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## **Challenging the conceptual boundaries of the compact city paradigm in sub-Saharan Africa: Towards Southern alternatives**

Donald Brown

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# Challenging the conceptual boundaries of the compact city paradigm in sub-Saharan Africa: Towards Southern alternatives

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**Abstract.** International policy discourses are actively promoting the compact city planning approach as a universal paradigm for achieving sustainable urban development in both the global North and South. These discourses have tended to favour European and American compact cities, thus reinforcing the 'EuroAmerican' version as the dominant paradigm. Consequently, Southern versions of the compact city have been largely excluded from consideration. This paper confronts this rather imperialistic approach to compact city theorisation by challenging the binary opposition between 'First-World' cities that are commonly viewed as models for generating theory and policy and 'Third-World' cities that are commonly viewed as problems in need of external intervention. This paper utilises a method of deconstruction to dislocate the compact city paradigm from EuroAmerica so that it can be reimagined outside the confines of that construction from a Southern perspective. This method is applied to sub-Saharan Africa, where the

compact city paradigm is promoted as a response to 'urban sprawl' and other unsustainable patterns of urbanization.

The findings reveal significant discrepancies between EuroAmerican compact city models and the local realities of cities in sub-Saharan Africa. Conversely, the Southern alternatives 'unlocked' present new opportunities to learn from Southern planning practices and about the local realities they respond to. It is argued that the power relations that have historically favoured EuroAmerican over Southern theorists thus warrant more critical attention in future research efforts concerned with liberating oppressed Southern planning epistemologies. It is further argued that fostering communities of inquiry in which planning theorists and practitioners from different parts of the world could come together to discuss the relevance of planning theory and the conditions under which it could be appropriately applied in different places could provide a way forward within international debates surrounding the compact city among other 'travelling' planning ideas.



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# 1. Introduction

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Cities in the global South face unprecedented demographic challenges. As of 2008, more than half the world's population live in urban areas and it is expected that the majority of all future urban growth will occur in Asia followed by Africa and Latin America (hereafter referred to as the global South) (UNDESA, 2011). Urban populations in the global South are expected to double between 2000 and 2030, while the built-up areas of cities are expected to triple from 200,000 square kilometres to 600,000 square kilometres (Angel et al., 2005). This growth is equal to the world's built-up area in 2000, meaning that cities in the South are in the process of building an entirely new urban world in just three decades (World Bank, 2010).

Whilst Africa is the least urbanized region of the world, it is the second most rapidly urbanizing following Asia. The urban population in Africa is estimated to increase from 37.3 per cent in 2000 to 60.5 per cent in 2050, with the total population reaching the rural-urban tipping point sometime around 2032 (UNDESA, 2011). Moreover, forecasts for urban land cover are highest in sub-Saharan Africa where, based on the highest projections, it is estimated to increase twelve-fold between 2000 and 2050 (Angel et al., 2011). Urban densities will also continue to decline (as they have been doing over the last century) in cities where urbanization rates are high, incomes are growing and transportation costs remain affordable (ibid). These projections demonstrate the on-going trend towards suburbanization (understood here as the combination of non-central population growth and urban spatial expansion), which has typically been associated with European and American cities, but is now beginning to occur in the global South, including sub-Saharan Africa (Bloch, forthcoming; Mabin et al., 2011).

Rapid suburbanization in the global South poses significant challenges for municipal authorities, which typically lack the institutional and fiscal capacity to engage in effective land use planning (UN-Habitat 2009a). Moreover, as Watson (2009a, pp. 2275) argues, "urban planning in many parts of the world reflects an increasing gap between current approaches and growing problems of poverty, inequality, informality, rapid urbanization and spatial fragmentation". International policy discourses led by UN-

Habitat (2009a) and the World Bank (2010) (see also Mofatt et al., 2012) are thus actively exchanging new ideas and 'best' practices on how urban planning can become more effective. Within the debate on urban form, the compact city is widely promoted as a sustainable solution to the social, economic and environmental externalities of 'urban sprawl' and other unsustainable patterns of urbanization (UN-Habitat, 2009a, 2010a, 2011).

These debates have tended to favour European and American compact cities and their state-led (i.e. formal) planning systems. As a result, the EuroAmerican version of the compact city has become reinforced as the dominant paradigm, which assumes that compact city 'models', such as Barcelona, Spain and Portland, Oregon are universally valid. As a consequence, Southern versions of the compact city are largely excluded from consideration. This paper confronts this rather imperialistic approach to compact city theorisation and contributes to Robinson's (2002) post-colonial urban agenda by challenging the binary opposition between 'First-World' (compact) cities that are commonly viewed as models for generating theory and policy and 'Third-World' (compact) cities that are commonly viewed as problems in need of external intervention (see also Roy, 2005, 2009). It is argued that this binary is held together by power relations that favour EuroAmerican over Southern theorists. This paper utilises Derrida's (1992) method of deconstruction in order to dislocate the dominant compact city paradigm from EuroAmerica so that it can be reimagined outside the confines of that construction from a Southern perspective.

This paper is comprised of five chapters. Following Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents the EuroAmerican version of the compact city, examines how it became the dominant paradigm, and identifies its underlying assumptions. Chapter 3 deconstructs the paradigm by confronting these assumptions with the realities of cities in sub-Saharan Africa as an entry point for challenging the paradigm's universal relevance in the global South. Chapter 4 broadens its focus to 'unlock' new opportunities for alternative theorisation by exploring and examining Southern approaches to compact urban form and high density.

## 2. Presenting the dominant EuroAmerican compact city paradigm

Paradigms provide models for informing and structuring the way we conceptualize problems, devise solutions (i.e. formulate policy) and analyse and explain the world around us. Paradigms differ from approaches in that they contain a set of commonly accepted praxis that defines a discipline at a particular time (Kuhn, 1962). Within the social sciences, including urban planning, paradigms are often embedded with particular values and/ or principles (e.g. ‘sustainability’) that are used to justify certain actions or choices in pursuit of a desired process or outcome (e.g. compact urban form). Thus, paradigms are inherently normative and contestable. When adopted by policymakers, they can determine development pathways and have powerful implications for urban policy.

