

A Quantitative Study of Places of Worship in Windhoek, Namibia

Ritta Khiba¹, Daphne Ntlhe¹

¹ *University of KwaZulu-Natal*

238 Mazisi Kunene Rd, Glenwood, Durban, 4041, South Africa

² *Ritta Khiba Planning Consultants CC*

1012 Virgo Street, Doradopark, PO Box 22543, Windhoek, Windhoek, Namibia

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Corresponding Author:

Daphne Ntlhe

ntlhed@ukzn.ac.za

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Abstract. Since Namibia's independence, religious diversity in Windhoek has increased, and the city faces the challenge of a rapidly growing number of places of worship, which raises concerns amongst the government authorities and residents. This article aims to determine the number of churches in Windhoek and their spatial distribution pattern within the city boundaries in twenty-seven suburbs and excluded peripheral areas. It is guided by the religious neoliberal theory, in which God and religion are commodified and commercialized. The spatial aspect of the places of worship is explained based on the Hoyt sector theory and the Multi-nuclei model. These theories describe urban land uses and how these land uses develop from the city centre in a pattern of circles. Data from four databases was converted into quantitative data and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The above is done by highlighting the number of existing houses of worship and clarifying why there is such a number in an area. The study results revealed 300 religious groups or organizations associated with worship gatherings and 249 places of worship in the study area. Therefore, the study concluded that the 249 worship houses spatially signify the religious diversity of Windhoek's population. It cannot be stated that the site has many worship houses because the existing ones are essential as they represent the religious diversity in the locality. The results are critical in that they will bring clarity to the stakeholders who grapple with the issue of places of worship in Windhoek.

Keywords: Churches; Houses of Worship; Place of Worship; Social Infrastructure; Spatial Planning.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is an inherent part of many people's lives and has a material and spiritual effect on human life. From a worldly perspective, religion is perceived as engendering religious interests, institutions, and social classes. While in a theological position, it is linked to social and individual behaviour patterns that assist religious people in shaping their lifestyle [1]. Globally, the religious profile is changing at an alarming rate, mainly due to the changes in fertility rates, the number of youth among the significant religions internationally, and people who change faiths/religious beliefs. While it may be true that traditional religion is decreasing due to an in-

crease in the number of people who prefer spirituality over religious dogmas, the way cities have been designed, at least since the 19th century, is still being followed up to the present era [2].

In 2022, the world population was 7,953,953,000, and 84% of this population identified with a religious organization or grouping. In the same year, the global urban population was 4,533,667,000, and the urban Christian population was 1,687,465,000 [3]. Since Namibia's independence, religious diversity has increased in Windhoek as people from different backgrounds immigrated to the city. Additionally, the city has experienced an increase in population, and the municipality faces challenges in accommodating houses of worship [4]. Namibia's Con-

stitution proscribes religious discrimination and affords freedom of religion. It professes and promotes any religious belief and the right to practice. Together with other laws of the country, it allows the recognition of any religious group as a voluntary association [5].

Given the freedom of religion assured by the Constitution in Namibia, Christianity has spread faster compared to Islam or Muslim, resulting in many Christian denominations. By 2012, 45 Religious institutions in Namibia represented different faith groups. Approximately 15 Christian churches are affiliated with the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), which started in the 1980s to fight against colonialism. The largest denomination in the city is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), followed by the Roman Catholic, Methodist Church, New Apostolic Church, Seven-day Adventist Church, and Pentecostal Church. Churches in Namibia are the leading employers. The churches play a significant role in poverty alleviation [6].

About 50% of Namibians identify as Lutheran, 20% as Catholic, and the other religious groups, comprised of Anglican, Dutch Reformed, Seventh Adventist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal denominations, evangelicals, charismatics, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, constitute 27% of the Christian population. The remaining 3% is comprised of Muslims, Baha'is, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, and other non-Christian religious groups, and they are found mainly in urban areas [5]. According to Kapuka & Hlasny [7] and the United Nations Development Programme [8], churches in Namibia occupy 136 088 hectares (0.34%) of the total land area of Agricultural (Commercial) land, which is 39 728 364 hectares.

The spiritual and social aspects of humans manifest spatially and have consequences. Religion manifests in neighbourhood space through religious buildings central to the urban areas' spatial layout and affairs [9]. In Namibia, there are challenges and concerns by the public and authorities regarding the mushrooming of new places of worship. Namibian Christian Freedom Fighters (NCFF), a Christian activist group, complains that there is unfair treatment and unconstitutional closure of churches by police. On the other hand, the president of the Association for Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches of Namibia (ACPCN) complained that the bourgeoning of churches

and prosperity gospel threatens Namibia's peace and stability [5].

