

# Urban Decay and the Resilience Factor in Bulawayo's Downtown Precinct

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## Abstract

This paper provides an assessment of the impacts that urban decay has on the various urban activities and subsequently on the resilience of cities. This is against the background that despite being a matter of public concern for many years, urban decay has not been given enough attention in Zimbabwe's urban planning and management platforms, yet its impacts affect the social and economic activities of cities and is central to their resilience. By definition, urban decay describes a condition of observable indicators of the physical deterioration of the built environment that end up attracting crime, vandalism and pollution. This usually results in the decline of social and economic activities as more and more businesses relocate to more prosperous areas where infrastructure and services are adequate and development opportunities exist. The implications of urban decline to urban resilience are that the economic and social systems of a city may not be able to return to or to surpass equilibrium after experiencing stresses and/ or shocks. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, using primary and secondary data sources, making use of questionnaires, observation, key informant interviews and document analysis to gather data from the public, property owners, business operators and selected participants from central and local government. Findings reveal that the major indicators of urban decay in the downtown area of Bulawayo are segregation, crime and disorder, infrastructural dilapidation, building obsolescence and poor solid waste management. Conclusions were made that urban decay affects economic and social activities as well as the environment negatively, making it difficult for cities to recover after shocks and stresses as opportunities for businesses and employment are lost. Therefore, it is recommended that areas that are experiencing decay be transformed by way of regeneration, redevelopment or revitalisation to ensure that economic and social activities are at least maintained and enable resilience.

*Keywords:* urban decay, urban activities, downtown, impacts, resilience

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## INTRODUCTION

Cities in the developing world are experiencing urban decay in some parts or neighbourhoods. Considering that the majority of the world's population

now live in cities and is expected to grow in the next decade (UN-Habitat, 2017), instances of continued decay are likely to increase proportionally with increasing population. Whilst this is expected, the health of cities should be at the centre of planning and management of cities if the quality of life of the inhabitants is to be improved because places that are experiencing decay are exposed to further decay, forming a spiral of deterioration. This decay can affect the city's resilience.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on urban decay in Zimbabwe, for example, Ahmad *et al.* (2010); Chirisa (2010); Mutisya (2016). These researches provide an understanding of urban decay and its dimensions which are critical for transformation and policy proposals. However, the effect of decay on urban activities and resilience of cities has not received attention in the Zimbabwean context despite, evidence of its prevalence and the increased dependence of citizens on cities as shown by the rise of urban populations. This study builds on the observation that urban decay affects urban activities (Acioly & Acioly, 1999; Mosselson, 2015) and argues that this affects the resilience of cities. Thus, this paper assesses the impact of urban decay on urban activities and the subsequent effect on resilience using Bulawayo down area as a case study. Findings to this study provide answers to the question; how does urban decay affect urban activities and influence the resilience of cities?

Brandman (2003) defines urban decay as; observable indicators of physical deterioration that end up attracting crime, vandalism and pollution. This decline is often associated with a sharp decrease in economic activities as businesses and industries depart to more prosperous areas of the city where adequate services and infrastructure are in place and development opportunities exist due to, among other reasons, better accessibility and less congestion and vice (Acioly & Acioly, 1999). The decline of infrastructure and economic activities as a result of urban decay can compromise the potential of places to bounce back to their original condition in the event of shocks and stresses such as economic depressions and natural disasters. For example, places experiencing urban decay are often exposed to further decay as more and more businesses and people relocate to better places. This leads to poorly performing city economies and unsustainable growth of cities as this can lead to sprawling development of cities as businesses and individuals relocate to suburban places.

Urban decay dates back to the Post World War II era where cities in the United States were seen as the “urban wilderness?”. These cities were

characterised by social decay - diseases, disorder, crime, corruption, drugs and danger (Smith, 2005). Some cities in America experienced an increase in physical decline of the core neighbourhoods and commercial districts as well as a decrease in population and industry due to urban decay. Real estate leaders responded by calling for government intervention to curb the numerous effects of urban decay in order to protect real estate investment in the deteriorating areas. Real estate industry lobbied for, among other things, a series of policy proposals that could facilitate the acquisition of blighted areas for resale to potential developers. The State Acts also empowered the municipalities to redevelop the blighted areas, for example, Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 as well as the National Real Estate Board.

