

## THE IMPACT OF URBAN PLANNING ON PLACES OF WORSHIP IN WINDHOEK NAMIBIA

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### Abstract:

Urban planning impacts freedom of religion through planning regulations applied by local municipalities in establishing places of worship in urban areas. However, incorporating religion in urban planning in most countries has remained insignificant, regardless of the new challenges of increasing religious diversity in most cities. This paper examines the role of urban planning policies in Namibia in establishing places of worship in Windhoek and its impact on freedom of religion in the City. Data was collected by reviewing and exploring journal papers, government documents, books, and newspaper articles. Neoliberal theory was employed to guide the study. The research established that the City of Windhoek, through planning policies, has a direct impact on places of worship, and to facilitate a sustainable process, the City put a moratorium on establishing new houses of worship to reduce the number of people intending to create such facilities. Applications for even places of worship by religious bodies, including churches, are treated the same as other applications for related institutions, even though the churches and other religious facilities have different ways of worshipping. In Namibia, the government and municipal urban planning departments benefit all religious organizations equitably. The study's findings contribute to the scientific discussions on places of worship and town planning policies in developing countries. The findings will benefit all stakeholders involved in developing places of worship, such as policymakers, academics, and researchers. The study is limited to Windhoek, and further studies should incorporate both urban and rural areas.

**Keywords:** Place of worship, urban planning, religion, zoning, planning laws

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## INTRODUCTION

Establishing places of worship requires engagement with the planning system regarding the legal requirement to apply for planning permission to construct, convert, and modify buildings for religious use. However, the type of place of worship needed in a locality depends on the residents' faith and spiritual needs or the needs of a particular faith group residing in that neighborhood (Burchardt, 2019). Geography, Religious Studies, and Social Sciences researchers have explored the significance of space for religious purposes, religious place-making, and conflicting spatial strategies and designs proposed by religious organizations, government authorities, and urban planners. Analyzed the interaction and conflict of the above concept and the challenges faced by several types of places of worship in their attempt to acquire a space in the urban space (Berg, 2019; Burchardt, 2019; Miller, 2020). However, incorporating religion in urban planning practice and literature has remained insignificant in many countries.

Regardless of the new challenges from increasing religious diversity in most towns and cities worldwide. In addition, urban planning directly or indirectly impacts freedom of religion through

planning regulations applied by local municipalities when establishing places of worship in urban areas (Osorio, 2019). In Namibia, over the past three decades, a rapid growth in the Christian population challenged municipalities to accommodate places of worship (Cook, 2019). The challenge calls for research to illuminate how municipalities can address the issue. Currently, what makes the matter even more serious is that there needs to be more rigorous scholarly studies that examine the effects of urban planning policy on places of worship in Namibia. However, in the towns and the City, religious institutions and groups continue to submit applications to municipalities for consideration.

This paper examines the role of urban planning policies in establishing places of worship in Windhoek, Namibia, to bridge the gap. The study seeks to contribute to knowledge on religion and urban planning internationally by extending the topic by focusing on the connection between religion, urban planning laws, and strategies in Namibia. The significance of this research is that it provides a starting point for discussing how Namibia's urban planning laws and policies impact the places of worship for all stakeholders. The argument in this study will assist in finding ways to sustainably address the correlation between religion and urban planning in Namibia.

The sources used in this study were identified from literature limited to less than five years old to contextualize the study. Namibian laws and policies were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The study is based on the neoliberal theory linking religion and economics, called religious neoliberalism. According to Boland et al. (2020), neoliberalism supports the right to religion. Fundamentalist Christianity uses the Bible to legitimize neoliberalism theologically. Religious groups under neoliberalism commodify and commercialize religion, believers become consumers of the product faith, and church leaders use marketization tactics to win churchgoers intellectually and emotionally. They utilize economic language to sell salvation merchandise to worshipers in a competitive marketplace. Hence, an increase in Christian Libertarianism and Prosperity Gospel churches increased the need for more land to accommodate places of worship.

## METHODS

The sources used in this study were identified from literature limited to less than five years old to contextualize the study. A scoping literature review on the role of urban planning policies in establishing places of worship or the relationship between religion and urban planning in Namibia was conducted. Then, a content analysis of policies and laws in Namibia was conducted, and government documents were used to provide relevant information using a qualitative content analysis method. The City of Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia, was used as a study area because there are many places of worship. Subsequently, data was sourced from the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (1990), Local Authorities Act 23 of 1992, the City of Windhoek Town Planning Scheme with amendments including Amendment Schemes 1 to 89 (1987 - 2013), and the City of Windhoek Institutional Land Policy Council Resolution 224/07/2018. Based on the above sources, the study's findings were reported using a table in which the document type is identified, the date of publication, the type of data, and its relevance in the current study. The data was then described and discussed using simple words to meet the research purpose.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The scoping review discovered that no existing research in Namibia examines the role of urban planning policies in establishing places of worship or the relationship between religion and urban planning in Namibia. However, there are some relevant laws and policies that address the issue.

