



The Exclusion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Planning Open Spaces in Namibia: The Case of Havana, Windhoek

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Abstract

The lack of accessible and valuable public open spaces for socio-cultural activities is a concern in low-income urban areas. Through an indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) lens, we explored indigenous cultural open spaces (the *olupale* and *omuvanda*) of two communities in Namibia and their relevance to urban areas. This qualitative study included interviews, informal discussions, sharing circles (focus groups) storytelling, and participatory observation with the two rural communities. In the Havana low-income area in Windhoek, observations, semi-formal interviews and discussions were used. The study found, on the one hand, that planning practices excluded marginalised urban communities due to reliance on a single modernist rational problem-solving process. On the other hand, and through an indigenous knowledge paradigm, aspects such as community respect, well-being, cooperation, environmental respect, and care being taught, lived, and experienced at cultural open spaces, were mostly excluded. Planning in Windhoek overlooked these vital well-being components, to the detriment of the communities. Existing spatial IKS could help planning in addressing the well-being of low-income residential areas and their residents. This paper is therefore foregrounding IKS in planning and argues that such IKS integration will facilitate the improvement of diverse forms of living spaces, including poor and low-income spaces in urban areas.

Keywords Cultural open spaces · Indigenous knowledge systems · Low-income settlements · Modernist planning · Olupale · Omuvanda

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Introduction

Open spaces contribute to communities' social lives and their sense of place (Strydom & Puren, 2013:34). While often overlooked through modernist planning approaches (Fadamiro et al., 2012), open spaces' importance to communities' well-being is emphasised (Abbasi et al., 2016; Landman, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2020:117). Various descriptions of well-being exist, but most converge on "well-being to include the satisfaction of material needs, experience of freedom, health, personal security, good social relations and healthy natural environment" (Sangha et al., 2015:198). In addition to that description, Davis (2019:Online) emphasises that good mental health and an ability to manage stress are important well-being indicators as well.

The role of open spaces in well-being is that they co-constitute a critical component of 'social infrastructure', which plays a role in connecting diverse people in the city (Landman, 2019). However, existing neoliberal market-led public open space provision processes on the African continent tend to favour the rich who appropriate the best land for their settlements (Goodfellow, 2013:86). Consequently, wastelands, river courses and hills are allocated to low-income areas (Strydom & Puren, 2013:36), thus contributing to a shortage of useable spaces. Such shortage affects poorer communities' well-being negatively, while equally hampering the creation of sustainable communities (Cilliers et al., 2021). Urban planning is implicated in these discriminatory approaches, as town planning legislation requires the provision of public open spaces in residential areas (Friedman, 2000:24; Watson, 2014:117). Current planning approaches in the global South generally, and on the African continent in particular, are largely embedded in modernist 'Western-style' urban development codes (Goodfellow, 2013:84). As a result, many African urban areas design well-planned settlements through their vision plans, including public spaces that are imaged after the notions of "world class city", which is viewed as the ideal modern city (Guma, 2021:4). We argue that this modernist planning does not reach the intended targeted developments, especially those aimed at uplifting poor areas (Guma, 2021:9). Such post-colonial and post-industrial modernised style of urbanisation lead to the destruction of important indigenous cultural spaces, and other living, historical and symbolic features, by replacing them with modern buildings under the pre-text of beautifying the city (Fadamiro et al., 2012; Gewald, 2009).

However, in Southern African spaces where planning incorporated indigenous terms and concepts, the outcomes still favoured the wealthier and powerful groups (Hammami, 2012; Sihlongonyane, 2015). In the South African case where indigenous cultural metaphors were incorporated into planning policies for example, the metaphors are critiqued as having become empty signifiers to the poorer residents (Sihlongonyane, 2020). The metaphors end up benefitting the elite groups, while the poorer areas targeted for improvement remain marginalised (Sihlongonyane, 2020:467). This echoes Amin's (2008) earlier assertions that in the current neoliberal sphere, the rich and elites tend to withdraw from collective responsibilities in cities. Sihlongonyane (2020:467) observed that indigenous metaphors were co-opted into the policies without being accompanied by important cultural values such as communalism and reciprocity. Such cultural absence contributes to unequal cultural landscapes and economic frameworks, while engendering unsustainable developments

that consequently exclude the majority of urban residents (Nawa et al., 2014:165; UN-Habitat, 2020:174).