In Africa, urban decay is prevalent in the downtown areas and first colonial neighbourhoods such as Hillbrow in South Africa, Jerusalem Estate in Kenya and Makokoba, Sakubva and Mbare in Zimbabwe. Hillbrow, for example, is characterised by informality, vice and dilapidating buildings which have been disconnected from water and electricity supplies despite being occupied by people (Ahmad *et al.* 2010). Financial institutions red-lined the area as they became more and more fearful of the places as an investment destination. This discouraged the landlords from maintaining and improving their buildings or prevented new investors from acquiring properties in these areas. This precipitated a corkscrew of decay as the already-ageing buildings started to crumble under strain and neglect (Mosselson, 2015) resulting in a cycle of disinvestment.

In Zimbabwe, Mbare (in Harare) is experiencing decay (Chirisa, 2010). It is filthy and aesthetically unpleasing, with old and dilapidated buildings, heaps of solid waste, burst sewerage and water pipes which have become an eyesore (Muchadenyika, 2015). Informal activities and unsocial behaviour including baggage looting, drug dealing and theft are also dominant (Chirisa, 2010). Bulawayo's downtown area is not an exception. The area is characterised by old, vacant and dilapidated buildings as well as informal activities such as touting and vending among others. Such conditions and activities depict signs of urban decay. If nothing is done to monitor such conditions, the place can fall into disrepair. This is likely to worsen urban problems including poverty and crime among other social, physical and economic challenges and affect the resilience of the city. Against this background, the study examines indicators of urban decay and analyses how they can affect activities in the downtown area with the context of resilience.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

Urban decay can best be understood by two theories namely the Spirals of decline theory by Prak & Priemus (1986) and the Broken Windows theory by Wilson & George (1982). The Spirals of Decline Theory argues that urban decay is a result of three main aspects. These are social decline, economic decline and technical decline (Kempen, Vermeulen, & Baan, 2005). Social decline is about the changes that occur in the tenant population with regards to household income (Prak & Priemus, 1986). The logic behind this is that when estates, neighbourhood or part of the city becomes less attractive, the high-income occupiers move out leaving the low-income households (Kempen *et al.* 2005). The result is that social control may weaken while vandalism and crime flourish making the area less attractive. According to this theory, the moving out of high-income population leads to high tenant turnover rates. This will, in turn, lead to increased void levels, vandalism and all forms of pollution (Somerville, Beckhoven, & Kempen, 2009). Such issues result in technical decay which is the fall in the quality of buildings and infrastructure such as water and sewerage pipes. In this spiral of decline, it turns out to be challenging to maintain an area with buildings of bad quality and poor infrastructure.

When urban decay starts to have an impact on the operational costs of the property, it is termed economic decline. This is the third spiral of decline which touches on property values. Property owners lose money because tenants will be leaving, businesses and investments tend to scale down due to increased costs and reduced benefits. According to this theory, the property owners will be forced to invest less in maintaining the property, thus promoting further deterioration of the building. Crucial to note is that; all the three spirals of decline are inter-linked and they can create a cycle of urban decay, where the vacation of people will lead to voids and deterioration which will further lead to the decline in property values and investment. The theory explains urban decay in social, technical and economic terms. However, it does not fully demonstrate how these spirals of decline affect urban activities and the resilience of cities, hence, this study contributes to the body on knowledge by assessing how urban decay affects urban activities and the resilience of cities.

The Broken Windows theory also explains urban decay by looking at disorder, the dilapidation of buildings and infrastructure, abandonment, social ills such as prostitution, intoxication, declining property values and residential instability (Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006). The theory argues that leaving

broken windows unrepaired attracts further vandalism, hence, accelerating urban decay in the area. This will lead to a decline in property values (ibid.). Therefore, delayed maintenance and repair will fast-track the deterioration of the city or neighbourhood. The theory informs policymakers to take due cognisance of the areas that seem to be deteriorating before the situation gets out of hand. This study borrows from the Spirals of Decline and the Broken Windows theories, on how decay affects activities in the city.

