The City is Wholesaling: Implications of N Richards Group and Metro Peech Locations to Greening Endeavours in the Harare Urban Space

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Abstract

The article seeks to explore and discuss the possible effects associated with a city is wholesaling, that is currently on a drive in Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare as seen by the emergence of new vibrant and giant wholesalers in some high- to medium-density residential areas, including Hatcliffe, Msasa, Sunningdale and Tynwald. City wholesaling in Harare has emerged and is on the rise at a time that is deemed to be perfect, considering the advantages that wholesaling in nearby suburbs is offering to the city centre. The study is based on the notion that wholesaling of large quantities of goods requires extensive space that is unavailable within the city centre, hence some of the wholesale shops end up locating in or close to industrial areas and others in commercial areas within local suburbs and neighbourhoods. It becomes important for these industries to go green for less negative implications posed on the environment and the local people's livelihoods. The study made use of geographical information systems (GIS) technology to map the location and distribution of N Richards (NR) and Metro Peech (MP) Wholesalers in Harare. From the mapping exercise, the study found out that the location of these giant wholesalers has been highly due to the need for much space, and nearness to high populations as in the case of

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MP along Seke Road, in close proximity to Sunningdale and Hatfield suburbs which are highly populated.

Keywords: *mapping, proximity, decongestion, low-carbon development, smart city*

INTRODUCTION

Urban expansion, coupled with population growth, has attracted growth of business opportunities as demand for supplies has been increasing. This has been the case in most of Zimbabwe's towns and cities. As such, taking the case of Harare, massive wholesale and retail outlets, such as N Richards and Browne Wholesalers have found themselves locating in suburbs such as Tynwald, Hatcliffe, Msasa within the city, and the Graniteside industrial areas. Consequently, Metro Peech is dominating in high- to medium-density locations, with three major branches strategically positioned in the three locations of Sunningdale, Queensdale and Msasa respectively. With high standards associated with these giant shops, local customers within the vicinity of these shops are finding life easier as they no longer have the burden of going to the city centre frequently to satisfy their shopping needs. This has indirectly helped in reducing congestion within the Harare Central Business District (CBD). The existence of these big wholesaling outlets in high-, medium- and low-density suburbs has provided convenience to most shoppers at a time when the country has been grappling with the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that has restricted the operation of most businesses by limiting operating hours as a way to manage the pandemic, depending on the intensity of the disease spread at any given point in time since the onset of the pandemic in 2020 to date.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The wholesale industry remains an important component in the effective functioning of the urban system as it provides the urban system with the majority of its supplies (Sirjean *et al.,* 2019). These range from groceries to building materials, among other goods and services. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2018), only 30% of the world lived in urban areas in 1950, a figure that has since risen to 55% in the year 2018 (*ibid.*), and is still expected to

continue rising. This indicates a massive increase in population, and this would entail an increased demand for local goods by businesses and urbanites (Dobbs *et al.,* 2012). Due to the increase in demand, mega wholesale industries have found themselves located in urban centres to quench the increase, and at the same time, make profits by supplying the urban population with its basic needs. The spread of industries into the urban space has been associated with many negative impacts and these include increased generation of waste, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions that have triggered climate change and global warming over time. This has, in turn, prompted many governments to go green and encourage green industries in their urban spaces.

Faced with the need to alleviate extreme poverty, especially in the developing world, countries are now faced with the need to expand their industrial sectors through the expansion of supplies and the provision of jobs, that in turn improve the local people's standards of living (UNIDO, 2011). However, it is through these developments that many countries have faced environmental degradation and resource depletion, threatening opportunities for sustainable development, hence, the need for the promotion of green industries to enable sustainable means of production and consumption (*ibid.*). This would mean, the urgency for industries to go green as a way to save the environment and the further depletion of resources.

