Recreational Facilities and Space Needs Analysis and Residential Densification: A Review of Design Standards in a Case Study of Harare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The designing of recreational facilities and spaces attentive to the analytical daily needs of beneficiaries can make densified residential suburbs healthy and vibrant. Yet, enduring modernist development planning practices in a post-colonial African city seem to downplay recreational space in both old and new poor neighbourhoods. The article traces this trend to the segregationist urban planning standards in pre-independence Zimbabwe that curried favour with the small racist white enclave community. Nevertheless, the skewed planning standards now seem to overshadow recreational space in emerging and poor urban settlements. The empirical work of the article examines the impact of these planning standards on recreational space in the low-income suburbs of Mbare, Highfields, Cold Comfort and Crowborough Farm in Harare. The results demonstrate how low-income households blame the poor quality of social life in densified neighbourhoods on the existing cracks in the governance of recreational facilities and space. The experience beckons regular policy reviews of residential design standards to respond to the analytical needs of residents in old and emerging low-income suburbs over time.

Keywords: *recreational space, needs, modernist planning, governance, residents*

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INTRODUCTION

The article sheds light on existing gaps in the design of recreational facilities and space by projecting the analytical needs of residents to make densified residential suburbs healthy and vibrant. The article observes that enduring modernist development planning practices in post-colonial African cities now seem to downplay the importance of recreational space in the daily life of low-income residents. It appears the political economy interests of the new black ruling classes now override planning reservations for recreational facilities and space, preferring expansive housing estates "to cultivate voting banks" (Mazhindu, 2020: 120) for political gain (McGregor 2013; 783; Alexander & McGregor, 2013: 749). Using a mixed-methods strategy, the empirical work of the article examines the impact of modernist urban planning standards on the provision of recreational spaces in Nenyere Flats in Mbare, Highfields, Cold Comfort and Crowborough Farm in Harare. The study collates data sets that explain how the prevailing deficits in planning standards have influenced the everyday life of 100 purposively identified participants in the targeted densified neighbourhoods in the City of Harare.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Urban planning policy orientations that can address the rapidly growing population demands for affordable housing (Kombe 2017) and spatial justice (Lefebvre, 1996) continue to exert pressure on urban governments to implement policies that promote residential densification (Cape Town, 2012). However, despite the merits gained through such policy orientations (Wekwete 1989: 14), some beneficiaries of residential densification[3] are concerned about the negative social and environmental impacts that the underlying processes bring. The social advantages of higher urban densities may include greater diversity, vitality, accessibility and social interaction. However, these advantages must be balanced against the disadvantages of housing environments that are more crowded and cramped, overshadowed and stressful, and more competitive (Boyko & Cooper, 2011; Holman *et al*., 2015; Waters, 2016). Invariably, some

[3]Densification denotes the increased use of space, both horizontally and vertically, within existing areas/properties and new developments, accompanied by an increased number of units and/or the resident population threshold (Cape Town Densification Policy, 2012: 5; Broitman & Koomen 2015).

beneficiaries of densification have raised questions about the deteriorating quality of social life and public space (Honey-Roses & Zapata, 2021) through the informalisation of land uses in urban space. In other cases, the spatial and institutional transfigurations accompanying residential densification have improved the cityscape through creative architecture.

In many African economies, the challenges of residential densification in terrains of smart growth, have demanded a revisiting of the related planning, layout design and building standards to accord "with the changed socio-economic and physical drivers shaping urban environments" (Chirisa, 2014: 2). Matters relating to costs, investments, building materials, planning laws and climate change play a key role in shaping urban environments. In all this, the question that arises is: what aspects of the geometry of planning standards for recreational[4] space need to be revisited in the densified residential suburbs in Harare?

Reacting to that question, Litman (2016) has been concerned that although "smart growth" policies have fuelled a demand for recreational space through compact city planning avenues, increased densities in buildings and rates of occupancy have created new socio-spatial challenges. The social and environmental sustainability challenges of building compact urban forms that have "higher densities" (Flint, 2005; Lawson 2014; Jenks *et al*., 1996; Daneshpour & Shakibamanesh, 2011; Gordon & Richardson, 1997) have questioned the efficacy of compactness. Logically, compact city planning was intended to "discourage urban sprawl through increased densities in the existing urban areas" (Burton, 2000; Ye, Mandpe & Meyer, 2005) within manageable spatial boundaries of citywide development. However, some scholars have elevated "the importance of recreational facilities in integrated urban development" (Koning *et al*., 2020, 2-3; Staley, Gilroy & Leonard, 2001) to safeguard the social attributes of the urban envelope.

