

PhD project by Moritz Kasper

Water tanks, jerry cans, power banks: Artefacts and practices of storage as part of heterogeneous infrastructure configurations in Nairobi

Embedded in discourses of postcolonial urban studies, STS-inspired infrastructure studies, and urban political ecology, my PhD project investigates domestic storage of water and electricity by households as an inherently important part of urban-infrastructural lives in Nairobi. For both, water and electricity, I start with the domestic space – the household – as my main spatial framing. I conceptually define domestic storage as a socio-technical hybrid of human storage practices – in short, storing – and its artefacts – the storage containers.

Empirically, the project is grounded in a) roughly 50 qualitative interviews with residents from a diverse range of household typologies, mostly but not exclusively in Eastleigh, Kibera, Ongata Rongai, and Westlands, and b) roughly 30 expert interviews (utilities, government officials, private sector, NGOs, CBOs, etc.). The interviews are complemented by uncountable conversations, strolls, visits, and informal insights from many generous Nairobians; all conducted or experienced over several stays in Nairobi between 2021 and 2023. I further bring my conceptual approach and empirical material into conversation with an understanding of the urban and its infrastructures as heterogeneous, continuously becoming, socio-technical assemblies of materials, technologies, discourses, human and non-human actors and their practices, which – all together – should be investigated as ‘they actually are and not as they should be’.

Ultimately – in regards to potential implications for urban planning, design, and governance – my project is concerned with opportunities and potential propositions that may arise from acknowledging domestic storage as a highly important infrastructural element of 21st century urbanism. The project cumulates in four academic papers, published in international peer-reviewed journals.