Greening the city is a big system that comprises various components, ranging from the way infrastructure is developed, the type of materials used in construction, the use of renewable energy, and the use of green technologies and smart Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in development of various infrastructure within and around the city (Brilhante and Klaas, 2018). It can, therefore, be observed that the aspect of greening the environment touches on many aspects that range from how a building is structured to how it affects the environment in which it is situated. To promote a healthy urban environment, decentralisation of wholesales in cities must come along with the aspect of greening the environment.

Verheij and Nunes (2021) equate urban greening to the existence of urban gardens, parks and street trees and city forests within the confines of the urban space. This, in turn, has various environmental benefits to the city as tress help reduce air pollution while improving biodiversity survival. Urban greening has been regarded as one of the effective ways to fight climate change as trees are a major sequester of carbon. It reduces the level of greenhouse gas emission concentration in the cities (Addas, 2021). UNESCAP (2012) stresses that there are numerous ways to green the industry and these include the Circular Economy (CE), Cleaner Production, Industrial symbiosis and the use and implementation of the 3Rs, which are reduced, reused and recycled. Lindfield and Steinberg (2012) defined the CE as a mechanism that reduces waste by turning by-products of one industry into inputs of another industry. This has been the case in Japan's "eco-towns" and an example is that of Japan's Kitakyushu eco-town that has implemented the CE on a large scale to manage waste through the creation of extensive recycling and environmental industries responsible for processing and producing paper, plastic and metal office equipment, among others. It is further emphasized that the successful implementation of the CE requires government involvement and well-planned institutional arrangements that enable efficient regulatory control, and offer incentives for an industry that would adopt CE (Lindfield and Steinberg, 2012; Lewis, 2015).

Urban greening has been associated with health benefits and has been noted to increase the level of community and social cohesion (Sefcik *et al.,* 2019; Knobel *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, marrying city wholesaling and urban greening will not only create a healthy working environment for workers, but also bear health and environmental benefits for the residents and the environment (both natural and built) at large. In promoting greening, the environment and buildings can be constructed following green building standards. In this case, buildings can be made energy-efficient through the use of eco-friendly devices and practices that can cut electricity consumption by 60% or more, while building codes can be used to maintain densities at levels that are consistent with environmental sustainability (Lindfield and Steinberg, 2012). To ensure maximum

benefit, buildings, particularly wholesale buildings, must therefore be built in such a way that they maximise the use of natural lighting and practise rainwater harvesting, limiting the energy costs of buildings in the process. Lewis (2015) further highlights the adoption of CE as linked to reduced waste, improved operating efficiency and operating environment, improved urban environmental conditions and increased awakening of waste management practices.

Greening touches on various aspects, including the creation of low-carbon, low-waste and non-polluting and safe industries (UNIDO, 2011). Urban greening, through suburbanisation and decentralisation of retail business has, of late, become a major activity in several cities all over the world. China has industrial sites within its urban areas. Cities, such as Shanghai, have been implementing strategies for urban development and these include urban industrial upgrading of many firms within the city centre and on urban fringes (Cao *et al.,* 2017). In a study carried out on 35 cities in China's Yellow Basin River (YBR) in 2012, 2015 and 2018, it was revealed that Industrial Green Development (IGD) in the YBR is generally on the rise as it had increased in 2018 compared to the year 2012, with claims that IGD is higher in the east compared to the western regions (Liu *et al.,* 2021). Liu *et al.* (2021) acknowledge the positive role played by the government in influencing IGD in YRB and stress the need for government to formulate policy to support IGD and strengthen its environmental controls to limit the industrial discharge of waste and increase spending on environmental protection and energy conservation.

In Africa, notably South Africa, retail decentralisation was witnessed in some of its cities, including Johannesburg and Cape Town. Decentralisation was mainly a result of an increase in the level of crime rates and disorder led to blacks being the only people to buy in the city centre before the final relocation to suburbanised areas by business operators. Venema *et al.* (2020) observe that wholesale decentralisation in the Southern African country was not only limited to high levels of crime rates in the CBD but was also attributed to racial discrimination as the whites were the first to go to shopping malls outside cities. In efforts to go green and manage waste, South Africa's New Life Plastics in Cape