In the context of this paper, we focus on the importance of usable open spaces to communities' well-being. We argue that despite exclusionary planning practices, indigenous communities continue to practice their respective place-based cultures in urban areas for their well-being (Fadamiro et al., 2012; Hammami, 2012; Molebatsi, 2021; Molebatsi & Morobolo, 2021). In contemporary Nigeria, for example, the few existing indigenous public open spaces that survived modernisation are still viewed as symbols of healthy communal living standards, and they sustain settlements and the local people's value systems (Fadamiro et al., 2012:56). The same well-being attributes linked to cultural communal open spaces were recorded from the Tswana community in Botswana's urban villages (Hammami, 2012; Molebatsi, 2021). Similar well-being importance of cultural or community open spaces were also found in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada (Marek, 2020; Puketapu-Dentice et al., 2017; Thompson-Fawcett et al., 2019), Chile (Caulkins, 2018) and East and Central Asia (Agustina & Hindersah, 2019). From recent resurgent approaches in Chile, the indigenous communities identified vacant rubbish sites in the city to recreate their cultural activities on them with permission of local authorities (Caulkins, 2018). This not only enabled the communities to engage in cultural spatial practices that were erased during colonialism, but also improved their sense of belonging in the city (Caulkins, 2018:85).

In this paper, IKS are defined as a body of knowledge and beliefs by specific people, handed down generations through oral tradition, which comprises systems of community and spatial organisation, environmental observation, and self-management to govern resources and their uses (Anwar, 2011:137; Mekoa, 2018:19). Pre-dating the colonial period, IKS was erased and dismissed as unscientific and inferior during colonialism (Anwar, 2011:138; Zegeye & Vambe, 2006:352). Yet some of its elements and attributes survived and are still in use (Jojola, 1998; Mekoa, 2018; Muashekele et al., 2018; Walker & Matunga, 2013). It is this IKS, especially the indigenous spatial practices that were, and still largely continue to be, silenced by post-colonial modernist planning approaches in urban areas (Molebatsi, 2021:29) that we draw attention to.

We align with the argument that IKS exclusion is largely due to mainstream planning's definitions and conceptualisations largely based on western epistemologies, which render the implementation of alternative knowledges impossible (Barry & Porter, 2011:178; Sihlongonyane, 2020:467). For example, the institutions and policies rigidly prescribe land uses for compliance and adherence, even if it is in contradiction with the residents' survival strategies, organisations and well-being aspirations (Barry & Porter, 2011:178; Oranje et al., 2020:8). Drawing on health well-being theories, Mackean et al. (2022) demonstrate that the narrow policy conceptualisation is based on individual, social or environmental aspects, and ends up excluding the broader communal aspirations of indigenous relational practices that are aimed at multiple methods of well-being (Mackean et al., 2022:1). This IKS exclusion is exacerbated by globalisation processes that promote westernization as the ideal approach to development, in liaison with other aspects such as neoliberalism, corruption and patriarchy (Mbenzi, 2018; Mekoa, 2018:24). Nevertheless, scholars are increasingly

recognising that IKS values, concepts and practices are invaluable in resolving contemporary urban problems (Guma, 2021; Melore & Nel, 2020). For instance, Guma (2021:2) argues that building knowledges displayed by the informal settlements' residents offer useful alternatives to current dominant neoliberal and market driven interventions. In the same vein, Melore and Nel (2020:1) assert that IKS could be valuable in assisting government efforts for climate change adaptation.