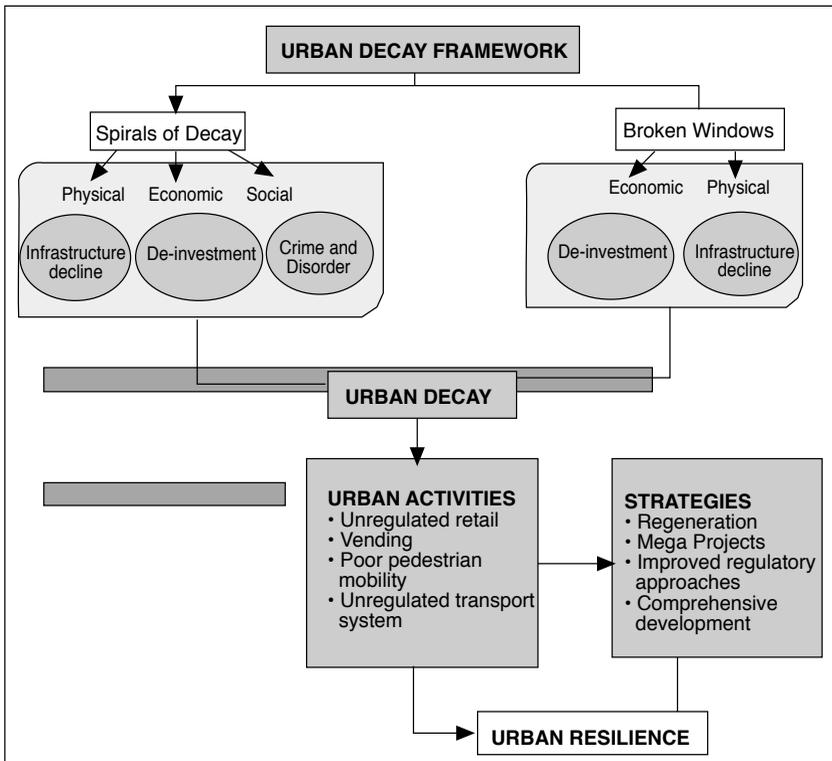
The Spiral of Decline, Broken Windows theory and the Urban Resilience concept form the conceptual framework for this study (see figure 1). The two theories explain both the causes and indicators of urban decay which are broadly categorized in terms of physical, social and economic. Urban decay affects different activities which include retail, vending, circulation and recreational among others. Urban resilience is hinged on the "... capacity of urban systems, communities, individuals, organisations and businesses to recover and maintain their function and thrive the aftermath of a shock or a stress ..." (Frantzeskaki, 2016:6). The concept of urban resilience provides a framework for cities to sustain the effects of a shock or stress. Urban decay can be a result of or a cause of economic shocks such as market failure (Sagara, 2018) or social stresses such as urban population growth (ResilientCity.org, 2019), social exclusion and extreme poverty (Sagara, 2018). Based on the aforementioned stresses that are associated with cities, urban decay should be addressed if cities are to be resilient. Figure 1 summarises how urban resilience could address the challenges presented by urban decay themes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **INDICATORS/ MANIFESTATIONS OF URBAN DECAY**

Andersen (2002) states that urban decay is connected to social segregation which tends to concentrate the poor in the least attractive parts of the city. In this case, segregation is seen through social and economic classes (Skogan, 1992). This affects the attractiveness of the place and usually results in changes in the population composition of the area – characterised by poor families. These groups are usually involved in the vandalism of property and drug dealing, prostitution and pickpocketing (Andersen, 2002).

Crime is associated with violence, harm, destruction of property, denial of respect to people and institutions as well as illegal activities (Morrison, 2013). Skogan (1992) adds that disorder is a sign of the breakdown of the collective social order in a neighbourhood. The disorder can be in terms of rampant



**Figure 1: Model of Challenges Presented by Urban Decay Themes and Their Alleviation through Urban Resilience (Sagara, 2018).**

fights, drug dealing and panhandling. Crime and disorder also include theft, vandalism of property and belongings or public goods. Gibson (2003) notes that downtown crime compromises public safety, thus, when an area is no longer safe for people, it is decaying. Skogan (2012) argues that disorder is debatable since some of the activities are prohibited by law. For example, law enforcement agents apply of regulatory measures created by authorities in order to apprehend people involved in illegal activities. Whilst this is done to ensure compliance with the established town planning standards, the approaches used, such as, chasing, causes chaos and disorder. It is important to note that whilst Skogan (2015) elaborates on disorder, he does not go further in explaining how neighbourhood disorder affects urban activities in the area.