Town has been able to practise the recycling of polyolefin products, which make up 57% of South Africa's market for plastics, and these have been transformed into outdoor furniture, pallets and other products that are more environmentally friendly and eye-catching (Government of Western Cape, 2013). This, in turn, helps to reduce huge amounts of plastic waste from industries and households. For sustainable urban settlements, it is, therefore, imperative to ensure that countries embrace the development of green industries. UNIDO (2011) emphasizes that the greening of industries can be supported through educating local communities about the social, environmental and economic benefits of resource efficiency and cleaner production, and stresses that education and training for resource-efficiency should be introduced and taught throughout the educational curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare, the hub of business in Zimbabwe, comprising of businesses from individual operators to multinational corporations. The city is home to various types of businesses from boutiques, grocery shops, supermarkets and hardware shops specialising in different goods and services. The city is diversified to more commercial wholesalers just from the CBD who offers a wide range of goods through to nearby locations within the vicinity of the city centre. To show the locations and distribution of various branches, GIS was used in mapping the present locations of N Richards and Metro Peech in Harare. Google Earth Pro was used to digitise point locations in Sunningdale, Msasa, Tynwald and Hatcliffe before the points were imported into Quantum GIS software for further processing and conversion into shapefile. Population mapping was done by creating a 4km buffer around the location of the wholesale shops. Within the 4km-buffer radius, every household living in houses within the radius was captured. A point count analysis was carried out in the GIS environment to see the number of houses that are being served by one wholesale within that 4km-buffer.

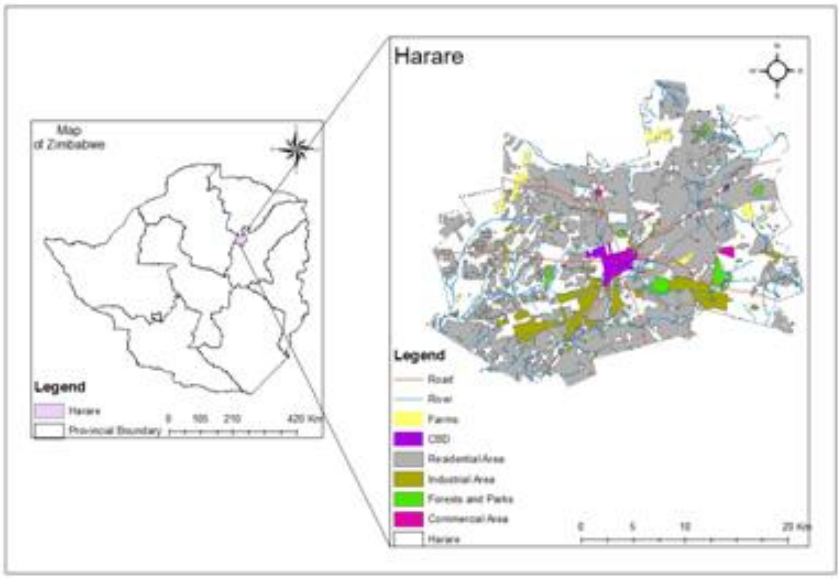

Figure 1: *Location of Harare* (Authors, 2021).

The map shows various areas of Harare's landscapes that range from the central business district (CBD) marked in purple, to the industrial and residential areas that are the most dominant marked in grey. The article now looks at the results of the study.

RESULTS

Faced with inevitable population growth across the globe, demand for various products within city centres has increased. This has resulted in increased relocation of industries, particularly wholesalers, for the supply of various goods and services into the city centre. The wholesale industry is noted as one of the most important components or requirements for the effective functioning of the urban system. This has been because the wholesale industry does supply the urban system with some of its basic supplies (Sirjean *et al.,* 2019). UNIDO (2011) links the presence of industrial sites in urban areas to the creation of jobs and improvement of the local people's standards of living. In this case, it becomes possible to supply urban inhabitants with some of its requirements, such as groceries

and building materials. This has in turn seen the wholesale light industry relocating to the city centres of most cities globally.