[4] Commonly defined "…as period, activity or state of mind where choice is the dominant feature, in this sense, it is the form of free time for the individual…viewed objectively as non-work residual time and qualitatively when recreation activities, in any setting, have meaning only within the context of individual perceptions and belief systems" (Hall & Page, 1999: 2).

Figure 1 – *Green spaces enhance cityscapes and sustainable ecosystems* (Authors, 2021).

These scholars have maintained that a compact urban form, without social and environmental health attributes (WHO, 2016), often leads to the lack of green spaces for community engagement, reducing urban heat island effects, recreation and the maintenance of ecosystems (Figure 1). It is important to envision the socio-spatial impacts of densifying residential neighbourhoods before the implementation of development proposals. For instance, urban planners can project how increased occupancy densities[5] will impact the quality and quantity of public and recreational spaces, encompassing children's playgrounds, sports complexes, open parks and entertainment venues.

Equally, it is essential to note that although residential densification can contribute to overcoming the scarcity of developable urban land through the construction of the detached towers and terraced perimeter blocks, the higher population densities have often given rise to "excessive crowding,

[5] Occupancy density refers to the inhabitants of a specific enclosed area or site (Cheng, 2014). Occupancy density indicates the number of individuals in an area and quantifies the services needed within the area. It takes into account the social attributes and interaction in an environment.

lack of privacy and crime" (Broitman and Koomen, 2015: 32). Therefore, providing suitable recreational facilities that are commensurate with the densified complexes can help alleviate some of these challenges. However, some of the recreational facilities and spaces in the old and rich suburbs of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, inherited upon independence in 1980, have become disused due to mismanagement, dereliction and vandalism. These facilities include public open spaces[6], football and sports stadia, swimming pools and public cinema halls.

Since 1980, in Zimbabwe, some of these recreational facilities have either transformed under "change of use regulations" and/or become obsolete to the extent that they no longer satisfy the needs of consumers. In light of the changed political economy structures and rural-urban demographic circumstances, the current planning standard[7] guiding urban development in Zimbabwe need to be reviewed so that they cater for the ongoing and proposed urban re-generation and re-development processes. With densification, both indoor and outdoor recreational facilities become critical because the urban planning standards still in force well after independence, were tailored mainly for outdoor recreational facilities in favour of the limited European settlement. In "stressing order, control, health, security, and amenity" (RTCPA, 1996), these outdated standards still dominate urban development planning, particularly in the wealthier residential enclaves (Davison, 2002) outside of the overcrowded and underserviced low-income suburbs. However, at the behest of corrupt government officials, political loyalists and illicit land barons, *laissez-faire* urban land-use practices have become the norm in peri-urban informal

[7] Open physical urban space can generally be defined as "…land, which is not intensively developed for residential, commercial, industrial or institutional use" (Schenker, 1995: 209) and is usually multi-purpose in function, although the division is not always clear (Madinpour, 1999). Nabi (1978) suggests that open space is land that includes all private and public lands that are open in character and can be used as a place for open air recreation that range from a small play lot to vast hunting grounds. More than just parks and play fields, open spaces consist of all "wanderable" land as may be found on college campuses, school campuses or agricultural areas.

[8]Generally, a planning standard is used to determine the minimum area for each use for a certain population or for a certain land area (LGED, 2009). These standards are based on the total amount of land required for selected urban services, number of users and facilities expressed as acres or hectares per population threshold, served by a local authority.

settlements and slum areas since the overturning of planning standards and regulations during *jambanja* (space invasions) in early 2000 (Kelsall, 2016; Muchadenyika & Williams, 2016: 33; Mbiba, 2017: 1-2). Drawing on these factors and processes shaping urban Zimbabwe, the following questions helped to deconstruct the residential densification landscape in Harare:

1. What are the main causes of structural gaps in the provision of recreational facilities and space in Harare's densified low-income suburbs?
2. Why structural gaps are evident in the current design standards for recreational facilities in the densified residential suburbs in Harare?
3. What planning dimensions need rethinking to bridge the gaps in the provision of recreational facilities and space in the densified poor suburbs?