Harassment is also an indicator of social decay as morals and values will be eroding. On the other hand, Andersen (2019) links crime and disorder with empty properties. From his analysis, crime and disorder are stimulated by vacant buildings thus, “If the properties are empty, then they will be vandalized within hours of the former occupants leaving the property. Anything of value such as combination boilers and pipework, kitchen units and bathroom units are immediately stripped from the properties and sold” (Power & Mumford, 1999:30).

Infrastructure dilapidation is also associated with urban decay. It includes the deterioration of building structures and physical infrastructures such as water, sewer network, roads and pavements (Acioly & Acioly, 1999). In high rise buildings, some of the floors cannot access reticulated water (Ahmad *et al.* 2010), subsequently compromising the wellbeing of the inhabitants. In some cases, electricity cables would also be non-existent or malfunctioning such that the building will not receive enough energy supply. Thus, darkness and physical dilapidation attracts malicious mischief. The facades of the buildings in the city should relate harmoniously with the adjacent buildings. The moment the façade patterns start to differ because of wear and tear that signifies that urban decay is setting in. The prevalence of fire-damaged buildings is also an indicator of urban decline in the area (Sahely, Kennedy, & Adams, 2005).

Urban decay is also seen through building obsolescence. Thomsen & van der Flier (2011) define obsolescence as the useless, outdated, worn away, eroded, effaced and broken-down buildings. The major reasons for this are technological changes and demand changes in the type of buildings and houses. Technological changes may mean that the designs are no longer appealing to the people in the modern world. Obsolescence in buildings leads to loss of investors and has consequential effects on the income generated by the building. This results in deferred maintenance of properties, leading to further decay as explained by the Spirals of Decline theory.

Illegal solid waste dumping and poor waste management are manifestations of decay (Cointreau, 1982). Urban decay manifests itself when an area starts to have heaps of uncollected waste. This becomes an environmental concern especially during the rainy season (*ibid.*). Decay manifests itself by the presence of trash dumps and garbage. Solid waste can also block sanitary lanes in these areas. This affects the economic aspect of cities in the sense that the presence of uncollected solid waste in sanitary lanes which are near the buildings decreases the property values.

## CAUSES OF URBAN DECAY

Voids in buildings are a cause of urban decay. If a building is left empty, it attracts vandalism and other social ills such as burglary and drug dealing. Most vacant buildings are used by people for illegal activities (Anderson 2001). Abandonment increases the obsolescence of building structures because it will be lacking maintenance. Andersen (2002) explained urban decline as a chain of events occurring with one event leading to another problem. Thus, vacant lots and building structures result in the damage of buildings (Wallace & Wallace, 1990), loss of consistency and collapse in controls which will generate serious management problems, deteriorating services and turmoil.

De-investment occurs when there is investment failure in an area. In such cases, industries, businesses and property owners start to reduce the workforce, downsize development or relocate. This leaves vacant buildings and consequentially deferred maintenance exposing the area to urban decay (Sahely *et al.* 2005). The area becomes less attractive and starts to deteriorate. Investor confidence in the area decreases (Mutisya, 2016).

Deferred repair and maintenance is another cause of urban decay. This usually happens when properties are left empty. Since there will be no incentive for maintaining them, they are left idle to decay. Meinen (2014) notes that repair and maintenance require money. In a poor performing economy with low levels of investment, most property owners rarely repair their buildings. Similarly, repair and maintenance of infrastructures such as water, sewerage pipes and roads, drainage channels and electricity power lines are usually non-existent in an ailing economy, leading to urban decay.