Due to the negative impacts attached to the operation of light industrial sites, such as improper disposal of wastes in the form of plastics and unwanted cardboard boxes and paper, and pollution which has further been linked to global warming and temperature changes, cities have started advocating for the green industry in its urban spaces. The greening of the city has broadly been associated with the use of renewable energies and the use of green technologies in infrastructural developments (Brilhante and Klaas, 2018). UNESCAP (2012) links green industries to the circulated economy, the use of the 3Rs, cleaner production and industrial symbiosis. In this case, firms are encouraged to use recyclable materials in production and the packaging of goods.

Greening, therefore, has been associated with numerous advantages ranging from pollution reduction, reduction of industrial waste, health benefits to residents and improvement in social cohesion (Sefcik *et al.*, 2019; Knobel *et al.,* 2021). Japan's Kitakyushu eco-town has adopted the CE and through this, giant environmental industries responsible for the processing of plastic, paper and metal equipment have been created (Lindfield and Steinberg, 2012). This helps in reducing waste within urban spaces, and at the same time, creating employment for local people. China's Shanghai has witnessed the upgrading of its industries within the city (Cao *et al.,* 2017). In a study carried out among 35 cities in China's YBR, it has been concluded that there has been a rise in Industrial Green Development within the periods, 2012, 2015 and 2018 (Liu *et al.,* 2021). This shows massive developments when it comes to greening industries within the city.

African cities have been noted to accommodate light industries, particularly wholesale industries within their urban areas. These, in turn, come with the generation of plastics as noted earlier and the generation of plastic materials becomes one of them. Like other African countries, South Africa has wholesale and retail industries in its urban areas to satisfy the needs of local people and other smaller industries. The study notes the presence of New Life Plastics which has recycled plastic waste into outdoor furniture and pallets, among other products (Government of Western Cape, 2013). These products would reduce waste, and at the

same time generate employment and income from the selling of the artefacts made from unwanted polyolefin products.

It is observed that the practice of urban greening and industrial greening has many advantages that range from the creation of healthy living and working environments, reducing pollution in the environment, utilisation of nature's gifts, such as natural light and ventilation to the creation of jobs through the creation of companies to recycle waste materials. This calls for the need for governments to continuously embrace the aspect of greening urban industries through the formulation of policies that support green industries, educating communities from the grassroots levels for them to understand the benefits attached to greening urban economies and be passed on from one generation to the next.

Zimbabwe's wholesale industry has many players in the industry. These include retail outlets and wholesalers such as Mohamed Mussa, Trade Centre, N Richards and Metro Peech to mention a few. Figure 2 shows the various channels that goods pass through from suppliers to the consumer.

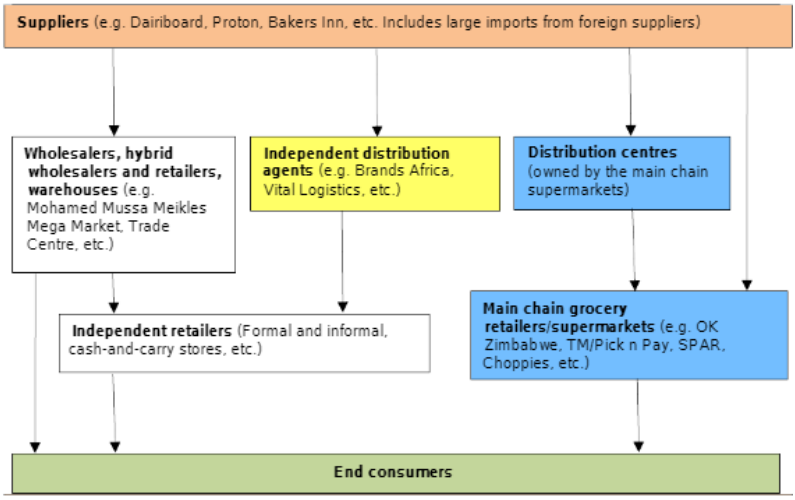

Figure 2: *Value Chains for Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) in Zimbabwe* (Nair and Chisoro, 2016).