However, scholars warned that clarification of IKS concepts is essential if it is to be applied in planning and other development projects, or to prevent some cultures dominating others, which could perpetuate inequalities (Baas, 2019; Budwa & McCreary, 2013:196; Young, 2008:73). Scholars argue that the proper translation of IKS terms, including an understanding of their tangible and intangible meanings, could contribute to the reduction of inequalities, conflicts, domination, and unending failing development projects (Porter, 2010; Umemoto, 2001). Umemoto (2001:17) argued that, still, proper and respectful translation remain essential as it assist in expanding "epistemological worlds". She argued that such an engagement enables an increased understanding of local communities, their way of life, their conceptualisation of cultural spaces, and the power relations involved in producing and maintaining such spaces (ibid.). The increased IKS understanding enable or empower planners to incorporate cultural spatial practices into planning policies and approaches (Puketapu-Dentice et al., 2017:6).

In this study, we explored cultural open spaces of two indigenous communities in Namibia as case studies. The exploration was to identify which spatial IKS, still existing and useful, could be harnessed by planning as important tools that can assist in improving the well-being of the communities in low-income areas such as Havana in Windhoek. The two cultural open spaces, the *olupale* of the Ovawambo community, and the *omuvanda* with its *okuruwo* of the Ovaherero community, provided important insights in this regard. The *olupale* is a central place within the homestead where visitors are welcomed and served a meal and is occasionally used for storytelling and games amongst many other activities in the Ovawambo culture. Other intra-group names for *olupale* space are *oshoto*, *oshinyange* (University of Namibia [UNAM] 2002:9). In the Ovaherero community, between the great (main) house and the *okuruwo* (sacred shrine/holy fire) there is an imaginary passage known as *omuvanda*, literally 'flat space'. The whole area between the houses and the *okuruwo* is known as *omuvanda*, but the imaginary narrow passage between the great house and *okuruwo* is the most restricted sacred area (Kavari, 2001:126).

Place-Based IKS: Arguments for Cultural Open Spaces

The term 'indigenous people' is defined differently around the world. In this study, we use the term indigenous to refer to those people of African descent that inhabit Namibia, whether before, during or after colonialism. The Namibian historical and cultural literature emphasise the significance of communal (or cultural) open spaces for the respective communities, especially through their facilitation of well-being practices centred around recreation, religion, education, decision-making and environmental management (Williams, 1994:49–50; Kavari, 2001:124–130; UNAM,

2002). Molebatsi and Morobolo (2021:134) in the context of Botswana, argue that the cultural spaces such as the *bogosi* and *kgotla*, are multifunctional, and celebrate a “collective good” of the community. Furthermore, they “continue to provide viable institutional guidance to planning in urban villages”. Literature beyond the African continent equally recorded similar attributes regarding cultural open spaces. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada for example, an increased sense of belonging and participation were observed in urban areas where cultural open spaces were integrated into planning and the physical environment (Marek, 2020:7; Puketapu-Dentice et al., 2017; Thompson-Fawcett et al., 2019:272).

Thus, with their multiple roles including symbolic and social practices that maintain them, cultural spaces could be described as ‘special places’ in Lefebvre’s space production analysis (1991:34). These symbolic aspects tend to be excluded in modernist market-led planning approaches (Lefebvre, 1991:34). Despite this exclusion, indigenous planning scholars argue that planning should not be viewed as a foreign concept, but as a deeply embedded practice in indigenous communities (Jojola, 1998:117; Walker & Matunga, 2013:15). These scholars, including others from the global South, call for planning to recognise and assist with the recovery of IKS as well as the integration of the marginalised communities in an enlarged shared space (Molebatsi, 2021; Molebatsi & Morobolo, 2021:134; Porter, 2010; Walker & Matunga, 2013:16). In these calls, attention is drawn to planning, which must cease being ignorant of important indigenous spatial histories (Porter et al., 2021:114). We align with those indigenous planning scholars and aim to contribute and promote this type of research in the Namibian context.

The Case of Havana Settlement in Windhoek

Namibia’s urban population grew from 28% in 1990 to 50% in 2018, with half the population living in low-income areas and informal settlements (Lühl & Delgado, 2018:5–7). Havana, representing part of the case studies in this paper, is located on the north-western side of Windhoek, and fall in this low-income formal / informal category. The growing number of residents in low-income urban areas and informal settlements in the country face inequalities not anticipated at independence in 1990. Since then, rapid urbanisation has meant that municipalities – and their planning practices – struggle to provide adequate and useable open spaces in urban areas, particularly in low-income and informal settlements such as Havana. Despite attempting to be normative and inclusive, the benefits of planning do not reach many urban residents in Namibia, especially the low-income groups (Delgado, 2021:49–60), which could be attributed to the exclusion of alternative knowledges such as IKS as we argue in this paper.