As a point of departure in the next section, the article draws up a conceptual framework of design standards for recreational facilities and space in densified residential suburbs in the context of urban planning in Zimbabwe.

CONCEPTUALISING RESIDENTIAL DENSIFICATION

Since urban residential "densification" (Bibby, Henneberry & Halleux, 2021) encompasses different context-related dimensions, there is no universal construct of densification. In residential densification, population density is expressed as the number of people or households per given area, giving a measure of physical density (Forsyth, 2003; Cheng, 2014). Residential density is regarded as the ratio of the population concerning residential land, expressed as net or gross density (Delta Foundation, 2000). Therefore, gross residential density takes into account the geographic area utilised for allocating residential and non-residential spaces such as internal roads, parks, schools, community centres and facilities, whereas net residential density refers to the entirety of a residential plot; land covered by residential development and attached gardens (*ibid*.). The variations in quantifying density make measurements inconsistent and difficult to compare using a universal benchmark (Cheng, 2014).

Occupancy density refers to the inhabitants of a specific enclosed area or site. Occupancy density indicates the number of individuals in an area and quantifies the services needed within the area. Measuring the occupancy rate may show the capacity and adequacy of a building in serving its inhabitants. Regulations of minimum occupancy rates are often in place to safeguard health and sanitary conditions (*ibid*). Stimulating a high standard of living within higher density affordable housing developments, may ensure that an overall increase in density within a neighbourhood does not have negative effects. Perceived density, according to Cheng (2014) and Kyttä *et al*. (2013), refers to the way individuals perceive the number of people in a specified area. It takes into account the social attributes and interaction in an environment. Perceived density deals with spatial density and social density.

People interact within defined spaces. The spatial environment is the platform upon which social interaction takes place. Cheng (2014: 12) states that

> "... it involves the various sensory modalities, the mechanisms for controlling interaction levels, such as spacing, physical elements, territorial boundaries, hierarchy, the size and nature of the group involved, its homogeneity and rules for behaviour in that these qualities affect the rates of social interaction".

In high-density spaces, people are often forced to interact with too many others. Crowding is a consequence of too large a population in too small a space. Proposals of higher density are often associated with crowding or overcrowding (Forsyth, 2003; Churchman, 1999). Architectural features or design (building height, spaces, light traffic) may change perceptions and decrease the apprehension toward high social densities. As shown in a study conducted by Flachsbart (1979), human-scale development may lower perceived density, although not significantly.

The term "suburb" has more than one meaning. Traditionally, according to Pickett and Cadenasso (2013; 274), suburbs contain higher concentrations of low-income populations with less green space, with suburban areas especially in the developing world comprising largely informal settlement development. The authors (*ibid*.) note that the suburbs are a "component of broadly recognised urban areas... primarily residential... single or multiple household dwellings... interspersed with

the open spaces of lawns and generous street landscaping... a locus of wealth and power." Suburbs may have commercial nodes but seldom have industrial land uses within them (*ibid*.). This contemporary definition of suburb is accepted as the most relevant to the research and context in terms of most cities, particularly applicable to established Zimbabwean residential suburbs developed through colonial-settler or racially defined separate development planning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature underlying the empirical work of the article is organised into the planning and design methods of recreational facilities and open spaces together with the themes emerging from data analysis. Some of the literature indicates that recreation forms an integral part of other land uses and, therefore, means different things to different people (Hall & Page, 1999: 2). For this reason, "the integration of land uses concerning recreational open space planning is a prerequisite" (Ngubane 2009: 25). In practice, appropriate and adequate land space should be devoted to recreational developments in any residential layout plan. Some scholars (Trancik, 1986; Safriel, 1991; Zube, 1995) reserve open spaces as active playgrounds for children and youths and for adults to relax. Crucially, greenbelts should be preserved within the built environment not only for the conservation and protection of natural ecosystems. These greenbelts serve as buffer zones between different and often incompatible land uses.