From the main suppliers, such as Dairyboard and Bakers Inn, these products are distributed to wholesale outlets that, in turn, distribute to independent retailers and later to the end-user. These, in turn, help to ease demand for goods within the city centres. Due to the negative impacts sometimes posed by these industries, such as waste production, the government uses instruments, such as the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27), regulated by the Environmental Management Agency, to control and impose penalties on firms for not complying with pollution practices. The article focused on two wholesales giants, N Richards, and Metro Peech.

It is argued that in Zimbabwe's urban areas, particularly Harare, retail decentralisation has been driven mainly by low land prices, and closeness to high populations with whom the majority of people can hardly get into the CBD for basic goods and services. As such, in Harare, decentralisation of business to surrounding urban areas has been mainly a result of a high level of competition amongst business operators and the need to offer service to customers at a much competitive and affordable prices. This has attracted a large number of customers from the periphery who hardly make it to the densely populated and highly congested capital of Harare

The study found out that in as much as the city is wholesaling Metro Peech Sunningdale, Metro Peech Msasa, N Richards Msasa (NRM) and Metro Peech Chiremba (MPC) are located closer to each other in terms of separating distance between them. This was supported by an intersection of a 4km buffer constructed around each wholesale shop. This means that these two shops have branches that at some point in time they are accessed by the same customers within 4kms. As such, these shops are offering their service to people from areas that include Sunningdale, Acadia Cranborne, Hatfield, St Martins, Queensdale, Msasa Park, Ruwa and Mbare. But of interest is NRM which is located in Msasa industrial area. This shop besides intersecting with MPC has its greater part falling

across the Harare-Mutare highway to the nearby forest-like area, where no settlements are found thereby reducing the number of stands it services.

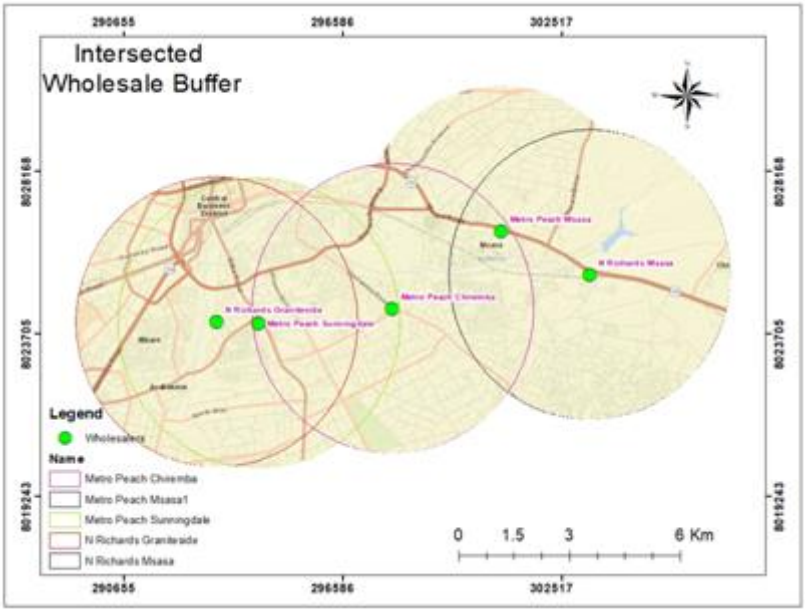

Figure 3: *Intersected wholesales sharing the same area* (Authors, 2021)

However, N Richards Tynwald (NRT) is isolated further away from the CBD serving people who live as far as Kuwadzana, Madokero, Westley, Warren Park, Cold Comfort, Glaudina and Kambuzuma. Compared to other wholesalers on the Southern side of the CBD, NRT is servicing a huge number of people as supported by the number of stands that are within a 4km radius of its location. After performing point count analysis in QGIS, we observed that NRT is serving approximately 26394 stands and this is approximately the number of people who are not getting to CBD in search of goods and services similar to those offered by NRT. As such with increasing services that are being offered by these giant shops, the influx of people into the CBD for shopping for a variety of goods will remain regulated despite the recently relaxed lockdown measures.