Method

This qualitative study was conducted in Havana settlement in Windhoek (Namibia) and in two rural communities using participatory observations and discussions through an indigenous knowledge system framework. This IKS lens permits the

researcher to engage participants through acceptable and culturally appropriate platforms, to consider himself/herself as part of the concerns being researched, and to build and maintain respectful relationships with the participants (Wilson, 2001:177). The study included residents of the Havana settlement ($n=12$), urban planners in private practice, local government and universities ($n=8$), and traditional knowledge holders and elders in the rural Ovawambo and the Ovaherero communities ($n=22$).

Participant observations of the rural settlements (during ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and festivals) provided insight into the traditional use of open spaces. To gain consent and trust of the participants, indigenous approaches of respecting cultural approaches were adhered to. According to Smith (2012:130), in all indigenous community approaches, the process is an important aspect of the engagement. The process is far more important than the outcome, and all community development projects need to be informed by community-based research that respects and enhances community processes (Smith 2012:130).

In Havana, observations were aimed at the everyday use of the few available open spaces and activities occurring spontaneously in-between the houses. Individual and group interviews and informal discussions were conducted with all the participants, using the main prompts indicated below.

1. *What Value do Spatial Indigenous Knowledge Systems have for Their (Largely Rural) Communities?*
2. *Could these Spatial Indigenous Knowledge Systems be of Value in Urban Areas?*

For the urban residents and rural indigenous participants, a purposive snowball sampling approach was used (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:562). The smaller sample size in the urban area was adopted to obtain a more in-depth perspective of the Havana residents (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:563). The planning practitioners and academics were purposively sampled to gain insights into their understanding of the issue being explored (De Vos et al., 2005). Other methods such as storytelling and informal discussions complemented the interviews. The data were analysed using thematic coding.

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of the Free state. Semi-structured interviews and participatory observations were conducted accordingly. Municipal permission was equally obtained in order to engage with the planning staff of the Windhoek municipality.

Findings

This section discusses the findings relating to the rural communities' IKS, the situation in Havana, the residents' perspectives and the planners' opinions.

Spatial IKS from Rural Communities: Examples of *Olupale* and *Omuwanda*

Both the Ovawambo (*olupale*) and Ovaherero (*omuwanda*) communities confirmed that open spaces served as their traditional religious, health and educational insti-

tutions (Elders $n=5$; Knowledge holders $n=6$). The educational role was observed through storytelling during important and highly participative ceremonial events. The storytelling and educational role of these cultural spaces confirmed the assertions in the literature that such spaces facilitate an intergenerational dialogue that contributes to solving some of the pressing problems and land use conflicts in society (Porter, 2010:41; Rukero, 2015:46; Williams, 1994:49). Additionally, these spaces serve equally as children's play and fitness areas, peace and happiness spaces, while misbehaviour and alcohol abuse are highly discouraged at the sacred areas (Elders $n=4$; Knowledge holders $n=4$). Such spatial principles, especially that of prohibition, were found to be at the origin of social spaces in general (Lefebvre, 1991:35). The cultural spaces were further described as containing high levels of respect for women, as some important homestead activities do not take place if the wife (or main wife if many) is not present (Elders $n=2$; Knowledge holders $n=2$). The high responsibility, participation and cooperation aspects observed in cultural open spaces from the two communities, were found in other communities in Indonesia (Agustina & Hindersah, 2019:7), New Zealand and Australia (Marek, 2020; Puketapu-Dentice et al., 2017; Thompson-Fawcett et al., 2019).