PLANNING METHODS REVIEW: APPROACHES AND MODELS

The Regional, Town and Country Planning Act (29:12) (called the "Act") is "the centrepiece" of town and country planning and development control in Zimbabwe (McAuslan 1981: 149). Thriving on its minimalist standards of order, control, health, security and amenity, the Act, modelled on the British planning system, has dominated the planning of urban settlements in Zimbabwe (Wekwete 1989: 2; Davison 2002, Chirisa 2014: 2) since independence in 1980. The Act has inspired, in essence, a continuity of urban "values" and quantitative standards (Wekwete 1989: 14) in the "defence of an aesthetically pleasing modern city" (Kamete, 2013: 1) in Zimbabwe. However, in the quest for a formal order, the provisions of the Act have posed problems in the housing sector, where there is a strong manifestation of overcrowding despite the

strong development control standards. The rational planning movement has remained in force in some independent sub-Saharan African countries of South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe despite that the social, economic and physical environments in these counties have markedly changed (Watson, 2002: 35; Chirisa, 2014). Although the recreation needs of the colonial communities were predominantly shaped by the entrepreneurial "interests of metropolitan and white capital" (Potts 2012: 15), these have shifted with majority rule, the underlying modernist planning standards have continued to be state-driven and top-down while exacerbating urban inequalities.

In the interest of the past racialised urban land use system, the city was a site of control and restriction. Thus, the planning guidelines were ideal for the planning of compact urban settlements that would cater only for the smaller white communities instead of the larger and poorer black populations that flooded the higher-density suburbs with increasing demands on open space (Brown 2010: 265, 319). Obsessed with modernist desires for order and amenity in the built environment, most local planning authorities are largely hostile to mixed-use buildings providing indoor space for recreation. Since independence, little emphasis has been placed on changing urban planning, the main tool that urban governance employs in promoting social change. Urban planning continues to perpetuate social and economic segregation between the wealthier and poorer suburbs in African cities (Jenkins *et al*., 2007; Njoh, 2007; Myers, 2003, 2011; UN-HABITAT, 2009). As revealed in the results, it is not surprising to find hordes of little children that live in high-rise buildings playing games on congested road servitudes and in high-voltage electricity way leaves.

Drawing on his studies in Zimbabwe, Kamete (2009) concluded that urban development in the country is highly technical. The planning frameworks in the country pay special attention to strict adherence to building and housing standards but fail to provide recreational facilities and spaces. The frameworks only provide that 15% of developable land within a settlement should be set aside for recreational open space. Moreover, even though Circular No. 70 of 2004 (see Table.1) encourages residential densification through reduced stand sizes or national minimum

standards, especially through new real estate development projects, does not provide design standards for recreational facilities.

Table1: *Permitted Standards on Residential Densification in Zimbabwe; Source: Circular No. 17 of 2004, Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and Housing* (Marongwe, 2011: 46, Chatiza, 2012: 14).

Parameter	**Permitted Standards**
Stand sizes	70 m^2-200m^2 for high-density housing/low cost; semi-detached buildings
	300 m^2-500m^2 for medium-density housing/medium cost; no outbuildings.
	800 m^2- 2000m^2 for low-density housing/high cost.
Building lines	For high-density housing, 1 metre from the side boundary, 3 metres from the front boundary and 2 metres from the near boundary. For medium-density housing, 2 metres from the side boundary, 5 metres from the front boundary, and 3 metres from the near boundary. For low-density housing, 5 metres from the front, and 3 metres from all other boundaries.
Road width	District distributors (main internal traffic routes) to be 20-25 metres. Primary distributors (main regional through roads) to be 25- 30 metres. All stands shall have direct access. All roads are to be 8 metres in high-density areas, 10 metres in medium-density areas and 12 metres in low-density areas.
Infrastructure, roads and stormwater drainage	Access roads in high-density areas must be appropriately gravelled and provided with dish drains. All roads shall be surfaced in medium and high-density areas.
Infrastructure, water supply	In high-density areas, all stands shall be connected to a reticulated water supply network, with communal standpipes allowed as temporary measures.
Infrastructure, sewage	In high- and medium-density areas, all stands to be connected to reticulated water sewer. In low-density areas, subject to soil suitability, stand sizes above 200m^2 shall have on-site sewage treatment, while stands on active soils and those below 1 200m^2 shall be on reticulated sewer.
Housing construction in high-density areas	The minimum room size is 6m down from 7m. Walls shall be constructed of burnt clay bricks/blocks, cement brick and stabilised soil bricks. Burnt form bricks or other approved material can be used for building single-storey buildings. Floors shall have a grano finish. Roofs