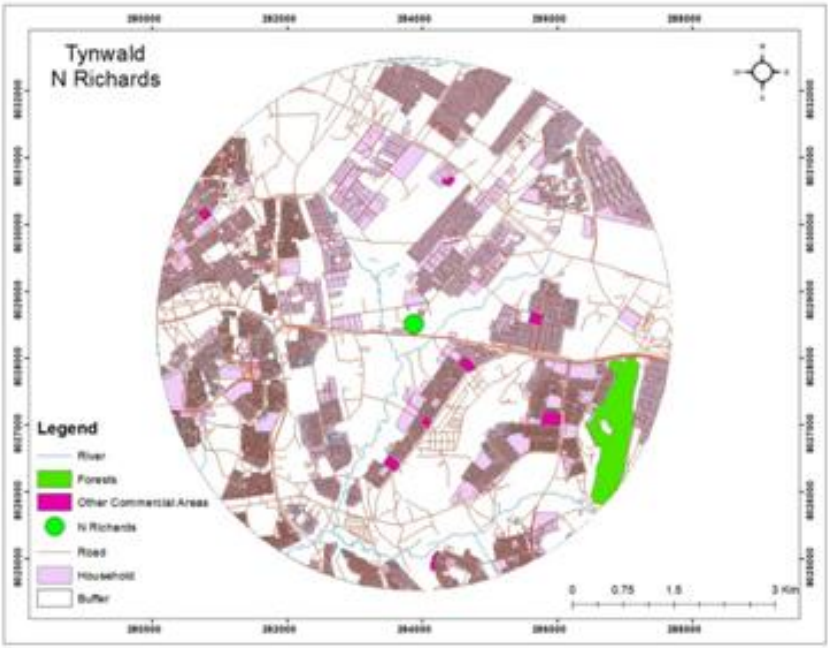

Figure 4: *N Richards Tynwald* (Authors, 2021).

However, the case differs from, NR Borrowdale which is located and surrounded by low-density suburbs covering areas including Vainona, Borrowdale, and Pomona. NR Borrowdale then becomes one of the shops serving several stands but due to the sizes of residential stands in surrounding areas, it will end up serving a few stands due to the relative size of stands present in its vicinity. After performing a point count, approximately 5038 stands were found to be having chances of shopping at NR Borrowdale at any point in time.

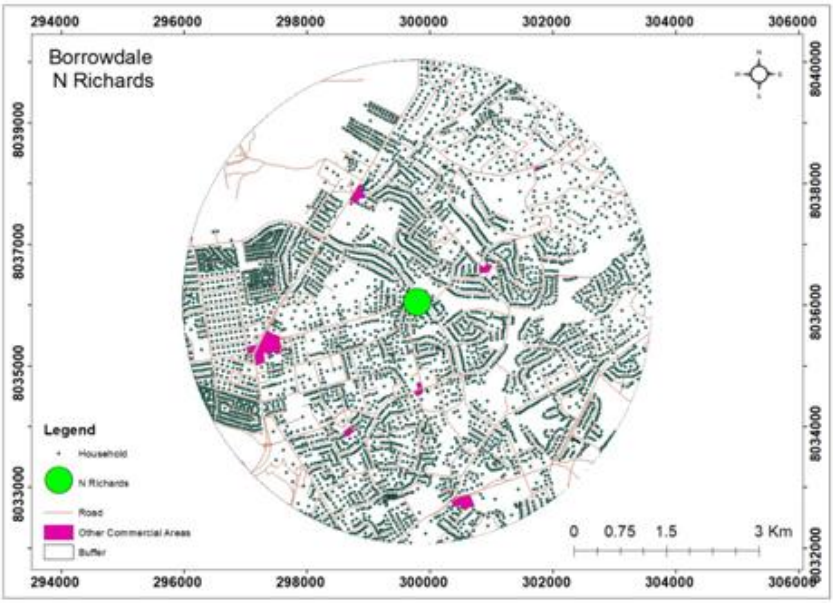

Figure 5: *N Richards Borrowdale* (Authors, 2021)

The map shows areas that are in the vicinity of N Richards Borrowdale and this, most people will then be confined to do their shopping outside the city centre, thus reducing congestion and improving convenience. The study now discusses these findings as done by the Geographic Information System software.