Participant observation and informal group discussions revealed mix-land use in cultural open spaces as well as land use similarities and differences highlighted in the literature. The *olupale* for example consist of a kitchen area (*epata*) used by women, a birthing and healing hut, a newborn naming and ancestral honouring space at the sacred fire, and a gathering space for boys at special occasions (Williams, 1994). Similar uses with use differences were observed and reported in the *omuvanda* case (Kavari, 2001). Interestingly, a small open space in front of the main house is called *orupare* in the Ovaherero community and is mainly reserved for women and girls to discuss issues of community concern during certain social gatherings (Rukero, 2015). An awareness of the differences and similarities around these cultural spaces is crucial for planning. For example, the holy fire at the *omuvanda* was kept alight by women in the Ovaherero community, while this function was left to the boys in the Ovambo community at the *olupale* (Elders, $n=4$).

Participatory observations revealed that certain steps needed to be adhered to and completed before the event or ceremony could be regarded as successful and blessed, both by the community present and the ancestors (Elders, $n=3$). Understanding these mixed land uses, including the movements between the activity points, enables the construction of a sense of meaning in such spatial arrangements (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones, 2012:182).

Urban Residents' Aspirations and Planning Constraints

The residents of Havana emphasised the importance of public open spaces, especially cultural open spaces to their well-being. Aspects raised as essential included the important physical training activities for younger and older children, and the protection of the different cultures present in their area (Residents $n=5$). They stressed the importance of equal sharing with calendars and programmes if such spaces were to be successful, and the potential such cultural spaces possess in reducing conflicts. Given the diverse ethnic groups and communities residing in Havana, conflicts around the

usage of open spaces cannot be ruled out. Some residents indicated that the majority groups tended to dominate space usage at times (Residents $n=2$). Studies that explored reasons behind tensions from open space usage in other African contexts listed insufficient space, language differences and competition for limited products as the main contributors to conflicts (Agboola et al., 2016:43). Another important motivation raised by the residents is that the availability of sufficient open spaces will not only be dominated by the male children with their soccer/football events as is currently the case but will enable the female children to equally have opportunity to play (Residents $n=3$). On this point, observations revealed many more male soccer events during weekends on the few available open spaces in Havana and other low-income residential areas while female sports were rarely observed or encountered. This is in accordance with Landman's (2020:211) observations that such "mono-culturally dominated" open spaces increase inequalities as accessibility is largely reduced for some groups.

Given the harsh economic conditions in which the residents of Havana and other similar areas find themselves, the residents expressed their wish for these cultural open spaces to be used for economic activities as well (Residents $n=3$). This is a call that planning should become more flexible and open to land uses in which mixing of activities with minimum control are allowed in certain areas (Nel, 2016:89). Mix uses on communal spaces were reported to be a characteristic of many historical and contemporary indigenous settlements (Molebatsi, 2021; Muashekele et al., 2018; Symonds, 2009).

The Planners' Acknowledgement of Undermining IKS

The residents' comments converged with those of the planning practitioners and the planning academics as well. The planners and academics acknowledged that there was a serious lack of useful open spaces in the low-income areas, especially those that could be used for cultural and economic purposes (Planners $n=3$; Academics $n=2$). The planners (both practitioners and academics) agreed that various IKS inspired practices are observed in urban areas, and although useful, they are often not supported due to existing policies and laws excluding such knowledge. This is in line with scholars who contend that although current planning is normative, it is rigidly framed that alternative knowledges are impossible to implement (Barry & Porter, 2011; Sihlongonyane, 2020). However, the planners acknowledged the fact that they themselves undermined, ignored or did not consider important spatial IKS in their planning practice. One of the planning participants had this to say after being introduced to the topic of IKS and purpose of this study:

Aha, now that you are talking of IKS, we planners are really guilty in that respect, we really do not consider IKS in our planning (Planner $n=1$).

The findings revealed a high level of awareness of the existence of IKS by planners, even some demonstrating how it is manifested in urban areas under certain circumstances outside the planning realm. One response confirmed seeing residents using IKS to improve the internal walling of their houses for thermal control of their mod-

ern buildings (Planner $n=1$). Another response argued that some residents' survival and economic activities led municipalities to create business corridors such as Eve-line Street in Goreangab, also a part of Katutura in Windhoek (Planner $n=1$). Specific groups were also found to engage in place-based indigenous practices as well. For example, the Damara ethnic group ladies organised cultural evenings at their houses to disseminate cultural knowledge to younger members, while the Kavango residents identified open spaces in the city where their rural counterparts could display and sell their wood carved products (Planners $n=2$).