### 2.1 Common characteristics of the EuroAmerican compact city

International policy discourses typically conceptualise the compact city as a unified paradigm that contains a set of commonly accepted principles that are supported by a variety of approaches to compact urban form in Europe and America (e.g. UN-Habitat, 2009a, pp. 70; OECD, 2012, pp. 26). Among the most influential approaches are ‘smart growth’ and ‘new urbanism’, which co-emerged in the United States in reaction to the attendant processes

of ‘urban sprawl’ and inner-city decline. Both approaches advocate for neo-traditional urban planning and urban design practices that support the development of cities around mixed-use, walkable neighbourhoods and multi-functional urban centres that are well connected to mass transit systems and contained within well-defined urban growth boundaries, notably greenbelts (Calthorpe, 1993; Duany and Plater-Zyberk, 1991; Duany et al., 2001; Duany et al., 2010; Katz, 1994; UN-Habitat, 2009a). Many European cities have also experienced suburbanization and post-industrial inner-city decline, prompting the widespread adoption of compact city policy as a means of catalysing the reurbanization and regeneration of traditional, compact and multifunctional urban centres (Scheurer, 2007). Figure 2.1 foregrounds the common characteristics of these approaches, which together define what this paper identifies as the dominant EuroAmerican compact city paradigm.

Figure 2.1 draws primarily on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2012) conceptualisation of the compact city, which is based on a comparative assessment of compact city policy across the 34 OECD member countries. This conceptualisation is important because it reflects the “geographies of authoritative knowledge” (Roy, 2009, pp. 820) where Northern theorists associated with well-resourced international organisations (e.g. OECD, UN-Habitat, the World Bank,

**Figure 2.1.** Common characteristics of the dominant EuroAmerican compact city paradigm. Source: Adapted from Neuman (2005) and OECD (2012)

<b>Dense, proximate and contained development patterns</b>	<b>Urban areas linked by public transport systems</b>	<b>Accessibility to services and jobs</b>	<b>Municipal authorities are capacitated and coordinated at the urban and regional scales</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban land is intensively utilised</li> <li>Urban agglomerations are contiguous or close together</li> <li>Contained urban development with clearly defined urban growth boundaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective use of urban land, notably transit oriented development</li> <li>Public transport systems facilitate mobility in urban areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land use and building typologies are mixed</li> <li>Residents have access to local services using public transport or active transportation – e.g. walking, cycling, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong state-led control of planning and land development</li> <li>Sufficient government fiscal and institutional capacity to finance urban infrastructure</li> <li>Land use planning is coordinated at the metropolitan scale across municipal lines</li> </ul>

etc.) decide which countries are relevant to compact city theory and policy (i.e. developed countries) and which are not (i.e. developing countries). Broadly speaking, many of these theorists possess normative preferences for the dense, centralised and compact urban forms of traditional European cities, such as Barcelona (Nicolodi, 2005) and Amsterdam (City of Amsterdam, 2009), which are widely valorised by planners, architects and urban designers, including World Bank functionaries (Luchi 2011), as ideal places to live, work and play (Jenks et al., 1996). European cities are also upheld as more sustainable than American cities because of their lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which have been attributed to their compact urban structure (UN-Habitat, 2011). However, American compact cities are also favoured, notably Portland, Oregon, which is widely regarded as one of the most 'liveable' and 'sustainable' city-regions in the United States due also to its compact and contained urban spatial form (Abbott, 2001; Irazábal, 2005; UN-Habitat, 2009a).

The dominance of the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm within international policy discourses and urban studies more generally means that planning theorists and policymakers in both the global North and South frequently look to the experiences of EuroAmerica and their formal planning systems for inspiration. Consequently, Southern approaches to compact urban form and high density remain largely invisible since many do not reflect

the modernities of EuroAmerican compact cities. When Southern approaches are earnestly considered, it is usually because they adopt the praxis of their EuroAmerican counterparts. For example, UN-Habitat (2009a) identifies Curitiba, Brazil along with Barcelona and Portland as successful examples of how integrated and strategic approaches to formal planning can effectively link land use and infrastructure to achieve high density transit-oriented development (TOD) (see Figure 2.2). Consistent with modern planning systems, these approaches rely heavily on regulatory mechanisms, such as development control enforcement and zoning ordinances, which require substantial institutional capacity to implement, as demonstrated by Figure 2.1, column 4.

## 2.2 The EuroAmerican compact city as the dominant paradigm

The EuroAmerican compact city has become the dominant paradigm largely because UN-Habitat, through its *Global Report on Human Settlements and State of the World's Cities* series, has problematized 'urban sprawl' as one of the main threats to the sustainable urban development agenda emanating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1992 and the UN-Habitat II Agenda in 1996 (Neuman, 2005).

**Figure 2.2.** EuroAmerican compact city models. Source: Adapted from Acioly (2000) and UN-Habitat (2009a)

Compact City	Urban Form	Planning Approach
Barcelona, Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed-use high density sub-centres</li> <li>Contained urban spatial expansion</li> </ul>	City-wide Strategic Spatial Plans (the 'Barcelona Model') <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local urban projects with strong urban design components promote compact urban form</li> <li>Participatory stakeholder involvement in setting common principles and priorities for urban development</li> <li>Public-private partnerships and cluster-based district zoning promotes economic restructuring in former manufacturing neighbourhoods</li> </ul>
Portland, Oregon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High density development concentrated around multifunctional transit hubs and mixed use centres</li> <li>Contained urban spatial expansion</li> </ul>	Smart Growth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinated regional planning across administrative boundaries enforces urban growth boundaries</li> <li>TOD combines high density development with light rail transit (LRT) and feeder systems for bus networks</li> </ul>
Curitiba, Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High density development concentrated along linear bus rapid transit (BRT) corridors</li> </ul>	Integrated Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land use and transportation infrastructure planning closely linked</li> <li>Zoning ordinances based on floor area ratio (FAR) requirements foster high density transit oriented development</li> </ul>

Within early debates on carrying capacity and ecological footprints (Rees, 1996), cities were seen as the causes of environmental degradation and natural resource depletion (Girardet, 1996; Wackernagel et al., 1997) and have more recently been blamed for climate change (see Dodman, 2009a and Satterthwaite, 2008 for refuting arguments). According to UN-Habitat (2011, pp. 30) “it has been claimed (correctly or incorrectly) that although cities take up only 2 per cent of the Earth’s land mass, they are responsible for as much as 75 per cent of the GHGs [greenhouse gas emissions] that are released into the atmosphere” (UN-Habitat, 2011, pp. 30). Whilst it is difficult to generate an accurate figure because few cities have detailed GHG emission inventories, it is clear that urban centres concentrate economic and industrial (production and consumption) activities and people whose lifestyles/ energy consumption generate high levels of GHG emissions, particularly in high-income nations (Satterthwaite, 2008).