Windhoek municipality banned the sale of land to churches in 2009 because of concerns about the "mushrooming" of churches. The city received many applications from religious groups for land or consent to use residential land as places of worship. The ban would be implemented until detailed information, such as statistics on recognized charismatic and governing church associations in Namibia, is available to the municipal council, amongst other issues [10]. The ban was lifted after the city council approved a policy for institutional land in 2018.

The community asserts that the activities of churches, amongst other things, profit-making through sales of anointed masks, water, oil, and other prophetic items, are a cause for concern. Following the above activities amongst others, Currently, the public views modern Christianity as characterized by deceit, the robbery of the faithful, dishonesty, and grand-scale thievery due to the above activities [11]. According to Burchardt [12] and Knott, Krech, and Meyer [13], cities are places of religious transformation and podiums for spiritual activities, ceremonies, and celebrations that contribute to urban consumer cultures, the construction of urban identities, and city images.

Given the above concerns, this study aimed to establish the number of places of worship in the city and their spatial distribution. The question that has to be answered is: How many recognized places of worship are in Windhoek, and where are they located? One can also assume that there are many places of worship in Windhoek, given the freedom of religion and the complaint that there are mushrooming churches in the area. Therefore, it is essential to verify if the residents' concern about an oversupply of places of worship is factual and that before the number of informal churches can be traced, the number of formal churches should be sketched out.

The paper, therefore, extends the literature in spatial planning and development that will assist all stakeholders in addressing the challenges faced by the public and the City of Windhoek in addressing the issues surrounding churches. It is also vital in bridging the gap in the literature as more research focuses on the spiritual, political, cultural, and social aspects of churches, neglecting the spatial component of religion (places of

worship), which impacts a city's daily activities, and its spatial design or form.

Internationally, the paper will enhance the literature with a spatial focus on Namibia and provide a record of contemporary research undertaken to create new knowledge in geography, environmental studies, and spatial development. The findings of this study are limited to Windhoek in the Khomas region. Though the study is limited to the study area, it provides a data set for researchers interested in places of worship locally and internationally.

Theoretical Framework. This study is built on the Religious Neoliberal Theory [14] that Khiba and Ntlhe [15] applied to the Namibian situation. In this context, religious neoliberalism is a model for managing religious groups, and in the model, God and region are commodified and commercialized. Regarding the spatial aspects of the places of worship in the study area, the Hoyt sector theory [16] and the Multi-nuclei model [17] are applied to explain the space use of worship houses in urban Windhoek. These theories describe urban land uses and how these land uses develop from the city centre in a pattern of circles.

The theories advocate that the centre of a town has high-rent activities followed by a low-rental residential sector for workers, a hierarchy of middle-class accommodation, and the peripheries housing for the upper-income class [16]. The Hoyt Sector Theory advocates that high-rent areas are positioned around the city centre in sectors, and the transformation of these sectors depends on accessibility variations from a central business district. The Multi-Nuclei Theory enhanced the Hoyt Sector Theory, which states that cities expand because of the development of multiple business districts along significant routes, some far from the central business district [17].

In the Multi-Nuclei Theory, urban land uses become a succession of differing land uses because of changes in the existing land uses that developed to become the highest and best alternatives. The theories highlight the relevance of core areas in urbanism and that the growth of cities revolves around a core/ Central Business District (CBD) where accessibility and transportation infrastructure are essential [18].

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A quantitative methodology was adopted, and secondary qualitative data was used to enrich the quantitative data used in the paper. Quantitative research depends on measurement and presumes that the situation or object being studied can be measured. Data was gathered from Google Maps [19], CYBO (Online Global Business Directory) [20], Brabys.com [21], and VYMaps.com [22] databases. The data provided names of the place of worship, the type, and the physical address, including the suburb in which it is located.

The data was cross-checked between the three databases and cleaned to remove duplicates, sites no longer used for religious gatherings, and those without names and locations. The data was converted into a suitable form, quantitative data, and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The statistic was aimed to determine the number of places of worship and the frequency in each suburb. Thus, the different worship houses were identified, and their proximity was highlighted. The study area, Windhoek, is located at the centre of Namibia along longitude 17.0658° E and latitude 22.5609° S (Map 1). It has a total land area of 513300 hectares and a population of 480,100 people [23].