The diverse languages are an important aspect to consider when planning for different communities located in one space such as Havana. One planner participant emphasised the importance to acknowledge differences, and to engage in proper listening and compromising approaches when planning spaces for different uses to reduce conflicts.

Consequences of Lack of Open Spaces in Havana

The findings reveal that current planning in Windhoek focuses on the provision of basic services and housing while other important issues are overlooked. The lack of adequate and useful open spaces is one such concern due to competing priorities characterising large parts of the global South (Cilliers et al., 2021:92). Municipal policies such as the Windhoek Open Space Policy (2001) emphasises the important role public open spaces play in communities. However, the prescriptions in those policies focus on the production and/or protection of natural open spaces for relaxation in the city (Municipality of Windhoek, 2001:4), thus ignoring the everyday communal experiences of the residents.

The residents of Havana raised issues of stress in adults and children, due to the absence of usable open spaces in their area. Children are confronted with unhygienic conditions when they have to use rubbish sites as playgrounds, while the community have to use small open spaces between houses for cultural activities (Resident $n=3$). The rubbish sites pose health risks as they serve as breeding grounds for diseases such as hepatitis-E, cholera, and tuberculosis, as reported in studies and the media (Nakuta, 2021:34; Ndalikokule, 2019:6). Other residents stressed that the few available open spaces have gendered use (Residents $n=2$).

The residents highlighted the consequences of stress such as increased neighbour conflicts, children searching faraway play areas where they end up in drug abuse situations, girls ending up in shebeens due to a lack of youth development spaces (Residents $n=3$). Shebeens are home-based liquor outlets, where patrons can gather and enjoy alcohol and food while listening and dancing to music.

Despite the shortages, the residents of Havana creatively use streets or spaces between their houses for cultural activities, sometimes having to overcome rigid policies such as the traffic and land use regulations (Resident $n=3$). At times, the younger residents negotiate with elders for permission to use streets for one to two hours for income generating cultural activities (Resident $n=1$).

Implications of Open Spaces for Communities and Urban Planning

The exploration of cultural open spaces in the rural areas added an increased understanding of how communities apply and create cultural open spaces for their holistic well-being. Thus, planning is urged to not only focus on cities but consider all types of settlements (cities, towns and villages) as they display important and relevant social, economic and cultural interactions of the local communities in their lived spaces (Smith et al., 2021:2). The *olupale* and *omuvanda* communal open spaces possess characteristics such as spontaneous participation and responsibility initiatives, which modernist collaborative and communicative planning approaches are failing to satisfactorily achieve or understand in urban areas. These communal spaces link the spiritual, emotional, physical and psychological components of human beings, and we call for their consideration when addressing the issues of inequalities and injustices facing individuals, families and communities (Mekoa, 2018:20). For Lefebvre (1991:26), social spaces are “special spaces” and important community anchoring areas to achieve communal goals, and their social and symbolic values should not be separated from the physical production of places as currently done. Community well-being displayed in the *olupale* and *omuvanda* cultural open spaces could be elevated, or “re-inscribed” (to borrow from Molebatsi & Morobolo, 2021) in urban areas to address problems associated with community stress and unhygienic living conditions where there is a lack of open spaces. This is one way to counter modernist planning approaches that focus on ‘world city’ standards that undermine local and indigenous knowledges (Guma, 2021; Mekoa, 2018), thus perpetuating inequalities. According to Marek (2020:10), indigenous community open spaces and their related structures are resources that could contribute to the treatment of problems such as homelessness, disaster management and health issues. Such re-inscription, as we argue in this paper, is particularly important for low-income areas where globally, they have been deprived of, or lack useable open spaces (Abbasi et al., 2016).