Local Authorities can also contribute to urban decay if they have poor mechanisms for regulating activities in cities. When development control is ineffective, people carry out any activity without regard to the effects. Regulations can help Local Authorities to coerce property owners to refurbish their buildings if they are ageing. However, many local authorities in developing countries tend to ignore downtown areas leaving them to decay. (Mutisya, 2016 p. 13) states that “poor regulation maintenance and poor urban policies may result in urban decay”.

Frantzeskaki (2016) stresses that the appearance of places has an important effect on their resilience. Places which appear worn out and dilapidated are less resilient. Thus, a place’s infrastructure and buildings should be adaptive

and robust to ensure delivery of resilience (Deshkar & Adane, 2016). Urban infrastructure should maintain function over time regardless of the stresses and shocks experienced and should provide services that meet present demand and social and economic needs for future generations. Since infrastructures are the hardware of cities that warrants that basic services are delivered to all citizens in urban areas, they should be maintained and upgraded to avoid decay and guarantee resilience.

Frantzeskaki (2016) argues that for urban places to have social resilience, there should be sense of community and social ties. The extent to which sense of community prevails is dependent on the peaceful relations between the different communities in a society. This implies that the business community, informal traders and the general public should be in harmony. It enables people to act in solidarity in the aftermath of a shock and further reinforces their social ties.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology aims to find out how urban decay affects the resilience of cities using Bulawayo's downtown as a case study. To achieve this objective, a case study was adopted making use of the mixed methods approach was adopted. Questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis were used to collect data that answers the research questions.

The target population for the study comprises of the general public in Bulawayo's downtown area. These consist of people who visit the area and hence, convenient sampling was used to select the participants to reach saturation point because the population size is unknown (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The saturation point for the general public was reached after interviewing 30 participants. The other group of participants in this study are the informal traders (vendors) and illegal transport operators whose size was also difficult to ascertain. A total of 30 questionnaires was used to collect data using the saturation criterion as espoused by (Guest *et al.* 2006). The business operators in the area also formed part of the study population. The sample size for this population group was dependent on the number of buildings in the study area. After carrying out a pilot survey, the businesses were clustered into various types in relation to the spatial distribution of the buildings. The study area comprises of 60 buildings which were all selected in this study based on Gay (1985) recommendation that for a population ranging from 0 to 100, a 100% sample size should be extracted. The other group of participants comprised of property management companies in

Bulawayo, particularly those in the downtown area. Five major companies that are listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange were selected in this respect. Professionals who comprise of five officials from Bulawayo City Council's Departments of Housing and Community Services, Health Services and Planning as well as the Bulawayo Municipal Police also participated in this research. These were purposefully selected and were the key informants of the study. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) also participated in the research as a key informant and one official was selected. Data collected was analysed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. Descriptive analysis was used to analyse textual data whilst computer programs were used to analyse quantitative data.

## **RESULTS**

### **INDICATORS OF URBAN DECAY IN DOWNTOWN**

#### **BULAWAYO**

Research findings reveal that one of the indicators of decay in Bulawayo's downtown area is segregation. From the study findings, 56.7% of the participants, comprising of, formal and informal traders and illegal transport operators in the downtown area received less than US\$100 income per month. Although the cases of earning less than US\$100 per month can be true with other places in the CBD, this revelation is good evidence to confirm the assertion that low-income earners usually occupy the downtown area.

Crime and disorder manifest itself in terms of theft, harassment and chaos in the downtown area. Findings reveal that chaos is the order of the day in the downtown area. Illegal transport operators established their pickup and drop off points in some parts of the downtown area. Vendors tend to be concentrated at the pick-up and drop-off points since there is high human traffic. This makes the area congested and accelerate the rate of disorder and exposes people to theft in the area. For example, research findings show that 67% of the participants from the general public, 80% of the business community, 48% of the informal traders and 40% of the property companies are affected by the theft of their belongings all the time. Based on these findings, it is clear that social decay in Bulawayo downtown is rising. On the other hand, responses from the business owners in the downtown area revealed that the sanitary lanes are not a safe place at night. They have become a hub of criminal activities such as theft and robbery. Statistics from the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) show that 13 of the rape cases reported

between the period January to December 2017 are said to have occurred in the sanitary lanes in the downtown area. Observations made also reveal that the sanitary lanes in the downtown area are associated with activities such as prostitution and drug dealing during the night.