Consequently, government documents were used in addressing the subject matter. The results are outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Laws and Policies That Impact on Places of Worship in Namibia

Regulatory Framework	Section That Has an Impact on Places of Worship	Relevance
The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia.	Article 1(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia founded The Republic of Namibia as a "sovereign, secular, democratic and unitary State founded upon the principles of democracy, the rule of law and justice for all." Article 21(1) states that "all persons shall have the right to (c) freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice"	Define the type of state and rights given to the citizens that are relevant to citizens.
Local Authorities Act 23 of 1992	Define "public nuisances" as "excessive noise caused by any means whatsoever". Section 75(1)(a) exempts churches from rates levied on ratable property if the church applies to the local municipality for exemption in any financial year.	Address the matter of excessive noise generated by churches. Treat churches favourably.
City of Windhoek Town Planning Scheme (1976).	The City of Windhoek (2013) defines a place of public worship as a "building, designed and used as a place of public devotion and related administrative activities but excluding a funeral chapel and includes other buildings designed for social gathering or recreation which are associated with and on the same site as the place of public worship." The scheme defines a building as stipulated in Section 2 of the Town Planning Ordinance, 1954. It also indicates that a building shall include a structure or erection in clauses 16 to 21, and the use of a building shall be as per the zoning of the ground on which it is erected.	Define places of worship in the context of the City.
City of Windhoek Institutional Land Policy Council Resolution 224/07/2018	Lifted the ban on land sale to churches, which the City of Windhoek imposed in 2019. The ban was implemented to allow the municipality to consult extensively and provide remedial procedures to efficiently allocate land to be used by institutions. The revised Institutional Land Policy addresses the irregularities experienced in the sale of 'institutional-zoned' properties and rationalizes how the properties should be used in the future.	Provide the procedures to apply for land for a place of worship. Establish the decisions and directives the Council takes regarding churches and the dates of implementation or operation.

Noise Control Regulations.  
 Municipal Council of  
 Windhoek General Notice  
 No. 77

Section 1 defines "noise nuisance" as "any sound which disturbs or impairs, or is likely to disturb or impair, the convenience, peace, safety or health of any person residing in the municipal area ."Section 2 prohibition of noise nuisance in the municipal area, on or from -(a) a street;(b) a public place; (c) any property belonging to the Council; or (d) any other erf, unless a person has written permission from the Council to do so. Section 3(2)(iv) permits sound emitted by a bell building clock from a church or (v) onsite recreational and sporting activities.

Deals with the regulation of noise pollution.

Source: Author's construction

As indicated in Table 1 above, in line with Namibia's Constitution, Namibia is a secular democratic State, implying that the government does not endorse and protect a single religious belief - it is not a State controlled by a specific religion. Namibia's stand corresponds with that of democratic and secular states internationally, including the USA, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, as outlined in the Constitutions of the different countries. Post-1990 Article 21(1), the Constitution of Namibia granted citizens freedom of religion, which led to the great need for land to be used for places of worship. Because of the increase, the local municipalities face the challenge of finding ways to accommodate the growing number of places of worship while considering aspects that can create local problems, such as noise pollution and unauthorized construction of places of worship. The municipalities should meet the need for land on which places of worship should be developed based on the country's constitution, municipal laws, and policies.

The challenge local municipalities face in Namibia, especially Windhoek is like what other countries are experiencing, such as Ghana and Nigeria, where the development of places of worship is unauthorized and disregards the municipal legal procedures. Places of worship in Namibia are classified as spaces or buildings used mainly for spiritual or religious purposes and include other buildings designed for social and recreational activities linked to the same place of worship and built on the same site. The definition is like other definitions used in other countries. It indicates that places of worship in the country ascribe to religious neoliberalism, where religion includes other related activities supported by neoliberalism. The above is corroborated by Boland et al. (2020).

The Local Authorities Act 23 and Noise Control Regulations define noise pollution, and all residents are prohibited from making noise unless they have permission from the municipality. Those who intend to establish places of worship or occupy such places should familiarize themselves with these Acts and policies and comply with the requirements stipulated in these documents. In response to the growing number of churches, Windhoek barred land sales for houses of worship for ten years (2009 to 2018). In this instance, Namibia took a different route than other places, such as Southwark Council (Southwark Council, 2013). It dampened the demand for land for houses of worship by banning land sales for religious purposes.

The poor locations and authorized developments of places of worship in residential areas were not a result of poor land use planning or the lack of laws and policies that guide the development of these places. It resulted from religious groups/ institutions flouting legislation or needing to be more familiar with the processes that should be followed when applying for land and establishing these

places. It can also misinterpret the freedom of religion stated in Article 21 (1). The practice is corroborated by the study by Ajiero, Oguike, and Udotong (2022) done in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of urban planning policies in establishing places of worship in Namibia using the City of Windhoek as a study area. The study concludes that laws and policies related to urban planning facilitate and support the construction of places of worship in Namibia. The application of urban planning policies in this country does not discriminate against places of worship - in the same way that they impact other institutions and provide a favorable treatment of places of worship in terms of sound emitted by a bell, building clocks, or onsite recreational and sporting activities from these institutions as stated in the Noise Control Regulations.

The researchers hope this study can contribute to the literature on the role of urban planning policies in establishing places of worship in Namibia and to the broader discussions about the international relationship between the region and urban planning. Future studies should include the application process for land for places of worship in different municipalities. This research suggests that places of worship be appropriately located and integrated into neighborhoods and land use/urban planning policies, as banning the sale of land to churches in Namibia was to consult widely and develop a better solution. Further studies should include the role of places of worship in sustainable development.

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