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Housing in Areas Unfit for Habitation

Irène Nadine Njiki
Doctoral student at the University of Yaoundé I / Faculty of Education / Centre for Research and Doctoral Training in Human, Social and Educational Sciences

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Corresponding Author:
Irène Nadine Njiki

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ABSTRACT

This research is entitled « housing in areas unfit for habitation ». The aim of this research is to show that social (contextual) and psychological (linked to the quality of the perception of risks) factors encourages the exposition of populations to health risks in Yaoundé. The vulnerability of people living in precarious neighbourhoods (in low-lying areas and on mountain slopes) to certain diseases and natural disasters can be observed through environmental degradation, the under-equipment of these neighbourhoods and the weakness of de means of protection against natural hazards that have been put in place. The social-economic and socio-demographic context, the preference given to individual housing in the African urban context, inoperative urban policies and the poor perception of natural hazards by disadvantaged communities encourages their exposure to health hazards by occupying low-lying areas and mountain slopes. The problem we developed leads us to the following research question: does housing in areas unsuitable for habitation encourage exposure to health risks in Yaoundé?

We used a deductive and explanatory approach to collect qualitative and is based on various accounts of interviews with local people, their beliefs and their perception of the natural threat. An interview guide was drawn up for the heads of the targeted neighbourhoods in the capital city.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the United Nations estimated that more than 350, 000 people on the African continent were affected by torrential rains. The latter caused severe flooding during periods of heavy rainfall in the third quarter of the year (July-August-September).the organization estimates that more than 300 peoples died in central and west Africa. The countries worst affected are Senegal, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon.

As an integral part of the equatorial part of the continent, Cameroon remains exposed to several types of risk, including mass movements such as landslides, mudflows, rock fall and land movements, most of which occur in mountainous areas (Zoning, 2006). They are also volcanic and seismic risks along the Cameroon line. As for the risk of Flooding, it is more frequent in the coastal part of the country and in the lowlands (Zoning, 2006). Gas emanations (lake Monoun and lake Nyos (1981, 1986)) and epidemics are not to be outdone, as they are a cause of death and expense for the country.

Our previous work focused on the housing crisis and living conditions in the university halls of residence in Yaoundé (Bonamoussadi). The cosmopolitan nature of the Bonamoussadi district the growing promiscuity, the meeting of individuals with divergent objectives in the context of crisis, make it difficult to manage the environment and result in risky behaviour (poor rubbish management, pervasive village mentality, noise and add hours, assaults, drug addiction, etc.). These various factors have an impact on living conditions (recurrence of certain diseases in the population (malaria, typhoid fever, amoebic dysentery, etc.), school dropout rates, prostitution, etc.). the population of this district is also exposed to natural hazards, due to the proximity of certain mini-dwellings to watercourses.

These significant achievements have motivated us to continue in the same vein, this time focusing on disadvantage communities who have consciously exposed themselves to natural hazards in low-lying areas and on hillsides in Yaoundé. Human pressures in

these protected ecological areas are linked to many factors, but above all to the strong urban growth of Yaoundé. They are at the root of the environmental crises (environmental loss and degradation) that are leading to climate change.

In fact, in 1926, Yaoundé had a population of around 5,865. Fifty years later (in 1976), this figure had increased 53-fold to 313,706 inhabitants. Between 1976 and 2005, the population doubled every 10 years. The rate rose from 9% between 1969 and 1976, to 6.85% between 1976 and 1987 and 5.7 % between 1987-2005 (RGPH, 2005). The population of Yaoundé was estimated at 3,004,975 in 2017. Generally speaking, this population has grown exponentially, with the city expanding into the surrounding localities (metropolitan area). This excessive urbanization of the city of Yaoundé is therefore at the root of urban sprawl, but also of the housing crisis.

According to studies of Yaoundé POS (2020), the housing deficit in the commune of Yaoundé II in 2018 was around 49585 dwellings. The additional demand for housing between 2018 and 2035 is 72251 dwellings. In total, for this city, and additional housing stock of 121, 836 dwellings is required over the period 2018-2035. This crisis is at the root of the development of informal, resulting in saturation of the central districts (Nvog-Ada, Melen, etc.) and anarchic occupation of space, even where is prohibited by the government. As a result, healthy shanty towns have sprung up in the shallows and on the mountain slopes.