Property owners, with the support of the Local Authority, have resorted to erecting gates at each side of the sanitary lanes to restrict access to the sanitary lanes by property users only. The Town Planning Department has been issuing permits for the erection of the gates with conditions that every property user abutting the sanitary lane has access at any time they wish to. However, some sanitary lanes have been blocked without a permit from the council, hence, making them inaccessible for Bulawayo City Council (BCC) to collect waste. Observations and interviews show that the vendors in the area dump their rotten fruits, vegetables and mealie cobs in the area. When this is combined with the poor waste collection services by the BCC, the waste situation in the area worsens.

Vandalism of property is another indicator of decay in Bulawayo. All participants from the general public, property companies and business indicated that they have been affected by vandalism, except for 12% of the informal traders. Vandalism does not only occur on the participant's belongings but also on public goods. For example, street lights and street benches have been damaged. Interviews also revealed that vandalism is not only caused by the thieves but that the Bulawayo Metropolitan Police (BMP) also vandalizes some of the infrastructures when chasing away the informal traders and illegal transport operators in the area. Some of the infrastructure is broken during this exercise, for example, street lights, traffic lights and even nearby buildings in and along Fifth Street, Leopold Takawira Avenue and Hebert Chitepo. This often leads to conflicts between council and property owners.

Harassment is one of the indicators of decay in Bulawayo. From the findings, 80% of the respondents from the general public indicated that they are harassed all the time; 40% of the property managers and 40% of the business owners responded that harassment occurs in the downtown area most of the time. Also, 48% of the informal traders indicated that they are harassed all the time. From the study, harassment was understood in different ways by the different respondents. The general public and the informal traders believe that the Bulawayo Metropolitan Police (BMP) and the ZRP also harass people, especially those who load their passengers in undesignated sites. To the informal traders, illegality is a result of the economic crisis, hence, they

will be looking for a means of living. The public is usually caught in the “crossfire” whenever the BMP or ZRP is chasing the informal traders and informal transport operators who operate in undesignated sites. From the business operators, harassment does not only mean physical but also emotionally abuse because they have the food caravans, maize roasters, fruit and vegetables being sold in front of their shops. To them, it means no or fewer customers since the vendors will be selling the products at a lower price as compared to them.

Infrastructural dilapidation and decline in the downtown area also indicate that Bulawayo’s downtown area is decaying. Study findings revealed that the town has got poor roads, buildings and malfunctioning streets lights and vandalised street furniture. The vandalised, malfunctioning street lights expose the public to danger especially at night. Findings show that high cases of theft occur in the evening because it will be dark, and also that the thieves also take advantage of the disorder that will be at the illegal pick up and drop off points. The research shows that 73.7% of the participants from the general public, 60% from the business and 52% from the informal traders are of the view that the state of the downtown infrastructure is very bad. However, 12% from the informal traders are of the view that the downtown is in a very good state. This might be because it is where they derive their livelihood from. Research results show that the dilapidated infrastructure is having negative impacts on service provision, hence, accelerating decay in the area.

It was also revealed that 4% of the informal traders rated water provision in the area as good. In contrast, 83, 3% from the general public are of the view that there is poor water provision. Perhaps this is because they do not spend a lot of time in the area, unlike the business owners who operate in the downtown for the whole day. Results from observation show that there are no burst water pipes although there are leaking sewerage pipe in the area. However, participants in the areas acknowledged that council quickly address burst pipes. Regarding the state of the roads, findings reveal that the roads in Bulawayo downtown are generally in a bad state. Thus, 86.7% of the respondents said that the roads are very bad and they needed rehabilitation.

Building obsolescence is another characteristic of Bulawayo’s downtown area. Findings reveal that most of the buildings in the downtown area are old and are not being refurbished. From the research, building obsolescence is accelerated by the economic meltdown in the country as a whole. This influences how businesses perform and the ability of property owners to

maintain them. Thus, although interview with BCC reveals that they have raised a red flag on 25 buildings in the Bulawayo CBD, no action has been taken by the respective owners due to the economic challenges being experienced in the country. The property owners leave them vacant. This attracts all sorts of social ills and increases physical dilapidation of the building structures.