	shall be made of asbestos sheets, clay tiles, and zinc. The thickness of external walls is to be a minimum of 115 metres.
Open spaces	Shall not exceed 5% of the planning area

Although each city in Zimbabwe is allowed to craft and implement their housing regulations in their respective areas, Harare's building codes and standards are similar to those in the Circular. The Circular "sets the standards regulating housing development in Zimbabwe using three parameters: Planning, Infrastructure and House Construction" (Chatiza, 2012: 14). The Circular has directed all urban centres to reserve 10% of their land for medium and high-rise flats in the residential areas close to the city or town centre. Curiously, however, National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), promulgated by the government of Zimbabwe, has increased the area reserved for residential densification by 40%. Meanwhile, some critics have called the existing model building by-laws into question for being rigid and outdated and inhibiting infrastructure development (Toriro 2007; Chirisa 2014). In ignoring the dynamics of urban change, these by-laws have been found unresponsive to the needs and requirements of society. The upshot of all this is the need to re-imagine planning standards and guidelines for recreational space that can articulate the demands of rapid urban change in Zimbabwe.

REIMAGINING OPEN SPACE FOR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND PLANNING STANDARDS

Open space represents an integral part of city planning because of the overall impact that such space, as a "resource"[8], has on the beauty of the cityscape and the "quality of life" (Brown 2010: 263). Yet such spaces are often undervalued by city officials in the fast-growing cities of the developing countries, thereby detracting from sustainable development. Therefore, sustainable planning of open space and recreational facilities in cities demands greater attention and care to ensure healthy and vibrant lifestyles for all residents (Khan 2019: 1). Recreational facilities

[8] In the sense that not only does this space provide for social interaction, but that "low-income households frequently gain part or all of their income from informal sector activities such as petty trading, manufacture, or urban agriculture, which rely on access to urban space" (Brown 2010: 264).

encompass various types of facilities. The major types of facilities that draw particular attention to city planners while preparing physical or layout plans for cities include open spaces, parks, playfields and children's playgrounds. However, the setting and application of proper standards for these recreational facilities always pose challenges for urban planners and policy-makers because of the limited availability of developable land, exacerbated through higher values in the increasingly densified urban environments. Therefore, the setting of appropriate planning standards for parks, playgrounds and open spaces is essential in providing proper recreational facilities for promoting a healthy and vibrant urban life.

Since countries have adopted various and different standards for designing their urban areas regarding specific contexts, it is widely recognised that searching for a one-size-fits-all standard for recreational facilities and space is not the right choice for urban planners when designing particular cities. In the case of Zimbabwe, the stipulated planning standards and provisions regarding open space facilities for cities are generally understood and applied within the context of operative master plans, structure plans or any other relevant local development plan. It must be borne in mind, however, that these statutory plans are prepared and administered in terms of the Regional Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12 of 1996), Allied Legislation and Statutory Instruments – that impinge on land-use planning and development control. This recognition is important to capture the nuanced contours of planning law in Zimbabwe, insofar as "the law governs the operations of state apparatus (local planning authorities) in enforcing planning standards" (Wekwete, 1989: 2).

Invariably, planning standards for recreational open spaces generally vary for different countries according to their particular planning contexts. Each local planning authority in Zimbabwe can decide the percentage of area that should be designated open space within the relevant planning area, although the national minimum area stipulated as open space is 5% of the planning area (Chatiza, 2012: 14). Invariably, the planning standards of any country cannot be replicated in another one without a detailed assessment of the socio-spatial demands of that particular locality or group of people for whom the standards will apply. Undoubtedly,

recreation ranges from home entertainment through passive activities to active games and competitive sports. Some of these activities require special facilities to cater for the public and others require land areas to be allocated in town plans. General guidelines for open spaces prioritise safety and integration, instead of segregation of play areas for the different ages, environments and access for people with special needs. Arguably, a review of planning standards for densified residential areas in Harare demands an analysis of the city-wide open space requirements based on socio-spatial and economic audit profiles of both existing and envisioned recreational facilities in the city.