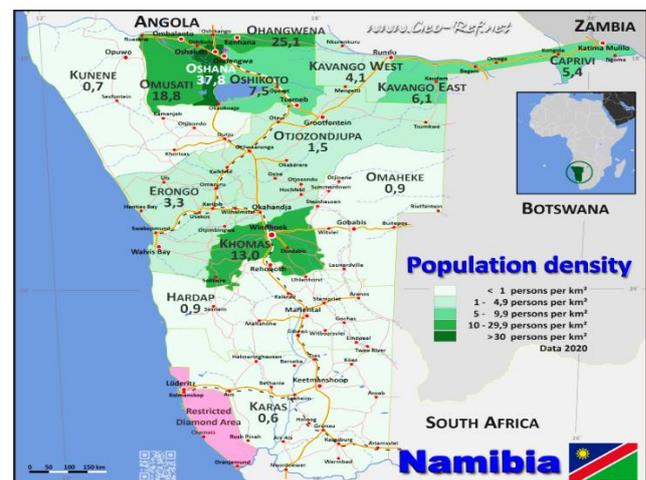


Figure 1 - Windhoek Location [23]

The study covers the entire city except the outlying areas with sparse populations. The location includes 27 suburbs (Table 1).

Table 1 - Windhoek suburbs and their sizes [24-27]

| High-income Suburbs | Size in hectares | High-income Suburbs | Size in hectares |
|--|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Erospark | 129.4228 | Windhoek West | 555.000 |
| Hochland Park | 158.7165 | Windhoek North | 380.000 |
| Klein Windhoek | 841.8354 | Windhoek Central | 259.0000 |
| Lafrenz | 62.9573 | Southern Industrial | 257.0000 |
| Olympia | 222.0346 | Tauben Glen | 93.7242 |
| Pionierspark (including the University of Namibia) | 686.6027 | Ausblik | 154.0000 |
| Prosperity | 235.5359 | Cimbembesia | 21.8639 |
| Rocky Crest | 160.1455 | Ludwigsdorf | 239.0000 |
| Academia | 163.9666 | Olympia | 222.0346 |
| Middle to High-income suburbs (mainly African) | | Low-income and unemployed suburbs | |
| Dorado | 133.9424 | Otjomuise | 251.2053 |
| Khomasdal | 618.6106 | Okuryangava | 266.4119 |
| Katutura (mixed- includes low- | 768.7314 | Hakahana | 42.0678 |
| | | Goreangab | 399.9664 |

| High-income Suburbs (income) | Size in hectares | High-income Suburbs | Size in hectares |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | | Havana/Big Bend | 323.0000 |
| | | Wanaheda | 252.6877 |

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study results revealed 300 religious groups or organizations associated with worship gatherings exist in Windhoek. Only 249 could be positively identified and verified as operating in a worship house, and the remaining 51 could not be located or linked to a building/ structure. The results further indicated that Christian churches dominate. Of the 249 places of worship, only three are mosques, one synagogue, and two Bahai Faith worship houses, and the remaining 243 are Christian churches. Figure 1 below displays the number of places of worship and the suburbs in which they are located.