Heaps of uncollected waste also characterise the downtown zone of Bulawayo. This is one of the major indicators of decay in the study area. Solid waste dumps were mostly observed in sanitary lanes and along Herbert Chitepo Street. The waste was mostly dumped by vendors and maize roasters during the day and after hours. Although BCC indicated that it collects waste every day, the waste dumps are visible in the downtown area. This shows that the rate of waste generation and dumping is high. The heaps of uncollected waste also attract stray animals (dogs) from the nearby Makokoba residential neighbourhood. Some people use the sanitary lanes in the downtown illegally as toilets.

## **CAUSES OF URBAN DECAY IN BULAWAYO DOWNTOWN**

The study revealed that one of the causes of urban decay in Bulawayo downtown is abandonment. Abandoned buildings are prone to vandalism, illegal occupation and fire outbreaks in the area. This is because the neglected buildings attract illegal activities which include drug dealing. Street kids also occupy the empty buildings especially during winter and put on fire to warm themselves and in some cases, the fire ends up destroying the buildings. From the interview it was revealed that, most of the buildings that caught fire are the buildings that the council condemned. It was also revealed that neglect of buildings by the owners makes the buildings susceptible to vandalism, and illegal activities that end up causing burning. This is a reflection of the explanation by the spiral of decay theory. However, if a building catches fire, interview reveal that the building can burn to ashes because the Fire and Ambulance department take long to respond to such cases. Hence, decay is not only an effect of property owners neglecting the buildings, but also a result of the inefficiency or incapacity of the responsible local planning authority in carrying out its responsibilities.

The physical deterioration of the environment in Bulawayo downtown has also led to many business operators to relocate to other places, particularly in residential suburbs. Findings reveal that this relocation is causing problems

in the destination suburbs as there is a conflict of interests. This shows that urban decay does not only affect activities in the downtown area, but the effects stretch to other places. Illegal activities are relocating from downtown to the Suburban area which is mainly a residential zone, according to the BCC town planning records. The bad state of the physical environment, as well as social decay, makes the downtown area unattractive and inhabitable, even to the informal activities themselves, hence relocating to other places, and spreading decay to other parts of the city.

De-investment was seen as one of the causes of urban decay in the downtown area of Bulawayo. The interviews revealed that property and business owners in Bulawayo are struggling to make ends meet. An overview of the property market in the downtown of Bulawayo shows that the property market is depressed due to the subdued economic conditions. Findings reveal that the poor performance of the economy is posing adverse effects on the property market. This results in increased voids, arrears, decreasing property returns and values. For example, rental arrears overall in Bulawayo increased to 35 per cent in 2016 from 25 per cent in 2009, while building vacancies surged from 10 per cent in 2009 closing at 25 per cent in 2016. Records from the BCC properties in the downtowns show that revenue generated has gone down from 82% in 2009 to 33% in 2016. It was also revealed that the deterioration of infrastructure in the city, coupled with lack of parking space, informality and traffic congestion is forcing businesses to relocate to suburban office parks.

The study revealed that there was no investor confidence in the downtown area. The property companies who participated in the interview indicated that they are not considering to invest in the area. They indicated that they preferred to invest elsewhere except for 20% of the property development and management companies surveyed who indicated that they have plans to invest in the downtown area of Bulawayo. However, this was on the condition that urban regeneration occurs in the near future.

## **THE IMPACTS OF URBAN DECAY ON ACTIVITIES IN DOWNTOWN BULAWAYO**

Interviews revealed that some of the retail activities are performing well despite the signs of decay. Some grocery retail businesses in the area indicated that they were satisfied with the business performance. However, retailers such as furniture stores, small scale tailoring, electronics and appliance stores

are facing challenges. The influx of vendors, hawkers in the downtown area was affecting their businesses since they operated in front of their shops, sometimes blocking the shop entrance and causing chaos and disorder. This is affecting business and reducing profits. There was also the challenge of shortage of parking space. Some of it has been invaded by the informal transport operators who scout for passengers.