To ensure a sustainable provision of urban recreational facilities, there is need for ongoing analysis of trends in demand for recreation so that their provision recognises changes in the demography and spatial growth of neighbourhoods. Consequently, this emphasizes the need for behavioural data to direct recreational facilities plans and programmes and regular review of regulations guiding their planning and use (Omondi, 1991; Government of Kenya, 2008; Muiga & Rukwaro, 2017). Recreational facilities are recommended to be within a walking distance from residents' homes and should cater for all age groups of the beneficiary population.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study engaged a mixed-methods strategy (Miles and Huberman 1995; Woolley, 2009; Cresswell, 2010: 157) to examine the suitability, quality and quantity of recreational facilities and spaces in purposively identified residential sites in Mbare, Highfields, Cold Comfort and Crowborough Farm in Harare. The selected sites manifested residential mixes ranging from garden flats to multi-storey buildings. In particular, the study targeted Crowborough Farm informal settlement, set aside by the Harare Municipality, to house its lowly paid staff. Another study area, the sprawling Highfields high-density suburb, has been rapidly engulfed by new residential developments – without any form of recreational facility or space.

The mixed-methods strategy permitted the use of a battery of instruments to collect, analyse and interpret the different quantitative and narrative data sets. The strategy made this possible through "integrating the

quantitative and qualitative materials" (Bryman, 2007; O'Cathain *et al.*, 2007) collected during the multi-site visits. The semi-structured in-depth interviewer-administered questionnaire guides helped participants to reflexively narrate their lived experiences by reflecting on the quality and quantity of existing recreational facilities and spaces. However, extreme caution must be taken when considering the "representativeness and generalizability" of the entire population (Scott & Morrison, 2007: 219; Neuman, 2011: 246) because it was not feasible to compile lists of all the key variables in the "source population"[9].This was mainly because of the extensively haphazard layout and shifting nature of the informal settlements in the study area. The study assumed that trade-offs could be achieved through the generally homogeneous characteristics of informal households by targeting the largest sample sizes possible, maximising stratified variations within the sample frame in different informal settlement contexts and corroborating the different data collection techniques (Scott & Morrison, 2007: 219; Cozby, 2009: 139-140).

Using an area sampling strategy, sub-samples comprising 25 respondents each, were drawn from Nenyere Hostels in Mbare, high-density Highfields (in the new Paradise Park), medium-density Cold Comfort and high-density Crowborough Farm (new informal settlement near "Mazai" Waterworks.. Using semi-structured interviewer-administered guides, 100 participants were interviewed in the four study areas. To complement the data sets, photographs were taken during transit walks intended to throw light on the qualitative features of the recreational spaces of interest. The survey tracked the lived experiences of participants by enabling them to reflect on the extent to which the existing recreational facilities and space harmonised with their daily needs over time and space.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since 1980, the carrying capacity of existing recreational facilities and space in the high-rise residential enclaves of Mbare has been overtaken by overcrowding and excessive blight. The occupancy rates for single rooms

[9] Sheskin (1985) considers "a source population" as "the universe to which inference is made because it contains all the sampling units". Thus, it is not possible to trace out, virtually, a sampling frame that captures all the elements in a population except in a census.

in Nenyere Hostels and Mbare bachelors' high-rise apartment complexes (hostels) have increased to two or three households thereby eroding privacy (Shumba, 2010).In some hostels, the ground floor is shared by assortments of housing cubicles, shops, beer halls and gyms. To worsen this situation, some of these small spaces have been further sub-divided into rooms to shelter the excess population. Unsurprisingly, the population in the Nenyere hostel has surged from 3,000 males in 1980 to a current population of between 24,000 and 30,000 — comprising men, women and children. This case of outright overpopulation and depleted recreational space inside hostels, is stark evidence of deficiencies in the planning and management of recreational space.