The smart growth movement in the United States (e.g. Calthorpe, 1993; Duany et al., 2001; Duany and Plater-Zyberg, 1991; Duany et al., 2001; Frumkin et al., 2004; Katz, 1994) and UN-Habitat (2009a, 2010a, 2011) continues to level their criticism squarely on the externalities of ‘urban sprawl’, including car dependency, traffic congestion, high infrastructure and development costs, inequitable access to housing and infrastructure, social isolation and poor public health, high energy consumption, environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions. Notably, the *Global Report on Human Settlements 2010: Bridging the Urban Divide* states that “[s]uburbanization and urban sprawl are happening in different places throughout the world, spreading low-density urban patterns and negative environmental, economic and social externalities” (pp. 4).

Of particular relevance to the argument presented in this paper is the identification by the *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities* of the compact city as an innovative and sustainable solution to ‘urban sprawl’, and the contemplation of its universal applicability. One of the seven environmental goals supported by the report’s universal definition of sustainable urbanization requires that “urban sprawl is minimized and more compact towns and cities served by public transport are developed” (pp. 36). This proposition reflects the broader EuroAmerican literature, which widely supports compact and mixed-use development as a climate change mitigation strategy, notably for reducing tailpipe emissions and fossil fuel consumption associated with urban sprawl (Brown and Southworth, 2008; UN-Habitat, 2011).

The urgency posed by climate change, whose impacts are already observable (IPCC, 2001, 2007) has raised the priority of climate change mitigation as a central aspect of the ‘green’ agenda, especially in developed countries,

which are responsible for a substantially disproportionate share of global GHG emissions as compared to lesser developed countries (UNFCCC, 2007). According to UN-Habitat (2011, pp. 9), “[i]n 2007, developed countries accounted for 18 per cent of the world’s population and 47 per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, while developing countries accounted for 82 per cent of the population and 53 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions”.

In response, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2009 Copenhagen Accord developed targets and timetables for the international community to reduce GHG emissions (ibid). New approaches to urban planning are emerging to meet these challenges, including ‘green urbanism’, which integrates the principles of renewable energy and zero-emissions into the compact city in an effort to retrofit and future-proof cities against climate change and resource depletion (Lehmann, 2010). The compact city is also widely promoted as a universally valid planning proposition for transitioning towards a green economy within mainstream sustainability discourses emanating from the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro (Rio+20), which identified ‘sustainable cities’ as one of its seven priority areas (see UNEP, 2011; UN-Habitat, 2012).

Green urbanism is further promoted by the OECD (2011, 2012) and by the World Bank (2010) (Moffatt et al., 2012) through its *Eco<sup>2</sup>Cities: Ecological Cities as Economic cities* initiative targeting policy and governance reforms in the South. Whilst the World Bank’s 2010 report does not promote any particular version of the compact city, it does feature suggestive imagery of cities that are very clearly of EuroAmerican origin and compact urban form (see page 1). Tellingly, the report closes with a case study on Curitiba, remarking that “Curitiba presents a creative and inspiring approach that can be adapted to the circumstances of almost any city” (pp. 18). This quote is indicative of the way international development organisations are actively searching for universal solutions to common problems without critically considering how the realities of cities vary in the South.

The increasing support for the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm within the evolving ‘green’ agenda further legitimises normative preferences among theorists for EuroAmerican compact cities. Nevertheless, very little research has examined the relevance of compact urban form in the global South. Dave’s (2010) study of high density development in Mumbai, India is one of the few recent examples. Whilst Dave’s findings suggest that compact urban development does have the potential to achieve more sustainable social, economic and environmental conditions, others question whether compact city ‘models’ are compatible with rapidly growing, under-served, hazard-prone, overcrowded and congested Southern cities (e.g. Angel et al., 2011; Hardoy et al., 2001; Williams, 2004; Kaji, 2003). In addition, the evidence to substantiate

ate popular claims that compact urban form will achieve more 'sustainable' cities in the North (or South for that matter) has been largely inconclusive (Echenique et al., 2012). Critics also question what 'sustainability' and 'sustainable urban form' actually means within the international compact city debate (Neuman, 2005). Overall, the debate remains starkly polarised and tends to be based mainly on anecdotal evidence from Northern cities. This finding demonstrates the power of EuroAmerican theorists who continue to dominate international policy discourses by virtue of their authoritative knowledge and the prevailing agendas to which they attach their theories.

### 2.3 Questioning the conceptual boundaries of the EuroAmerican compact city

EuroAmerican theorists clearly assume that their version of the compact city is universally valid. Consequently, the paradigm is presented as context-neutral, since it only considers the histories and realities of EuroAmerican cities. Consequently, the paradigm contains a number of underlying assumptions that reflect its place of origin. From the examination above, four main assumptions are identifiable. Firstly, the paradigm assumes that suburbanization is synonymous with low-density 'urban sprawl'. Secondly, the paradigm assumes that the spatial expansion of cities can and should be contained. Thirdly, the 'green' agenda dominates the broader sustainable urban development agenda. Fourthly, cities are formal entities amenable to modern planning systems.

These assumptions reflect particular realities involving urban growth dynamics, formal planning systems, urban policy agendas and rationalities that are grounded in EuroAmerica. However, Healey (2011) warns that whilst the underlying assumptions of planning theories reflect their place of origin, they frequently do not reflect the realities of the places that they are transferred to. Watson (2009b)

also discusses the relevance of the compact city within the international debate on sustainable urban form, suggesting that underlying assumptions must be unsettled if so-called 'best' practices are to have any relevance in diverse, rapidly changing Southern urban contexts. To unsettle these assumptions, Watson emphasises the shift towards a closer engagement with the 'situated' context of planning practice, reflecting Robinson's (2002, 2006) and Roy's (2009) call for alternative geographies of theorisation.

Before proceeding, the choice of cities in sub-Saharan Africa as a unit of analysis deserves some qualification. Firstly, African cities have gained substantial attention within international policy discourses that have been particularly critical of 'urban sprawl' (e.g. UN-Habitat, 2008b, 2010b). These discourses have included arguments for the universal application of 'smart growth' policy in this context (e.g. Arku, 2009). Secondly, there is an emergent debate on developing a new urbanization agenda for African cities (Pieterse, 2010) that has included consideration of compact city policy in South Africa (ACC, 2008; City of Cape Town, 1999, 2009; City of Cape Town Partnership, 2008; Dewar, 2000). Thirdly, South African cities have generally served as the principal site of theoretical production, abstraction and generalisation for the rest of Africa, which does not take into account the considerable variation and diversity of cities within the sub-continent (Watson, 2002).