Number of worship houses per suburb

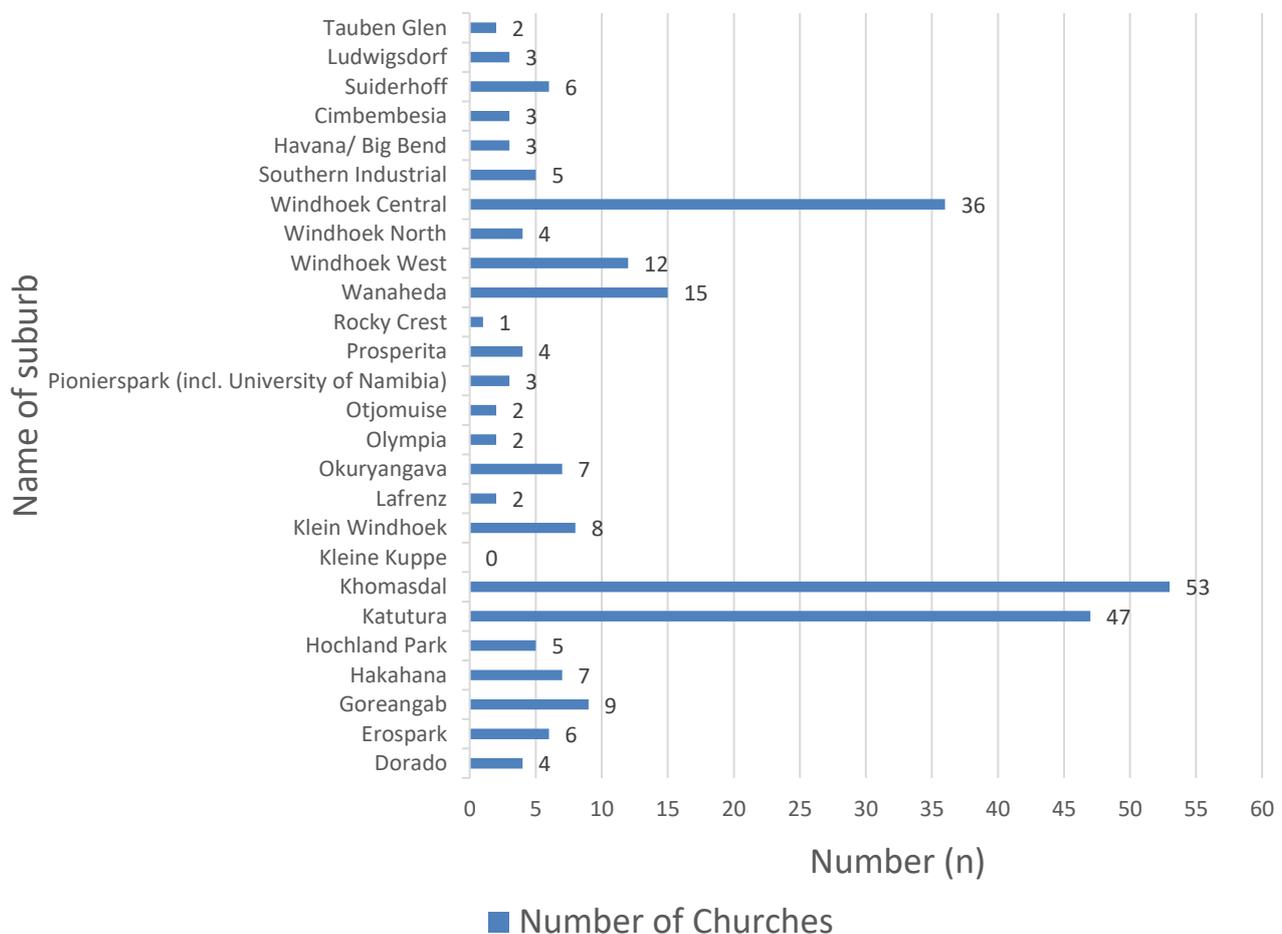


Figure 1 - Number of places of worship and their location

The highest number of churches is in Khomasdal (n=53), Katutura (n=47), and Windhoek Central (n=36). While on the Eastern side, where the high-income suburbs are located, such as Klein Windhoek (n=8), Ludwigsdorf (n=3), Olympia (n=2), and Suiderhof (n=6), there are fewer places of worship. From the results, it can be deduced that the churches are more on the Western side of the city, where the majority are African and mostly underprivileged reside. The spatial distribution of these worship houses corresponds to the population density, transport accessibility, and the development of focus/ central areas outside the city centre.

Residents in high-income areas can afford to travel to the city centre to access places of worship that have become monuments in the city. At the same time, additional churches founded after independence are primarily located in buildings previously used for commercial purposes in the city centre. The high number of places of worship in Khomasdal and Windhoek central can be linked to religious neoliberalism [14, 16, 17]. At the same time, the suburbs like Katutura, Windhoek West, Hanaheda, Hakahana, and Goreangab are more aligned with the population's social, cultural, and spiritual needs, as well as the churches evolving with the population [12-14]. From the above results, places of worship in Windhoek represent the diversity of the population's faith and religious beliefs.

Given that Namibia transitioned from the apartheid era after independence and its Constitution allows for freedom of religion, those who did not have freedom in all aspects of their lives, including religion, will experience incredible transfor-

mation. Thus, many new churches in the African community are on the city's Western side. From this study, it can be concluded that places of worship in the town are not excessive but represent the freedom of religion of the residents, and their right to religion should be respected [1, 2, 5]. In summary, 249 worship houses spatially signify the religious diversity of Windhoek's population.

CONCLUSIONS

The study aims to establish the number of places of worship in the city and their spatial distribution amid concerns that places of worship pose a problem to the authorities and members of the public. Amongst other things, the circumstances were based on the assertion that there are many places of worship. From the study results, 249 places of worship spatially signify the religious diversity of the population. The Namibian Constitution promotes freedom of religion; therefore, it cannot be concluded that there is a high number of worship houses as they represent the different beliefs of the residents in the various neighbourhoods.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that subsequent studies should be conducted to establish if religious groups are operating on premises where the law and municipal regulations prohibit them from doing so. It should be established if the residents' concerns are related to the establishment of places of worship and religious gatherings, as well as cultural and social activities that play a role in the urban identity and image of the neighbourhood.

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