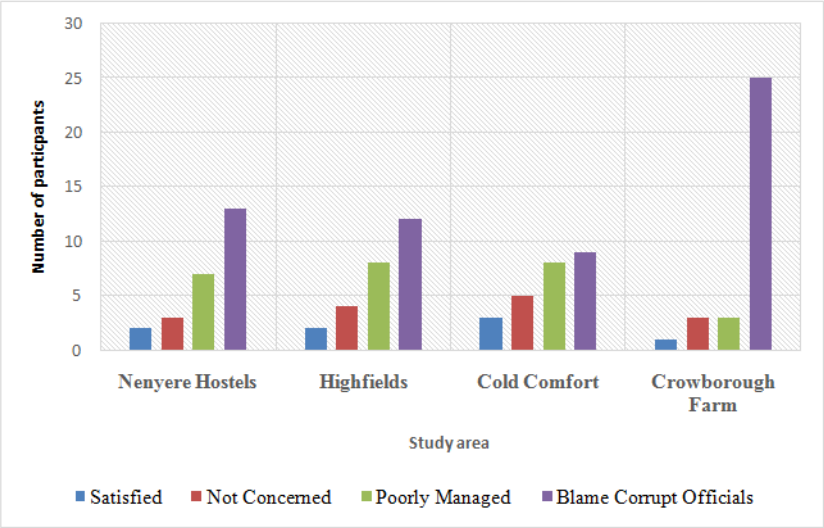

Figure 2: *Qualitative deficiencies in the provision and management of recreational facilities and space* (Authors, 2021).

As figure 2 shows, the highest number of participants traced some of the qualitative deficiencies in the provision and management of recreational facilities in their neighbourhoods to corruption. The second biggest quota of participants blamed the deficits on poor management, whereas the third biggest group of respondents were unconcerned about the status of recreational facilities and space in their neighbourhood. One resident, Mr

A, in the informal settlement on Crowborough Farm lamented a mushrooming of extensive housing estates without commensurate recreational facilities and space to benefit the youthful and surging urban population. Mr A considered it:

> …an affront to a decent urban living environment to live in this place with my family where no space has been reserved for recreation, including open parks, children's playgrounds, swimming pool and let alone a soccer pitch for my little boys to play and avoid mischief playing around the yard at home.

The research was met by a similar situation in Nenyere Hostels, where the absence of formal recreational space forces the children to play anywhere nearer home (Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Left – children playing outside hostels. Right – children playing on the roadside* (Authors, 2021).

Asked to comment on the status of sporting facilities in Harare's high-density suburbs, a young sporting enthusiast and resident in Highfields, Mr Chifamba, urged the government to spend more on the upgrade of public sporting facilities, saying this would go a long way in improving the country's sporting performances. He said:

> "Our sports facilities are dilapidated in the slums where I live. The national (soccer) team's performance has been very disappointing due to a lack of sufficient funds, made worse by the existing poor recreational infrastructure. Economic empowerment projects that might resuscitate the ailing infrastructure are not

supported. Where is the government? It should identify talented youths in the slums."

Elsewhere in Mbare, the researcher visited the deserted Rufaro Stadium, once acclaimed as the most important stadium for international soccer matches in the country. As Figure 4 shows, soccer playgrounds and public car parks adjoining the stadium have become unkempt and turned into informal tobacco auction yards and spiritual enclosure for the *'VaPostori'* (Shona lexicon for "Apostolic") church.

Figure 4: *Abandoned and disused soccer pitches and toilets turned into an informal tobacco auction yard and open church field in Mbare* (Authors, 2021).

To be sure, these open spaces have morphed into multi-purpose grounds or recreational overcrowding catering for informal soccer games, children's playgrounds, church gatherings, retail trading, disposal of liquid and solid wastes and informal housing. In all this, the question arises: What planning modalities can be suggested to bridge the structural gaps in the provision and management of recreational facilities and space in Harare's densified residential enclaves?