Living conditions in these unsuitable areas are difficult, given the health situation of the residents, who are exposed to natural hazards and disease. Based on these various empirical findings, a main research question was posed, namely: does housing in areas unfit for habitation encourage exposure to health risks through occupation of the low-lying areas and mountain slopes in Yaoundé?

The provisional answer to this provisional research question allow us to put forward our research hypothesis, which is: Housing in areas unfit for habitation encourages exposure to health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes of Yaoundé.

This gives rise to five specific research hypotheses:

- Poverty due to a difficult socio-economic situation favours exposure to health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé
- The absolute desire of many city dwellers to have their own home encourages exposure of health risks though occupation of low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.
- The high demand for building land in urban and peri-urban areas that can be urbanised due to strong urban growth encourages exposure to health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.
- The laxity shown by the authorities in charge of land management encourages exposure of health risks though occupation of the low lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.
- The low perception of the natural threat by the people living in areas unfit for habitation encourages exposure of health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.

The general aim of our research is to show, though a delailed analysis, that housing in areas unfit for habitation encourages exposure to health risks though occupation of low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.

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- The low perception of the natural threat by the people living in areas unfit for habitation encourages exposure of health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.

Of the many social science research instruments available, such as interview, rating scales, tests, tests. We choose interview guide for this research. It's a qualitative method.

It should also be noted that the qualitative research approach is used to obtain empirical data. According to Gudyanga et al. (2019), this approach is inductive, global and naturalistic, and makes it possible to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014) and to construct a global description, largely narrative, in order to inform the researcher's understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon (Astalin,2019).

1. Paradigmatic approach.

The intervention approach (action research) promotes knowledge centred on social change, emphasising practical knowledge of individuals and groups rather than scientific knowledge, and adopting the anthropological principle that members of a social group know their reality better than people outside the group. From this point of view, identifying the factors that contribute to the exposure of city dwellers to health risks can never be the subject of research conducted on a closed basis. Community practice tends

to enhance the value of the individual in a global environment. To gain a better understanding of the meaning given to risk by disadvantaged groups and the factors that influence this perception, we have adopted the psychometric paradigm.

According to this approach (psychometric paradigm, Fischhoff et al., 1978, 1987), risk is a multidimensional concept which takes account of social and psychological dimensions. These dimensions and their interrelations can be quantified. While experts refer to more quantitative criteria (e.g. probabilities and anticipated damage from a given event), the general public base their assessment of risk on dimensions. Slovic et al. (Fischhoff et al., 1978, 200), based on the work of Tversky and Kahneman (1974), also try to explain the aversion that individuals have towards risks and their indifference towards others, as well as the differences opinion between experts and non-experts. The general idea is that all hazards have a unique common causal pattern that determines how individuals perceive risk.

The assessment would be based on three criteria:

- The number of people exposed
- Whether the risk is catastrophic
- Whether it is familiar

However, the psychometric paradigm has a number of limitations. Environmental factors and those linked to choice of neighbourhood can explain risk taking in the lowlandsand on the mountain slopes of Yaoundé. In addition to psychological and social factors, some people settle in dangerous areas for relational reasons and also because they enjoy living there. The psycho-socio-environment dimension of risk can also be considered. There are three aspects to this environmental viewpoint.

- The number of people exposed
- Whether the risk is catastrophic
- Whether it is familiar or unfamiliar

However, the psychometric paradigm has a number of limitations. Environmental factors and those linked to the choice of neighbourhood can expain risk taking in the low-lying and on the mountain slopes of Yaoundé. In addition to psychological and social factors, some people settle in dangerous areas for relational reasons and also because they enjoy living there. The psycho-socio-environment dimension of risk can be considered. There are three aspects to this environmental viewpoint.

- Perceived vulnerability and stress caused by natural hazards.
- Spatial location and proximity to risks
- Attachment to the living environment.

Thus, the level of vulnerability depends on three key factors. The level of experience to a non-negligible risk, the feeling of loss of control, i.e. the feeling of lacking effective means of defence, protective measures and/or avoidance possibilities, and the anticipation of significant negative consequences (Moser, 1998).

According to Burningham et al. (2008), some people tend to deny or underestimate the risk of flooding because of their attachment to their property. According to several studies, attachment to one's home and region seems to be a determining factor in the decision to live in an area at risk and to refuse permanent relocation. Studies highlight the importance of the quality of life associated with the location of the home and the feeling of attachment in explaining the choice of certain people to live in a home at risk of flooding (Figuierdo et al., 2008; 2009; Kick et al., 2011; Shrubsole and scherer, 1996; Tricot, 2008; Vogt rt al., 2008; Williset al., 2011). Some of the people living near areas, taking holistic account of the factors that predispose populations to health risks.

2. Scope and interests of the research.

Conducted in the field of community intervention and action, thid research is part conducted in the field of community interventionism and sustainable development. Itis a collective intervention applied to communities living in at-risk areas in Yaoundé. As a result, it advocates integrated management of protected ecological areas, taking holistic account of the factors that predispose populations to health risks. It is the political dimension of the intervention that is highlighted in this research. It is concerned with city management. The study is of interest in four ways: scientific, ecological, socio-cultural and governmental.

The scientific interest of this research stems from the fact that, using a psychometric approach, it analyses the influence of social and psychological determinants (linked to the quality of perception) on people's attitudes and behaviour when they are exposed to natural hazards. As a result, the psychosocial dimension of risk in this research requires a global approach to risk.

Opting for a multidimensional approach to risk offers the advantage of a rich conceptual tool, insular as the quantitative component quantifies the potential for damage, whereas the qualitative or constructivist component takes account of risk understood as a representation of individual and collective concerns, which is part of the programme for risk management that takes account of social pluralism and ethically acceptable. Risk and its perception are seen as one and the same thing (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982). Ulrich Beck also defends a constructivist conception of risk insofar as he considers that risk is specific to our postmodern societies.

Community action always takes place in a context. For this reason, a study context is developed through the social dynamics theory of Georges Balandier and Alain Touraine. According to these authors, society is the product of its history, and social change

is at the root of the crisis. This theory enabled us to place our research in context by noting the influence of historical, socio-cultural, socio-demographic, socio-economic and socio-structural factors on the perception of risk in Yaoundé 'disadvantaged communities.

An individual's motivation to motivation to protect themselves in the face of a knwon and perceived threat is a function of their assessment of the threat and their ability to deal with it (Rogers, 1983). The evaluation of the threat is also a function of experience, the evaluation of the ability to cope and the situation in which the person finds him/herself (Bandura, 1997). This scientific approach could serve as a springboard and compass for future research, since it takes into account people's risk culture and advocates concerted management of natural hazards within community at risk.

In socio-cultural terms, this research is just as interesting the influence of cultural determinants linked to community beliefs on communities' perception of risk. For example, the Bakweri people who live on the slopes of mount Cameroon believe that their ancestors lived at the top of the mountain. They therefore consider the mountain to be a symbol of protection. As a result, hazards therefore consider the mountain to be a symbol of protection. As a result, hazard mitigation strategies must take into account the rationality of the local populations. The aim is to change people's perceptions of the risk and get them involved in preventive action.

From de ecological point of view, this research is just as interesting. This because it allows us to dwell once again on the need for integrated environmental management in higf-risk neighbourhoods in Yaoundé. This is because of the increasing degradation of protected ecological areas, such as lowlands and mountain slopes, and the recurrence of natural disasters in these communities, infectious diseases (malaria, typhoid fever, rhinitis, Zambian dysentery, etc.), and the lack environment protection, and the under-integration of people living in these areas. These pressures are at the root of climate change, which can be seen in Cameroon in the form of temperature variations and heat waves. They also lead to environment loss and the destruction of species endemic to these areas. The species, such as mangroves and mongooses endemic to the lowlands, play a key role in balancing the biosphere.

At government level, it is clear that the public authorities are aware of how dangerous these areas are, but also of the challenges of conserving these protected ecological areas. They are taking action by erecting signs demarcating dangerous areas in the mountains and forcibly evicting people from urban areas deemed to be dangerous to their health and safety. But these actions remain ineffective, given the appropriation of land (reinvestment) of these areas by the populations after the classes. In many cases, these demolitions are not followed up by support for the victims (compensation or rapid census of populations on serviced sites). In the absence of coordinated action, these cases, which are considered arbitrary by the local population, very often contribute to the creation of other shanty towns elsewhere and the increase in urban poverty.

Public authorities need to take account of the rationality of local people when setting up development projects. Awareness-raising and education campaigns must also be carried out in order to reshape people's social perceptions of risk and raise their awareness and involvement in preventive action in their neighbourhoods. The state also intervenes through legal provisions. Articles 124, 128 and 132 of the 2004 town planning code stipulate that the mayor has the power to police, monitor and take legal action against offenders under the town planning code. In practice, however, in ensuring compliance with the town planning law, it is important that the administrations responsible for managing the city , and the maor in particular, understand that good urban governance involves monitoring protected ecological areas and land use patterns, in compliance with land regulations. These are the prerequisites for urban ecology and sustainable urban development.

At-risk areas can be inhabited provided that only people with the means to hire a geotechnician and build to the required standards are allowed in. In the absence of appropriate solutions to the situation of the underprivileged populations living there, these populations must be evicted and genuinely supported to prevent the creation of other shanty towns elsewhere. Local authorities must promote local administration and take account of local knowledge.

In this context of community development, the aim is to enable at-risk populations to take ownership of the development projects initiates for them, in order to gain greater control over their environment and improve their health (empowerment). The aim of this approach is to give people greater control over what is important to them or their community (Rappaport, 1987). Appropriation refers to the idea of making one's own, is understood here in the sense of the ability of people themselves to take charge of change. In the context of social practices, this means that the people concerned (populations at risk) must be at the heart of the definition of the change anticipated through the effectiveness of administrative decentralisation.

CONCLUSION

The theme of our research is:" Housing in areas unfit for habitation''. It started from the observation of a paradoxical fact, the conscious exposure of populations to health risks by occupying low-lying areas and mountain slopes in Yaoundé. On the basis of our field observations and interviews with local people and block leaders during our pre-survey, we hypothesised that housing in areas unfit for habitation encourages exposure to health risks trough occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes of Yaoundé. Social factors linked to the economic and urban crisis and psychological factors linked to the low perception of environmental health risks explain why people take risks in low-lying areas and on hillsides.

Our objective was to show through detailed analysis that housing in areas unfit for habitation promotes exposure to health risks through occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes of Yaoundé. The psychometric paradigm was used to interpret the phenomenon under study. It explains the influence of social and psychological determinants on people's perception of risks.

However, this paradigm has the weakness of not taking into account the influence of psycho-socio-environmental determinants on human behaviour in the face of environment health risks.

In this research, we want to resolve the problems of risks denial in precarious populations. In other words, the problem of people's conscious exposure to health risks.

We asked ourselves the following central research question: does housing in areas unfit for habitation encourage exposure to health risks through occupation of shallows and mountain slopes of Yaoundé? This question led us to a provisional assertion: housing in areas unfit for habitation encourages exposure to health risks through occupation of the lowlands and mountain slopes of Yaoundé. The operationalisation of this hypothesis led us to identify the following research hypotheses:

- Poverty due to a difficult socio-economic situation favours exposure to health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé
- The absolute desire of many city dwellers to have their own home encourages exposure of health risks though occupation of low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.
- The high demand for building land in urban and **peri-**urban areas that can be urbanised due to strong urban growth encourages exposure to health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.
- The laxity shown by the authorities in charge of land management encourages exposure of health risks though occupation of the low lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.
- The low perception of the natural threat by the people living in areas unfit for habitation encourages exposure of health risks though occupation of the low-lying and mountain slopes in Yaoundé.

Our research is qualitative. We us interview with local people to show the influence of types of risk perception and the factors which influence this perception on human attitudes and behaviour with respect to risk.

At the end of this work, we were able to ascertain and understand that precariousness is caused by several factors, both internal and external. These factors influence human behaviour and, at various levels, are responsible for factors influence human behaviour and at various levels, are responsible for environmental degradation, in terms of housing discomfort, growing insalubrities and residential insecurity due to the recurrence of natural disasters in these unsuitable neighbourhoods. By referring to the theoretical framework of environmental education and specifically to the sociological model of behavioural change of Urie Bronfenbrenner, we are trying to make our modest contribution to better management of ecological areas in Cameroon and in Yaoundé in particular. We are advocate education and awareness-raising for all urban players.

The aim of this project is to provide a better understanding of the issues involved in conserving protected ecological areas in low-lying and on mountain slopes, and to develop more integrated strategies for managing these areas. These actions must be driven by the public authorities, who are the guarantors of social security. They must take into account the rationality of the local population and guarantee a sharing of knowledge and power to ensure real sustainable development for these communities and inclusive urban development.

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