On the other hand, it could be argued that this paper runs the risk of dangerously over-generalising the experiences of cities in sub-Saharan Africa by assuming the region to be a singular entity. However, cities in the region have social and political commonalities (Watson, 2002) and similar environmental and demographic trends (UN-Habitat, 2010b). Mamdani (1996) also argues that sub-Saharan Africa is an appropriate unit of analysis due to its colonial history, which has undeniably played a profound role in shaping modern urban planning systems across the region.

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### 3. Analytical Framework: deconstructing the dominant EuroAmerican compact city paradigm in sub-Saharan Africa

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Deconstruction is conventionally practiced by post-structuralists seeking to overcome the binary oppositions that lead to hierarchal ways of thinking about the world. Binary oppositions have three mutually-reinforcing characteristics, all of which bolster the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm as superordinate to Southern approaches to compact urban form and high density. Firstly, binary oppositions are hierarchal, meaning that one side governs the other, “or has the upper hand” (Derrida, 1992, pp. 41). Secondly, they are gendered, meaning that the more socially valorised (i.e. masculine) side of the binary is treated as superordinate to the other (i.e. feminine) (Blomley, 2004; Varley, 2002). And thirdly, they are mutually exclusive, meaning that they cannot be hybridised (*ibid*).

Using Derrida’s (1992) deconstructive method, it is possible to confront the four underlying assumptions of the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm identified above with the realities of cities in sub-Saharan Africa. These assumptions are challenged to expose how the paradigm is socially constructed so that it can be reimagined from a Southern perspective outside those confines. In doing so, the binary opposition is effectively flipped so that Southern theorists and their compact city approaches can be brought to light. This method of deconstruction is thus intended as an inventive rather than destructive tool aimed at liberating oppressed imaginations, epistemologies and informal rationalities for Southern compact city theorisation.

#### 3.1 Assumption 1: Suburbanization is synonymous with low-density ‘urban sprawl’

The EuroAmerican compact city paradigm is correct in that suburbanization is a now global phenomenon. The *Global Suburbanisms: Governance, Land and Infrastructure in the 21st Century* project based out of York University in Toronto, Canada ([http://www.yorku.ca/city/?page\\_id=222](http://www.yorku.ca/city/?page_id=222)) is dedicated to comparing and examining processes of suburbanization worldwide. The project includes case research in sub-Saharan Africa focusing on ‘Africa’s new suburbs’ as a new research object within peri-urban studies (Bloch, forthcoming). This research addresses how economic growth in Africa is catalysing a burgeoning middle-class (AfDB, 2011) and growing demand for suburban lifestyles (see also Leichenko and Solecki, 2005). In many cities in sub-Saharan Africa, the

development of large-scale greenfield sites for middle-class housing has become the norm within formal land markets (Knight Frank, 2011). Notably, *The Wealth Report: A Global Perspective on Prime Property and Wealth* by Citi Private Bank and Knight Frank (2011) identifies Lusaka, Zambia as one of the most promising emerging markets in suburban real-estate worldwide.

This development is increasingly appropriating ‘western style’ architecture and spatial layouts at different scales, ranging from small-scale owner-financed and owner-built housing to large-scale developer-built estates and new towns (Bloch, forthcoming). Much of this development is not gated, contrary to conventional literature on the prevalence of gated communities in Africa (e.g. Grant, 2009). While at face value this development could be taken to resemble EuroAmerican patterns of ‘urban sprawl’, urban densities in sub-Saharan Africa are highly variable, rendering generalisation about (sub)urban growth dynamics problematic.

What is clear is that urban densities in the South, including sub-Saharan Africa, are relatively high. According to a recent study by the Lincoln Land Institute, *Making Room for a Planet of Cities* (Angel et al., 2011), “on average, built-up area densities in developing countries are double those in Europe and Japan, and such densities in Europe and Japan are double those of the United States, Canada, and Australia.” (pp. 3). This suggests that the (sub)urbanising cities of the South are already in themselves models of compact urban form, with densities high enough to support public transport. For example, in 2000, on average built-up area densities in Southern cities were approximately 129 people per hectare, which far exceeds the 30 persons per hectare threshold that is generally required to support public transit in the United States (*ibid*). Even if densities declined at 2 per cent per annum, which is the most pessimistic projection by Angel et al., densities would still be 47 persons per hectare in 2050, more than double the average built-up area density in cities in the United States in 2000 at 21 persons per hectare.

The urban densities in sub-Saharan Africa are notable. Of the top 846 urban areas (> 500,000 people) ranked worldwide in terms of urban population density by Demographia (2011), 73 were in sub-Saharan Africa. Figure 3.1 lists the top ten ranked urban areas in the region, whose urban population densities per hectare are roughly

4 to 5 times higher than the threshold that is required to support public transit in the United States.

Figure 3.1 demonstrates that urban spatial expansion cannot necessarily be characterised simply as low-density 'urban sprawl', as UN-Habitat (2008b, 2010b) and much of the planning literature on suburbanization in sub-Saharan Africa does (e.g. Hill and Linder, 2010; Mundai and Muyarama, 2010). Such characterisation obscures the complexity of peri-urban areas, including mixed land uses, urban forms and varied densities. It also overlooks overcrowding and congestion as serious planning concerns in many of the urban areas ranked by Demographia.

Furthermore, Shoonraad (2000) states that "[t]he key difference between the African City and the [EuroAmerican] city is the lack of correlation between built form and physical appearance, activity and use" (pp. 223). The planning of relatively large plot sizes, facilitating the construction of single-family dwellings, does not accurately reflect land use or the way plots have densified over time (ibid). In reality, plots frequently contain multiple informal and temporary structures that serve a variety of uses, as demonstrated by the practice of 'backyarding' in South Africa. 'Backyarding' generally describes the process by which formally allocated low cost plots have been incrementally developed by informal actors in response to growing land pressures and chronic housing shortages (Crankshaw et al., 2000; Oldfield and Boulton, 2005; Lemanski, 2009; Mabin et al., 2011). However, gross-layout density measured in terms of the number of units per hectare is commonly used, which obscures urban density due to the

relatively large plot sizes that exist in sub-Saharan Africa (Schoonraad, 2000). Thus, Schoonraad argues that occupational density calculated in terms of persons per hectare provides a much more accurate measurement of urban density, which, if considered, would surely undermine characterisations of suburbanization as low-density 'urban sprawl'.

### 3.2 Assumption 2: Cities can and should be contained

The EuroAmerican compact city paradigm supports urban containment as a core principle. However, according to Angel et al., (2011), urban containment will be futile in light of rapid urbanization and declining density trends in the global South. The study deployed metrics based on data sets in ArcGIS to analyze historical trends in urban spatial expansion in 120 cities worldwide. It found that, between 1985 and 2000, the urban population of Accra, Ghana grew from 1.8 million to 2.7 million (representing a 50 per cent increase) while its urban land cover expanded from 13,000 square kilometres to 33,000 square kilometres (representing a 153 per cent increase). Accra is not an anomaly. Of the 120 cities sampled, population growth averaged 1.60 per cent per annum, while urban land cover growth averaged 3.66 per cent per annum, meaning that urban land cover grew on average more than double the urban growth rate. These findings demonstrate the on-going trend towards suburbanization at relatively high densities, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (revisit Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1.** Top ten urban areas in sub-Saharan by urban population density. Source: Demographia (2011)

Rank	Urban Area	Year	Urban Population Estimate	Land Area (Ha)	Urban population Density Per hectare
41	Kananga, Congo	2012	918,000	54	170
48	Mogadishu, Somalia	2012	1,563,000	96	160
53	Kano, Nigeria	2012	3,466,000	220	157
54	Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast	2010	890,000	57	156
56	Kinshasa, Congo	2012	9,046,000	583	155
58	Djibouti, Djibouti	2005	600,000	39	154
91	Niamey, Chad	2012	1,135,000	83	137
91	Kisangani, Congo	2010	780,000	57	137
98	Abidjan, Ivory Coast	2012	4,368,000	324	135
114	Goma, Congo	2007	500,000	39	129

It is important to consider how suburbanization in the region is driven in large part by low-income populations seeking to avoid anti-poor urban planning policies and building regulations (UN-Habitat, 2008b). Such regulations often impose prohibitive costs that prevent the vast majority of urban populations, which are predominately poor, from gaining access to formal land markets (UN-Habitat, 1999; Watson, 2009a). In response, informal land and housing delivery systems fill this exclusion gap in the absence of a viable alternative (Jenkins and Anderson, 2011; Rakodi, 2006; UN-Habitat, 2010b). According to Myers (2011, pp. 78), “a great many African urbanites [upwards of two-thirds] live in informal settlements, in cities where informality plays a key role in the built environment, as in economics, politics and society”. In fact, as of 2010, 61.7 per cent of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa lived in ‘slums’, accounting for nearly 200 million people (UN-Habitat, 2010a; UNDESA, 2007).

The typical municipal response to uncontrolled or ‘spontaneous’ suburbanization has been to retroactively extend administrative boundaries over peri-urban areas in order to bring them under planning control (UN-Habitat, 2010b). However, the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm assumes that municipal authorities are adequately capacitated and coordinated at the metropolitan scale (revisit Figure 2.1, column 4), but this is rarely the case in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the footprint of Dakar, Senegal crosses over 60 municipal boundaries, making cross-jurisdictional coordination on urban policy issues nearly impossible (ibid). This form of fragmented urban governance has become the norm. According to UN-Habitat (2010b, pp. 20), “[r]egardless of local circumstances, the outcome has been identical across Africa, namely disjointed forms of spatial and functional governance that fall well short of the needs of the majority of city dwellers”.

In this context, Watson (2009b) questions whether an accurate or enforceable urban growth boundary could be achieved at the continuously moving peri-urban fringe (Watson, 2009b). Angel et al., (2011) further warns that containment would likely create additional bottlenecks for accessing land, particularly among the urban poor. Thus, not only would containment be impossible in sub-Saharan Africa, it would likely be unjust.

### 3.3 Assumption 3: The green agenda prevails

The need to mitigate global climate change has amplified the ‘green’ agenda within the sustainable urban development debate. Nevertheless, McGranahan et al., (2001, pp. 10) warns that “there is a serious danger that as new ‘green’ concerns are added to the environmental agenda, the ‘brown’ concerns [i.e. socio-environmental justice] will be neglected or misrepresented”. In reality, both

climate change impacts and vulnerabilities in the South have clear implications for both the ‘green’ and ‘brown’ agendas and climate change mitigation and adaptation, respectively. However, the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm is suspiciously silent on the latter (OECD (2012) being a case in point).

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, Figure 3.2 demonstrates how the international compact city debate addresses the challenges and opportunities that urbanization presents for the climate change mitigation and adaptation agendas. Interestingly, urban form and density are addressed quite differently. On the one hand, EuroAmerican compact city theorists claim that low-density ‘urban sprawl’ contributes disproportionately to GHG emissions and that higher density development can reduce GHG emissions (Brown and Southworth, 2008; GEF and World Bank, 2008; UN-Habitat, 2009a, 2011; OECD, 2012). This claim has been ardently supported in the North for the reasons outlined above. On the other hand, Southern theorists claim that high urban density can both contribute to and reduce the vulnerability to climate change (Dodman, 2009b). This claim has been supported within the climate change adaptation debate in sub-Saharan Africa (Brown, 2011).

The latter claim features less prominently within international policy discourses largely because the debate on ‘urban sprawl’ has tended to dominate the discussion on urban form and density, with the exception of chapter 3 of UN-Habitat’s *Global Report on Human Settlements 2011: Cities and Climate Change*. This chapter drew strongly on Dodman (2009b) as one of the few urban scholars to approach the international compact city debate from a urban vulnerability perspective. According to Dodman (2009b, pp. 65):

*“If populations are concentrated in vulnerable locations, without proper infrastructure or institutional frameworks, density can increase risk. However, if effective means can be found for supporting dense populations in safe locations with suitable infrastructural and institutional frameworks, a viable alternative to living on marginal and unsafe sites can be provided, particularly for the urban poor”.*

The occupation of unsafe sites, especially by the urban poor, has long been a concern for disaster risk reduction (UNDRO, 1976) and has gained increasing relevance for climate change adaptation (Birkmann and Teichman, 2010). Cities in sub-Saharan Africa are among the most climate vulnerable due to the prevalence of the urban poor living in high risk coastal settlements, flood plains and wet lands (Douglas et al., 2008; Huq et al., 2007; Pelling and Wisner, 2009). Moreover, the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change (IPCC) expects extreme weather events (including heavy precipitation, drought, heat waves and tropical storms) to increase in frequency and intensity (IPCC, 2007) whilst the *Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (SREX) of the IPCC (2012) expects disaster risk to grow as more people and assets concentrate in hazard-prone areas.

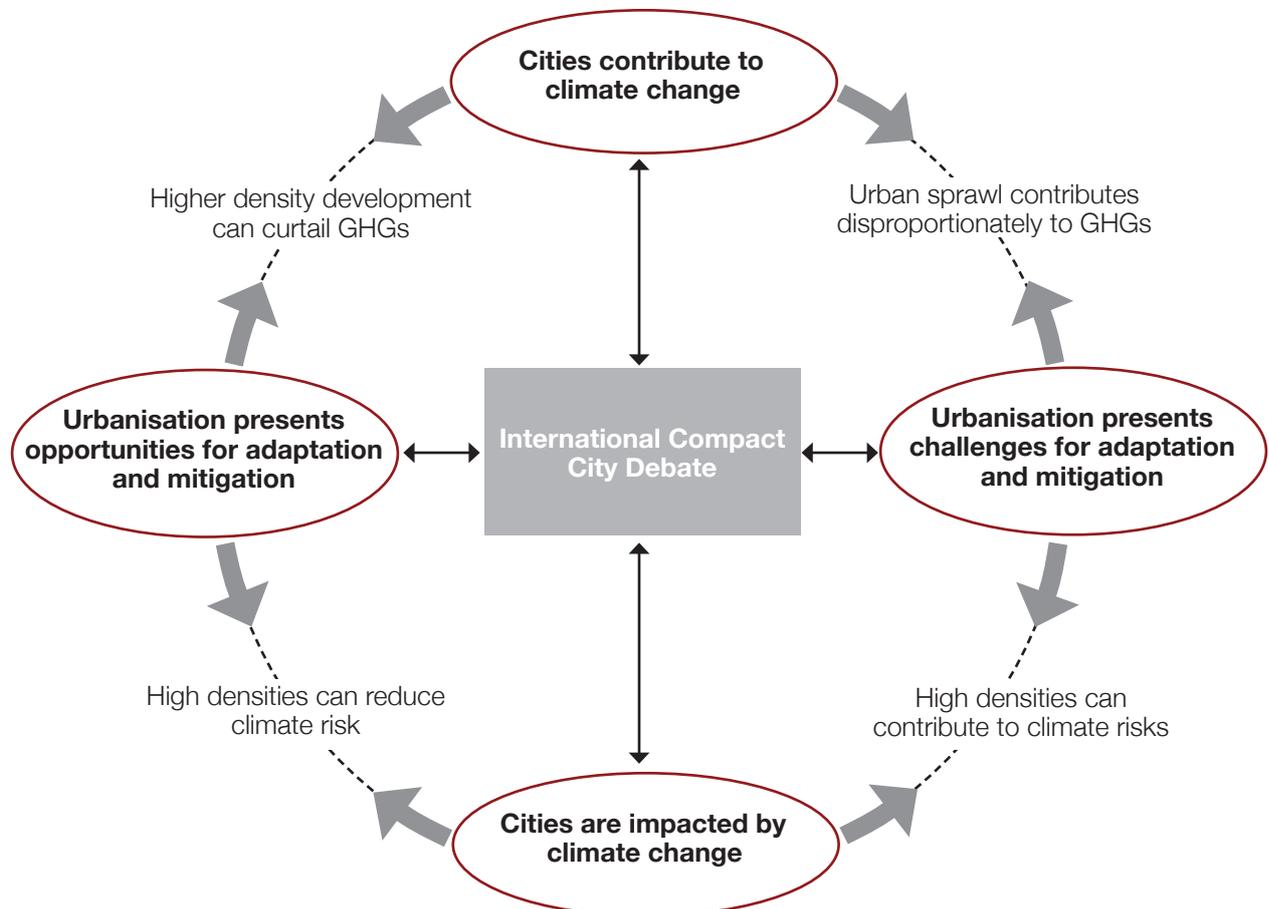
These expectations reinforce the need to support climate change mitigation not only for the well-being of future generations, but also for that of current generations. It is also important to note the defining paradox of anthropogenic climate change. Although Africa is responsible for only 7.8 per cent of the global share of GHGs (Rogner et al., 2007), it is one of the most vulnerable regions due to its already highly variable climate and its limited adaptive capacity (UNFCCC, 2007). The inequitable distribution of GHG emissions and climate vulnerability underscores the responsibility of the North to support both mitigation and to aid developing countries to adapt, as supported

by article 4 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Figure 3.2 illustrates the important role that urban form and density have to play in both of these agendas.

However, the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm, as it is currently conceptualised, is incapable of connecting these co-dependent agendas largely because it problematizes the impacts of cities on the environment rather than the impacts of the environment on cities. Ultimately, this disconnect jeopardises the global pursuit of sustainable urban development as a multidimensional agenda.

Furthermore, the claim that compact city policies result in low-carbon development is debatable. Gaigné et al., (2010) highlight how policies supporting compaction and containment may result in inefficient mono-centric cities that require supplementary policies to facilitate the decentralization of employment or the creation of poly-nucleated cities. Glaeser and Kahn (2010) suggest that onerous

**Figure 3.2.** Urban Form and Density within the International Compact City Debate. Diagram developed by author



land use regulations in low-carbon compact cities of the United States drive developers to sprawling high-carbon cities, undermining broader sustainability objectives. The relevance of the compact city to climate change mitigation is thus perhaps more contentious than proponents would suggest.

### 3.4 Assumption 4: Cities are formal entities amenable to modern planning systems

Urban development in EuroAmerican compact cities is mostly accommodated in formal land markets regulated by capacitated and coordinated municipal authorities. The analysis above undermined this assumption in sub-Saharan Africa where suburbanization has been dominated by informality. Nevertheless, the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm is unable to conceptualise informality as an integral part of the urbanization process because of the informal-formal binary that pervades its modern planning psyche. This failure is important because it reflects the way many modern planning systems in sub-Saharan Africa view the informal 'sector' as an 'unplannable' state of exception to formal urbanization (Roy, 2005). Modern planning's conventional response to the informal 'sector' has been to extend 'formalisation' and regulated development over the informal city through titling informal land (e.g. de Soto, 2003), legalizing street vendors through permit systems, recognising informal tenure, and so on (Porter et al., 2011). Whilst these planning initiatives are progressive relative to eviction and 'slum' clearance, they reinforce the dichotomy that makes formalisation the only possible policy option "while ignoring the fundamental structures of power" (ibid, p. 118). The treatment of informality as a 'sector', encompassing a vast array of activities (see UN-Habitat, 2003 for a comprehensive review), does not acknowledge the fact that informality is an organising logic or 'rationality' that largely determines how cities develop (Watson, 2003). According to Watson (2009b, p. 2268),

*"planners...are located in a fundamental tension – a conflict of rationalities – between the logic of governing and the logic of survival [i.e. informality] in which governing has to do with control and development and in which development is generally driven by notions of modernisation and the creation of 'proper' communities living and working in 'proper' urban environments".*

The inability of the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm to conceptualise urban informality as what has been described as an 'alternative modernity' (Deutsch, et al., 2002) is highly problematic. For example, Rakodi's (2006) study of five medium-sized cities in Anglophone Africa (Enugu in Nigeria, Kampala in Uganda, Maseru in Lesotho, Gaborone in Botswana

and Eldoret in Kenya) concluded that informal land delivery processes are both continuations of customary systems and responses to the failure of formal systems. Rakodi argues;

*"that neither conceptual frameworks nor policy approaches based on formal/informal dichotomy and privileging of state law provide an adequate basis for understanding contemporary processes of residential land delivery or developing appropriate urban development planning, regulation and tenure systems capable of meeting the needs of growing low-income populations" (p. 281).*

Rakodi's 'legal pluralist' framework allows non-state or 'informal' regulatory structures to be considered just as legitimately as those of the state. Roy (2005, 2009) also challenges the informal-formal binary by arguing that informality is actually within the scope of the state, since it has the power to define what is informal. Roy draws attention to how the process of suburbanization in Southern cities is driven by informal processes that operate in direct contravention to master plans, but that are also often informally sanctioned by the state. For example, in Kampala, Uganda, land is often accessed and subdivided by and through multiple non-state and state actors (including planners and surveyors) who constantly cross the formal-informal divide in illegal ways (Nkurunziza, 2007).

However, to assign the state the power to define informality is not entirely useful for conceptualising informality as something more than a state of exception. Alternatively, if informality is considered to be a continuation of customary traditions (as does Rakodi, 2006) then informality can be viewed as an original rather than backward planning modality that precedes the importation of modern planning systems through colonisation and globalisation. The history of pre-colonial planning is often glossed over in planning literature, even though indigenous forms of urban land use planning have existed for centuries (Awuah et al., 2011). For example, cities such as Timbuktu, Mali and Zanzibar, Tanzania functioned as major trading centres with their own spatial configuration systems well before colonisation (Mabogunje, 1990; Wekwete, 1995; Njoh, 2004, UN-Habitat, 2009a, cited in Awuah et al., 2011). Settlement planning by the Akans, the largest tribe in Ghana, can be traced back more than 3,500 years (Farra, 1996, cited in Awuah et al., 2011). This history suggests that the experiences of customary planning systems have much to offer planning futures in sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, informal settlements often possess many of the characteristics of the EuroAmerican compact city (e.g. high densities and mixed land uses) (UN-Habitat, 2009a), suggesting that much can be learned from informal development (Berner, 2000; UN-Habitat, 2010b). Zillmann (2000) argues that informal settlements should be seen as a reflection of

local knowledge and skills in production and self-regulation, and that questions concerning whether the compact city is a sustainable urban form and whether it can provide a vision for rapidly urbanizing cities in the South can be answered through the examination of informal development.

### 3.5 Findings

The deconstructive analysis above reveals significant discrepancies between the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm and the intersecting realities of high density, poverty, informality and vulnerability in sub-Saharan African cities. These discrepancies are indicative of how EuroAmerican theorists seldom consider the “geographi-

cal or conceptual ‘boundaries’ of their ideas and rarely specify the contextual assumptions on which their ideas are based” (Watson, 2008, p. 224).

There is a growing body of scholarship within African urban studies that tacitly supports Roy’s (2005) argument for a ‘new epistemology of planning’. Harrison (2006) calls for the abandonment of modernist planning in favour of ‘subaltern reason’ in guiding planning to link with the survival strategies of the urban poor. More pragmatically, Myers (2011) argues for “hybridizing the rationalities of modern planning and informal ordering through mutual acceptance” (p. 578). These scholars recognize that planning must learn to engage with informality if it is to have any significant influence over the urban development process in sub-Saharan Africa.

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## 4. Unlocking Southern alternatives to compact urban form and high density

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There are a number of alternative approaches to compact urban form and high density that engage with formal, informal and hybridised modes of urban development in the global South, including sub-Saharan Africa. Rather than selecting an international ‘best’ practice that may not be relevant to local conditions, the intent of this chapter is to unlock Southern approaches to compact urban form so they can be considered within international policy discourses. Whilst this list is not exhaustive, it should be seen as an initial attempt to liberate these largely overlooked approaches as potential alternatives to the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm in Southern cities.

### 4.1 The ‘Post-Apartheid Compact City’

The ‘post-apartheid compact city’ has been a hallmark of urban planning policy in South Africa since it was adopted as a national planning paradigm in 1994 (Schoonraad, 2000). South Africa is a unique case in that suburbanization has been strongly influenced by the intersecting ideologies of modernism and apartheid, which have had a profound and enduring legacy in cities (Dewar, 2000). White upper-class populations have, and continue to be, housed largely in planned neighbourhood ‘cells’ characterised by large plot sizes, single-family dwellings and inner-peripheral location, reflecting modernism’s strong anti-urban, pro-suburban ethos (Dewar, 2000; OECD, 2008; Turok, 2011). Conversely, black lower-class groups have typically been displaced to the periphery through state-led housing programmes, in some cases up to 60 kilometres away from the urban edge (Dewar, 2000; SACN, 2004). As a result, there remains a strong correlation between income, race and proximity to central areas in South African cities, which has entrenched inequitable access to urban employment and services, particularly in central areas, as a defining urban characteristic (Dewar, 2000).

In order to undo these spatial injustices, the ‘post-apartheid compact city’ was developed by South African theorists and policymakers as a viable solution for curtailing ‘urban sprawl’ within the ‘green’ agenda and for increasing equitable access to urban services within the ‘brown’ agenda (Dewar, 2000). However, Schoonraad (2000) argues that ‘post-apartheid compact city’ policy has actually worked to reinforce the apartheid city because the urban “poor cannot afford to live in a compact city [even though] efforts to densify the city have been directed at

this group” (p. 233). Schoonraad suggests that low-cost neighbourhoods, including those that have been informally densified and consolidated through ‘backyarding’, are more suitable models for understanding how densification can support more equitable planning outcomes. This proposition clearly conceptualises informality as an integral aspect of urban space production.