This question triggered mixed opinions (Figure 5). The highest percentage (40%) of the participants indicated that design standards for recreational facilities and space should differ across place and time

according to the prevailing socio-spatial contexts. Leaning on Purcell's (2002) and Fainstein's (2014: 13) values of justice in the reproduction of city space, some participants (26%) suggested that the residents should be meaningfully involved during the plan preparation stage to ensure the recreational benefits of development are distributed fairly between the constituent social groups within the prevailing political-economic circumstances. Because of the variation in different social groups' ability to pursue their competing needs and wants, just means may not produce just outcomes. In the circumstances, Fainstein (2010; 2014) argues that priority should be given to social equity. Thus, the participants in Paradise Park in Highfields and Crowborough Farm were dismayed that even though most developments taking shape in peri-urban Harare followed a leapfrog pattern, that should not be an excuse for the unavailability of children's playgrounds.

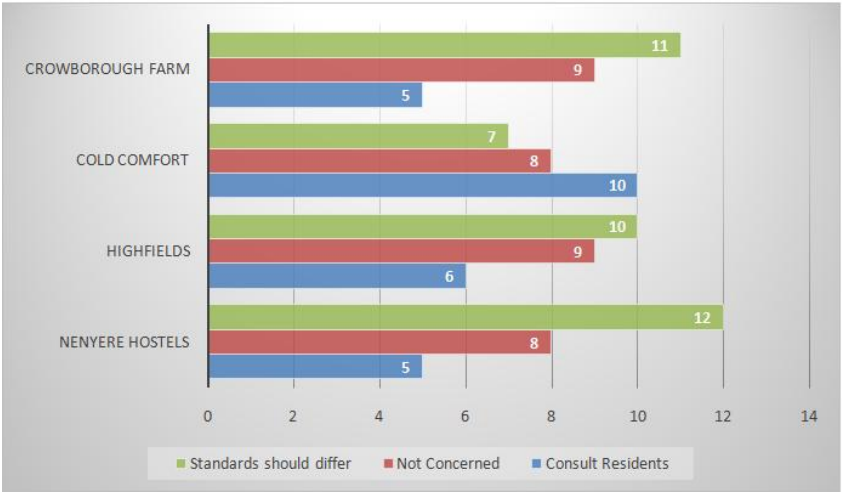

Figure 5: *Opinions on participatory review of planning standards for recreational facilities* (Authors, 2021).

A paradox is that although 66% of the participants showed an interest in the conceptualisation of planning standards for recreational facilities, 34%

were not concerned. A possible explanation for this is the power-laden processes of planning, dominated by the extroverted ruling and business elite and the endemic apathy that has paralysed most urbanites in the corridors of substantive community development (Fainstein, 2010: 3, 2014: 13).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cities are continually developing and evolving. There is no doubt about the central role that the Regional, Town and Country Planning Act plays in reproducing and shaping the heterogeneous urban forms that emerge from these processes in Zimbabwe. Here, the RTCP Act (1996) is strongly oriented towards physical planning and has not taken full cognisance of economic and social perspectives. This raises an important issue of planning laws in the overall development of the country. What role should these laws play, given that, historically, they have evolved to control development, to establish norms, rules and regulations? If planning is a dynamic phenomenon representing state intervention in the field of development, there is need to make the statutory framework dynamic. This will allow for flexibility in setting standards addressing the variations in intra-urban processes and outcomes in the different contexts of urban densification impacting spatial justice. As the experience in Nenyere Hostels and informal settlements in Highfields and Crowborough Farm shows, low-income households with access to relatively little residential space have been deprived of recreational space. This contributes to an increase in the level of inequality in the distribution of both residential and recreational spaces, thereby increasing social-spatial injustice. Thus, although there are merits in 'statutory' planning, the reality suggests that there is need for more flexible and simpler circulars. That means planning evolves *in situ* and local authorities have more discretion — within the context of broad guidelines. As the empirical work of the article has shown, the upgrading of densified suburbs in Harare can benefit from certain projects elsewhere. Particularly, a piecemeal approach should be avoided and an integrated approach applied.

It should be observed that the empirical component of the article has not produced a spatially fine-grained analysis of the processes of residential

densification in the selected study areas in Harare. In addition, it has failed to address variations in the intra-urban experience of densification and the redistributive effects to which they give rise. Consequently, only broad conclusions about the extent to which the revealed pattern of densification has contributed to spatial justice have been discerned. Therefore, further research is needed into residential densification and interrelated policies – in particular, the financial resources entailed.

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