces can be utilized by the universities for their functions.

- **Resource Pooling**: Institutions should be willing to pool their resources and come up with common areas where they can utilize these resources. This is because some of the infrastructure required needs a lot of capital to put up. If these institutions join together they can come up with capital adequate enough acquire these facilities. They can then develop a program for utilizing these facilities. Institutions can also lease out spaces and facilities to each other.

- **Creating a Spatial Framework for Universities in the CBD**: This spatial framework will include: provision of proper learning and support facilities for students, circulation, parking, security within and around the institutions, provision of common open and contemplative spaces, landscaping, accessible service areas and maintaining a capacity for growth of institutions keeping in mind increase in student population. Creation of a campus district is a viable option in this regard. New zoning standards are required for the CBD. The new zoning should include town campuses as an important urban function.

- **Legal and Policy Intervention**: Establishment of proper legislation put in place to cater for the emerging town campuses. The existing University regulations of 1989 only cover for university main campuses with vast tracts of land. There is a need to create flexible and up to date policies and regulations that will make special provisions for town campuses, in these regard, the proposed Universities Bill, 2009 should be passed as soon as possible.

- **Institutional Responsibility**: The relevant authorities from the Ministry, Commission for Higher Education and the relevant local authorities (City Council of Nairobi) should be more vigilant in
enforcing the laws relevant to learning institutions. There should be no compromises in issues to deal with the health, safety and security of Higher education institutions. This will call for more moral sacrifice and responsibility on the leadership of this sector.

Notes:

(1) 7-4-2-3: This was an education system whereby 7 years were in elementary school, 4 years in secondary school (O-Level), 2 years in high school (A-Level) and 3 years in university.

(2) 8-4-4: This education system is the one currently in place. It consists of 8 years in elementary school, 4 years in high school and 4 years in university.

(3) Jomo Kenyatta was the first president of Kenya

(4) The University Rules of 1989 did not consider planning standards for town campuses. They provided guidelines for the main universities with large tracks of land. Therefore, town campuses do not have planning standards and regulations guiding them.

(5) Matatus are vans and mini-buses with a city a capacity of 14-25 people. They are the main means of transport in Nairobi and in Kenya.

(6) Maasai market is an open air market where Kenyan traditional and contemporary art and materials are sold.

References:


