

GeoJournal Library 110

John R. Weeks
Allan G. Hill
Justin Stoler *Editors*

Spatial Inequalities

Health, Poverty, and Place
in Accra, Ghana

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Editors

Spatial Inequalities

Health, Poverty, and Place in Accra, Ghana

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Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction to the *Accra School*: An Overview of Health, Poverty, and Place in Accra

John R. Weeks, Allan G. Hill, and Justin Stoler

Most of the future growth of population in the world is expected to take place in cities of developing countries. This fact alone provides a rationale for this volume, but there are also broad policy and programmatic reasons for our interest in the demography, health and well-being of urban centers in low income countries. Cities in developing countries are the power-houses of national economic growth, not least because they contain some of the most skilled, best educated and economically productive people in their respective countries. Despite these advantages, there are major threats to the future success of such cities, including those related to governance, provision of water, sanitation and housing, as well as the emergence of stark inequalities in income, wealth, and health. These issues offer challenges to our knowledge and understanding of the processes of urbanization and economic growth, provoking comparisons with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century transitions in health, mortality, fertility and economic activity in the industrializing cities of northwest Europe and North America. Today's high income countries are struggling with the administration and financing of their modern welfare states,

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while leaders in low income countries are casting around for equitable solutions that produce full employment and rising incomes without leaving large sections of the population impoverished and resentful of the success of their neighbors.

It is our premise that the wealth of a city (and, of course, the country within which that city is located) is indexed importantly by the health of its residents. We adopt a systems approach to understand this linkage because it is not a linear cause-and-effect relationship. People who are physically and mentally healthy will be economically more productive, while at the same time a place that is economically productive is more likely to have the resources to improve the health of its residents. These are both “global” and “local” in the scale at which they operate. At the more global level, a richer city will generally be characterized by healthier residents. But at the local level there may be considerable variability from one part of a city to another. We expect that these inequalities in health and wealth will be starkest and most visible in cities of developing countries. Measuring and understanding these spatial inequalities in Accra, the capital of Ghana in West Africa, is at the heart of all of the research presented in this book. Although the analyses have their theoretical origins in different academic disciplines, the authors have collectively addressed some of the most pressing challenges facing a city like Accra. There are important public policy decisions that depend on our collective ability to follow and interpret the social and political implications of rapid economic development in Africa’s urban places. Our goal in this volume, as in our research more generally, is to link the technical innovations emerging in geospatial analysis with the substantive results from spatially-informed socio-economic analyses to address the development challenges faced by Accra and by extension, other such cities in tropical Africa.

1.1 Accra as a Case Study

Accra, our case study for this approach, does have some distinctive features that have facilitated research. Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to gain full independence from Britain and despite episodes of military rule, has emerged as one of the more prosperous and stable democratic countries in a region that remains very poor and prone to civil war. Like all other Sub-Saharan countries, Ghana is experiencing rapid population growth and very rapid urbanization, and the future of the country depends very largely on economic, social, political and cultural development in its cities. For several years our research team has joined others striving to understand the urban dynamics in this burgeoning West African metropolis, with a focus on urban disparities in health and well-being. Among ourselves we call this the “Accra School” of urban analysis, since few cities in the global south have been examined from so many different perspectives. Our analysis employs a wide range of GIScience methods, including analysis of remotely sensed imagery and spatial statistical analysis, applied to a wide range of quantitative data, including census, survey and health clinic data, all of which