DISCUSSION

It can be observed that the City of Harare is surely wholesaling as evidenced by the spread of big wholesales, such as Metro Peech and N Richards across Harare. This have had its advantages, such as a reduced number of people or businesses entering the city centre to buy goods in bulk for resale or use. This in turn reduces congestion and pollution of the CBD through the release of many cars flocking the city centre. In this regard, people in suburbs such as Msasa Park, Greendale, Hatfield, and the majority of Harare East residents, such as those that reside in Zimre Park, Damafalls, and Ruwa, can come and shop in branches located in Msasa. Low-density suburbs, such as Borrowdale, Vainona, and Pomona

have found convenience in shopping in NR Borrowdale which is located in the low-density suburbs of Borrowdale. The study, however, observed that due to large stand sizes in these areas, an estimated 5038 stands had high chances of shopping in the outlet at any given point in time. This would improve convenience and reduce the travelling distance by customers when it comes to satisfying their needs in terms of shopping for groceries and building equipment.

The wholesaling businesses have aimed to satisfy the needs of people in the high-density residential areas of Kuwadzana, Warren Park and Kambuzuma through the establishment of N Richards Tynwald. Other suburbs, such as Madokero, Glaudina and Cold Comfort, have found comfort in shopping in this big wholesaling outlet. The study reveals that NRT serves the needs of approximately 26 394 stands which is quite a big figure when it comes to reducing the number of people who enter the CBD for purposes of buying groceries and building materials. This in turn saves road infrastructure by reducing its usage. The study acknowledges that some areas near Tynwald are still under construction and in this, people are saved from the travelling hustle of looking for building materials in the Harare CBD or elsewhere.

Faced with the current COVID-19 pandemic, the government has restricted people's movements through numerous partial and full lockdowns and limited business operating hours to manage the spread of the pandemic (Mackworth-Young, 2020) and access to various goods and services from these local wholesaling stores for most people presents a bigger advantage. People's needs can therefore be satisfied in the minimum possible time, conveniently even in times of crisis. Some of these shops, such as Metro Peech, have embarked on online shopping to serve people during the pandemic while in the comfort of their homes.

It has, however, been observed that some of these big wholesaling industries are located closer to each other, within a 4km radius! This has been the case with N Richards Msasa, Metro Peech Chiremba and Metro Peech Msasa. This becomes unsustainable as one use becomes dominant in one area, or areas closer to each other. This then gives a challenge to most planners who are now faced with the need to save space, green the

environment, and promote densification and compact developments to cater for the ever-increasing number of urbanites in cities. This then becomes an issue when it comes to reserving space in urban areas for other uses that require less space. The land in the city centre is usually highly-priced and it may be more profitable for big wholesalers to be located at the boundaries of the city centres so that inner-city space may be reserved for compact use developments that do not require much space. This may be ideal for town planning, but not ideal for the business people as they may fear that they may lose many clients as they may end up having to travel long distances for shopping.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

City wholesaling had a significant contributory effect to the reducing the level of shopping population that can be found in the city centre. Congestion has been greatly dealt within the CBD as other people around Harare CBD are no longer travelling to Harare for bulk orders. As such, the availability of these mega shops has greatly reduced the number of customers boarding the bus to town but rather most of the people are now walking freely to shopping within their neighbourhood without the hustle of transport. The study recommends other business operators who are already in the industry and those who are to join others to consider wholesaling businesses outside the CBD as this can expose them to a high population who cannot access the CBD often. More so those who are into urban planning and local government are recommended to prioritise decentralisation of wholesale shopping centres and neighbourhood areas thus paving the way to urban greening of Harare CBD and fight against climate change.

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