(Virtual) P167 / Mega African Trash Cans, or the death of the utopia of the African independence movements in Portuguese-speaking countries

Topic : Citizens, Participation and Social Movements

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Mega-dumpsites in Africa, Latin America and Asia are not accidental products of rapid urbanisation; they are deeply rooted in the historical trajectories of nations that fought for their independence from a long colonial and imperial system. In the Lusophone post-colonial space—exemplified by the Hulene dumpsite in Maputo and the Mulenvos Sanitary Landfill in Luanda—as well as across Latin America and South Asia, there is a direct causal link between the structural inequalities of past empires and current urban crises. As Vanessa Melo (2015) notes, the colonial system deliberately designed fragmented cities, institutionalising spatial segregation and underdeveloping basic infrastructure for native populations.

Following their independence, the new African sovereign states promised equitable development and spatial justice, drawing on revolutionary ideals. However, decades later, the exponential growth of these mega-dumpsites mirrors how the values and principles that guided the post-independence era of these countries have fallen into total public discredit. Mirroring the warnings of Frantz Fanon (1961) regarding post-colonial state fragility, contemporary regimes have often reproduced territorial neglect, leaving waste management to reflect broken historical promises.

State-of-the-Art
Modern policy literature and global urban political ecology increasingly view waste zones through a decolonial lens, moving past technocratic paradigms. Research demonstrates that more than places of degradation, these dumpsites are, simultaneously, a space of marginalisation and of economic and community survival. In Latin America, Kathleen Millar (2018) illustrates how historical dumpsites act as vital shadow economies that sustain vulnerable groups—unemployed youth, poor migrants, and destitute families—through informal recycling networks, a reality Melanie Samson (2020) argues is increasingly threatened by exclusionary circular economy frameworks. Similarly, Seth Schindler (2015) highlights how top-down, exclusionary environmental policies in South Asia often displace these populations rather than solving systemic poverty, a systemic failure that Nedson Sinthumule (2021) directly links to the reproduction of colonial structures within modern waste management systems.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This panel seeks to address difficult questions regarding how to transform these territories through public policies capable of reversing legacy inequalities. It focuses on identifying tools for community intervention and dialogue to bridge the gap between marginalised citizens and political institutions.

The central research questions are:
How do colonial urban architectures and post-colonial leadership failures structurally intersect to shape the contemporary crisis of mega-dumpsites in the Global South?

What policy mechanisms can formalise waste ecosystems while securing the survival and dignity of marginalised populations across formerly colonised geographies?

The panel will test the following hypotheses:

H1: The contemporary degradation of dumpsites is directly linked to the reproduction of colonial-style top-down decision-making, which ignores peripheral communities.

H2: Public policies that incorporate co-production and grassroots participation successfully restore public trust and civic inclusion.

H3: Multidisciplinary policy research provides the necessary frameworks for an improvement in the stewardship of populations, territories, and, above all, citizenship.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites scholars, researchers, and practitioners to submit papers exploring urban waste ecosystems, focusing on nations that fought for independence from long colonial and imperial rule. While rooted in the experiences of the Lusophone post-colonial space (e.g., Mozambique, Angola, Brazil), we explicitly welcome comparative papers or case studies from other colonised regions in Latin America, Africa, and South Asia to foster a global decolonial dialogue on public policy. We seek contributions that analytically connect past imperial structures to current urban vulnerabilities, analysing how the values and principles that guided the post-independence era have fallen into total public discredit within urban management.

We welcome multidisciplinary papers showing that, more than places of degradation, these dumpsites are also spaces of marginalisation and of economic and community survival. The panel aims to identify how to intervene through public policies that deploy innovative tools for community intervention and dialogue. The ultimate goal is to gather research oriented toward an improvement in the stewardship of populations, territories, and, above all, citizenship.

We encourage submissions addressing:

Decolonial and Historical Analyses: Papers mapping how colonial spatial segregation persists in modern dumpsites like Hulene (Maputo), Mulenvos (Luanda), or similar sites in the Global South.

Public Policy Evaluation: Studies assessing state interventions, formalisation strategies, and why traditional top-down sanitation models fail.

Grassroots Stewardship and Co-production: Research showcasing community-led initiatives, waste-picker cooperatives, and dialogue platforms between vulnerable populations and local governments.

Comparative Post-Colonial Studies: Work that links Lusophone African realities with public policy successes or failures in Asian or Latin American informal waste ecosystems.

By confronting these difficult realities globally, the panel aims to foster a productive dialogue that moves beyond diagnosing degradation, offering lucid, policy-driven solutions to rebuild civic dignity at the urban margins.

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