
From Urban Sprawl to Compact City: An Inquiry into the Application of New Urbanism Principles in Transitional Cities.

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Résumé

In the epoch of global rapid urbanisation, transitional cities of the developing world have been facing remarkable urbanisation challenges to the detriment of urban sustainability. Unprecedented population booms and variant economic trends posing stress on finite urban resource land have been witnessing challenges of urban sprawl, traffic congestion, and unsustainable urban land use patterns. Realising such challenges in the transitional process for cities of the developing world there has been efforts to adopt the new urbanism initiative for curbing of rampant urban sprawl, thereby a move towards development of compact cities. New Urbanism is a contemporary urban of planning approach, which make use of traditional neighbourhoods design to ensure sustainable human settlements. The approach includes the principles such as walkability, mixed-use planning, smart transportation, densification as well as connectivity among others. While such initiative is spearheaded, several questions raise pertaining capacities, opportunities and constraints of the strategies used by transitional cities to curb urban sprawl through application of new urbanism.

This paper notes that in efforts to curb urban ills emanating from rapid urbanisation in transitional cities, new urbanism principles has been a strong panacea. While application of new urbanism principles crosscuts several spectrum of implementation context and approach, its application in rapidly transitional cities has been dubitable. It notes that new urbanism principles have been adopted in cities of developed countries, which have reached the advanced stage of urbanisation as well as application in development of new cities thus entailing differences in the context of transitional cities of the developing world. In the crucible of adoption of the new urbanism principles in transitional cities such as Harare like any other African cities, the study identifies implementation challenge of fragmentation where the new urbanism principles are implemented in fragmented approaches thereby losing their complementary strength to the detriment of new urbanism failure. The study also identifies incapacities and constraints in the realm of institutional, technical and financial capacities to achieve effectively compact transitional cities using new urbanism principles.

In efforts to achieve compactness of transitional cities, several urban anomalies were realised in the embracement of new urbanism principles. Adoption of fragmented principles has led to failure of the planning approach where adoption of smart transportation in a monozoned sprawled city has proven to be sterile and ineffective in Harare. This has been also exacerbated by resistance in the planning system where patch-patch planning approaches have been prioritised at the expense of the treasures of leapfrogging thereby witnessing transitional cities remaining behind the problem.

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With focus on three new urbanism principles of smart transportation, mixed-use development and densification, the study identifies that for transitional cities to achieve compactness and sustainability as a move from unsustainable urban sprawl, there is need to adopt the principles in an integrated approach to realise their complimentary prospects within the urban development spectrum. For effective and transitional process of these cities, the paper suggests remarkable institutional reform within the urban planning system through reflective and simulative urban planning from success story in the application of new urbanism. The study makes use of the Dutch urban planning approach, which successfully managed to achieve compactness through use of new urbanism and this was on the constructive pillars of effective urban planning regulation, efficient land-use planning approaches, formulation of comprehensive new urbanism strategy in a compliant coordinated urban institutional framework. Thus for effective adoption of new urbanism principles towards compactness of transitional cities there is need to be reflective of comprehensiveness in planning approaches, coordination in the institutional and regulatory frameworks.

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Mots-Clés: Urban sprawl, new urbanism, compact city, transitional cities