The shortage of useable open spaces leads to high stress levels for adults and children, as the residents of Havana attested. Consequently, the residents cannot manage this stress as their socio-spatial arrangements do not provide such opportunities. This study further revealed that the low understanding or ignorance of planners towards IKS could also be a contributing factor. The planning practitioners, mostly trained in the dominant western conceptualisations of open spaces and their role in community well-being, end up with a low appreciation and understanding of IKS. This leads not only to low treatment of IKS in planning practice and policies, but also its erasure as an inferior system of knowledge (Porter, 2010:148; Sihlongonyane, 2015:62). The IKS embedded aspects such as communalism and reciprocity (Sihlongonyane, 2020), are side-lined in favour of the individualistic experiences on open spaces as MacKean et al. (2022) contended. The consequence is an absence or low provision of open spaces, and poor maintenance of the few existing ones, thus becoming places of social ills such as crime and vandalism. The long existence of these problems proves that the Windhoek municipality, relying heavily on modernist and western notions of public open spaces, cannot prevent or eliminate these undesirable living conditions on its own. Abbasi et al. (2016:194) concluded, often the planned open spaces in less wealthier areas do not meet the needs and expectations of the residents.

Another negative consequence that shortage of open spaces holds for residents is the difficulty to practice cultural events in urban areas, thus impacting their socio-cultural well-being adversely. The absence of open spaces leads to a fear of culture loss in urban areas as raised by the residents. However, during this study, there was a steady resurgence of cultural activities observed in Windhoek's low-income areas. This takes place on unplanned or unsuitable spaces, hence the need and demand for cultural open spaces. The planners demonstrated their awareness of these IKS practices in urban areas, but responded that current policies, and they themselves, do not accommodate such activities for compliance reasons. This is linked to the rigidity of the policies and their inflexibility to accommodate alternative knowledges as alluded to earlier. To embrace IKS, we suggest that planning concepts should consider local spatial values such as local indigenous wisdom, as they will enrich planning processes and improve the understanding of multiple meanings of spaces (Agustina et al., 2016:16). The findings around the cultural *omuvanda* and *olupale* open spaces during ceremonies or festivals, improved understanding of land uses in those indigenous communities. Furthermore, they provide an understanding why some places are highly valued by the communities compared to others, something which planners need to take into consideration. The high cooperation and responsibility characteristics displayed during cultural ceremonies are valuable tools for planning to seriously reflect on transforming its space production practices in urban areas. Promotion of cultural open spaces will require a reconceptualization of public open spaces towards a more inclusive description that includes IKS based aspects as revealed in this study.

This paper aligns with the earlier planning and indigenous scholars' calls for urban planning to adopt a cultural lens in order to become inclusive (Burayidi, 2003:259; Jojola, 1998; Sandercock, 2003:321). Such an approach will open planning up to various alternative knowledges such as those embedded in IKS found in Namibia. The longue-durée of indigenous spatial practices and settlements in rural areas reveal that residents had found ways to solve social problems through cooperation, coordination and collective action (Smith et al., 2021:2). Their urban appearance in recent resurgent activities, although limited, show communities organising skills in reviving these cultural spaces and activities to ensure their well-being.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows the significance of IKS in planning and the different spatial production thinking such knowledge represents. It further highlights that spatial practices found in rural areas in the Namibian context should be considered in the creation of useable and inclusive community open spaces in urban areas. The persistence of *olupale* and *omuvanda*, from the pre-colonial era to the present, through interconnected, participatory, cooperative and collective principles ensured community cohesion and unity, and demonstrate lessons for conventional planning in Namibia.

Thus, the following recommendations are proposed to assist an initial transformation. Firstly, planning institutions, from the state, municipal to the tertiary educational institutions should revisit major planning theories and practices used and taught and accept alternative contributions from local and indigenous communities'

spatial practices and knowledges. Secondly, planning practice in Namibia should move away from top-down approaches and promote planning together (co-creation) with the residents. Thirdly, the *olupale* and *omuvanda* cultural open spaces are not the only examples existing in Namibia. More research is needed on other groups for planning to become inclusive. This will assist the reconceptualization process of the type of usable open spaces required for the improvement of well-being of both the low-income areas and their residents. Lastly, urban planners should be encouraged to broaden their perspectives by opening up to spatial IKS, even those found in rural areas.

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