

Traditional Concepts in Spatial Organization in Highland Towns of North Ethiopia

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Abstract

In recent years, interest has been growing in accommodating indigenous knowledge in development planning. In particular, given growing urban problems and weak financial capacity, the adoption of strategic and participatory planning has enabled the active participation of city stakeholders in planning processes. These changes in notions of planning, as well as in approach taken toward the informal sector, have increased the need to integrate local knowledge and resources in planning practice of cities in poor countries. In Ethiopia, as in most countries in Africa, given the extent of the problem, researchers and governments alike concerned with urban development have focused on settlement improvement. The most important subject to go progress in this direction is that understanding the settlements itself.

This paper pursues to find out facts which permit us to understand traditional settlement in towns of North Ethiopia. For that matter, socio-cultural and political values are taken and analysed as major background of overall settlement structure formation. Hence settlement principles and symbolic values are discussed with the intention of understanding the socio-cultural and political values which had shaped the settlement structure in the study area. Most importantly, the influence of socio-political relationship, spiritual and functional meaning attached to locations are underscored.

The paper seeks to show the importance of traditional know-how in promoting an adequate and sustainable urban planning method. For the most part in creating conducive neighbourhood improvement framework, it is first of all necessary to learn from the context. Learning from the context means knowing the reason behind character of overall spatial organisation, as well as the relationship between people and their surrounding environment.