Observation and interviews findings revealed that there exist pedestrian congestion and chaos in Bulawayo downtown area. The disorder and confusion associated with pedestrian congestion and chaos create a conducive environment for thieves to steal. This puts the lives of the public in danger. The business operators around this place also indicated that they are victims of theft. Bulawayo downtown area is also infested with illegal money changers who tend to block accessibility and movement of the pedestrians. Although Jacobs (1962) advocates for pedestrian activity in the downtown areas as a way of enhancing urban vibrancy and vitality, pedestrian movement in decayed regions ends up being messy and chaotic.

Informal transportation is negatively impacting on the formal transport system. The informal transport operators establish their illegal pick up and drop off points in strategic areas that make them close to the people. Although the public is not safe because of the inhuman driving behaviour and competition for customers in these areas, they still get more passengers than the formal transport areas who use designated places to pick and drop passengers. Eventually, formal transport operators make two or three trips a day whilst illegal transport operators make up to 15 trips a day. This leads to conflicts and disorder causing endless fights in the downtown area between illegal and formal transport operators. Thus, further compromising the safety and security of the public.

## **DISCUSSION**

Overall, the findings show that urban decay in Bulawayo downtown area occurs in spirals as put forward by (Kempen *et al.* 2005). Decay in the area is largely attributed to the abandonment of buildings, de-investment, deferred repair and maintenance of infrastructure and poor enforcement of regulations by local authorities. It confirms what scholars such as Andersen (2002) and Kempen *et al.* (2005) put forward that the abandonment of property exposes buildings and infrastructure to threats such as vandalism and fire outbreaks. These lead to decreasing property values in the area which encourages the relocation of investment to better places. This is confirmed in the study where

some businesses and property consultants are relocating to residential suburbs area in Bulawayo. Furthermore, the population composition Bulawayo downtown area validates the perception by Skogan (1992) that segregation as a sign of decay.

Segregation is also among the main signs of decay. The study findings show that the downtown area is characterised by low-income earners. As put forward by Skogan (1992) the low-income groups are associated with social problems that lead to decay. There are high levels of chaos and disorder which are worsened by rampant informality in the area. This is also attributable to the bad economic state of Zimbabwe as a whole.

The abandonment of building structures in Bulawayo downtown make them susceptible to vandalism, illegal occupation and fire outbreaks hence accelerating their dilapidation hence physical decay in the area. This validated what was put forward by Wilson & George (1982) in the Broken Windows Theory that broken windows should be fixed before more damage is done. The treatment of the downtown area as that far end of the town exposes the area to neglect by the local authority and property owners. This partly explains why the place has informal activities, poor solid waste management and high noise levels. The evidence of urban decay in Bulawayo's downtown, characterised by dilapidated infrastructure, buildings, vice and conflicts, compromises the ability of the downtown area to be resilient.

## **CONCLUSION, POLICY OPTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION**

Based on the research findings, there is need for property led regeneration of the downtown area. This will help to bring back life to the downtown area by reviving it through addressing embedded failures of the market in the area and hence make it resilient. Comprehensive redevelopment can go a long way in addressing urban decay in Bulawayo's downtown area. This may involve re-planning and rearrangement or reshaping of the downtown area. As much as informality is an indicator and cause of urban decay, there is need to consider informality in the regeneration exercises. This enables informal activities to coexist with formal activities and become a source of revenue for the local authority as well as a livelihood activity for the people, especially in circumstances of economic hardships. This creates a win-win situation that is beneficial to all parties. Urban design should consider the changing contexts. Robustness and adaptiveness should be key aspects in design. There is also need for infrastructure maintenance and replacement

in Bulawayo downtown area. This is because the street furniture has been vandalised and the roads are in a bad state. The provision of these facilities makes the area attractive to investment. The provision of proper infrastructure will also help reduce robbery cases and harassment. The City of Bulawayo should come up with a Local Development Plan (LDP) that covers the Bulawayo downtown area. This should offer to revive this decaying region. Thus, the BCC can capitalise on this LDP to revive the area. The LDP will also provide the direction of growth, and help to accommodate new uses which will enhance the ease of doing business in downtown Bulawayo. This will attract investment in the area.

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