

Temporary Autonomy and the Framing of Youth Policy Debates in Guinea

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This paper explores the theoretical and practical questions for urban governance, and youth policy and provision more specifically, raised by the current complexities and changing statuses of youth in Guinea. In particular, I draw on images and texts from a recent research engagement project conducted with young people, including students from the University of Conakry, in Labé and Simbaya, to suggest how the complex, ambivalent yet highly creative cultural practices of urban youth challenge the terms of the debates on youth policy and provision as presented by statutory and voluntary actors in Guinea today. I argue that dominant approaches to youth development remain largely inscribed in a complex post-colonial history that tends to understand urban youth in Guinea as 'lacking' – in spaces of exchange, skills, competencies or more generally points of references (*repères*), their spaces in need of 're-dynamisation'. This approach fails to recognise how spontaneity, informality and increasingly new technologies create spaces of relative, temporary and ambivalent autonomy from which new connections and modes of being in the city can be envisaged and potentially realised. A more strategic engagement with these spontaneous spaces could create more open platforms of engagements between the various actors involved in youth development and foster more 'relational' approaches to urban governance, responsive to the current changes affecting urban youth in Guinea today.