Nevertheless, densifying in formally planned settlements continues to be a core policy objective in South Africa. In particular, the main goal of the *Central City Development Strategy* led by the Cape Town Partnership (2008), which is comprised of major public and private stakeholders, is to add 100,000 residences to the existing population of 55,000 over a ten-year period. In addition, ‘policy 3’ of the *Draft Cape Town Densification Strategy* states that “[d]ensification... needs to be supported through regulations, legislation and zoning measures, as well as tax, rates and tariff incentives and design controls” (City of Cape Town, 2009, p. 7). Thus, the modern planning psyche of the ‘post-apartheid compact city’ is actually quite similar to the EuroAmerican paradigm and is therefore not terribly difficult to ‘unlock’. However, it is important to recognise that this Southern adaptation of the EuroAmerican compact city has become a dominant paradigm in its own right in South Africa, which has the potential to influence what the rest of the continent considers as ‘best’ practice.

Interestingly, the *Draft Cape Town Densification Strategy* compares the urban densities of Cape Town to those of Warwick Square in London, Old Quarter in Amsterdam and Mykonos in Greece (City of Cape Town, 2009). This comparison is indicative of how governments in the South continue to look to the modernities of EuroAmerican cities as policy models, even though more relevant examples might very well be within a stone’s throw of their planning departments.

### 4.2 ‘Making Room’

In opposition to regulatory approaches, Angel et al., (2011) argues that many Southern cities suffer from an overreliance on unenforceable land use planning regimes that are unable to regulate or contain urban spatial expansion. As an alternative to containment, Angel et al. proposes the ‘making room’ approach, which has four main components:

### 1. *Realistic projections of urban land needs.*

- Invest in preparedness based on realistic projections of urban population growth and urban land cover.

### 2. *Generous municipal boundaries.*

- Designate urban areas that are large enough to accommodate 20 to 30 years of urban expansion.

### 3. *Selective protection of urban space.*

- Discard greenbelts in favour of interspersed green spaces.

### 4. *Provide a network of arterial grid of major roads.*

- Use infrastructure provision to lead urban development in a relatively controlled rather than ad hoc manner.

The principle of ‘making room’ recognises the impossibility of comprehensively controlling urban development at the metropolitan scale in Southern cities, which the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm assumes is possible. As an alternative to containment, the making room approach seeks to lead future urban growth through more realistic, strategic and anticipatory interventions that open up access to land and that structure the densities that may already be high enough to support future demand for urban services, such as public transit. Thus, the making room approach still supports high densities, but in a way that is presented to be more suitably tailored to the particularities of Southern (sub) urban growth dynamics.

Importantly, the making room approach recognises the essential role that informality plays in the urbanization process, particularly in peri-urban areas. The fourth component of the ‘making room’ approach has an explicit poverty reduction objective that “aims to provide a large number of superblocks that can be subdivided by formal and informal developers into individual plots” (p.63). This proactive approach seeks to lead urban development through the provision of basic infrastructure, which differs substantially from current approaches that largely follow with services after peri-urban development has occurred. Speculative developers also frequently pressure municipalities to extend infrastructure and services into peri-urban areas that may not be zoned for development (*ibid*). This piece-meal approach to service provision in many sub-Saharan African cities has exacerbated socio-spatial fragmentation between well serviced middle and upper-income settlements and un-serviced low-income informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2010b). Angel et al., (2011) argues that ‘making room’ holds potential for increasing access to serviced land in informal and formal land markets across all income groups thereby directing

urban development away from hazard-prone areas and ecologically sensitive habitats, which would likely be encroached upon otherwise.

## 4.3 Community-driven upgrading

Community-driven upgrading generally entails the physical improvement of housing, infrastructure and services by ‘slum’ communities in partnership with municipal authorities and civil society (Boonyabantha 2005). In the global South, upgrading has become a core strategy for realising Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7 target 11: *to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020* (UN-Habitat, 2009b).

According to estimates by UN-Habitat (2010a), upgrading is having a positive impact on ‘slum’ eradication: “between the year 2000 and 2010, a total of 227 million people in the developing world will have moved out of slum conditions.” (p. xii). In Bangkok, Thailand, Dodman (2009b) examines how the Baan Mankong (meaning ‘secure’ housing) upgrading programme is “maintaining density while also improving resilience” (p. 75). The programme, introduced by the Thai government in 2003, is unique in that infrastructure subsidies and revolving loans for land and housing improvements are channelled directly to communities responsible for managing and implementing the entire upgrading process involving both formal and informal strategies (Boonyabantha, 2005). Dodman (2009b) highlights how different approaches to upgrading, including re-blocking, land sharing, in-situ upgrading and relocation have facilitated densification while increasing access to safe and serviced land.

Baan Mankong also involves community architects who provide technical assistance and facilitate participatory site planning and design exercises (CAN, 2012). Community architects help translate the ideas and aspirations of community members into tangible plans that reflect the knowledge and skills of informal dwellers, who are often knowledgeable about climate-friendly/resilient designs in high density environments through their informal building experience.

In addition, Dodman examines institutional approaches to densification including the reduction of national minimum plot standards (reduced from 300m<sup>2</sup> to 180m<sup>2</sup>) in Windhoek, Namibia, which was implemented in order to make serviced land more affordable to low-income groups (Mitlin and Muller, 2004). The Namibian government provides basic services to plots, including roads and communal water points, and supports ‘self-help’ housing (*ibid*). In addition, Brown (2011) drew on the Windhoek example in examining potential reforms to land use planning regulations in Malawi that could make safe land in planned settlements more affordable to the urban poor while simulta-

neously curtailing urban encroachment onto agricultural lands. One of the recommended densification strategies included the reduction of standard residential plot sizes.

#### 4.4 Low-cost housing

Nnagghenda-Musana (2008) suggests that many low-cost housing designs in Africa often mimic higher income housing thereby leading to urban sprawl, resulting in increased travel distances and costs for low-income inhabitants, increased GHG emissions and increased cost of service and infrastructure provision. On the other hand, Hasan (2010b) argues that the development of high-rise affordable housing throughout urban Asia has led to overcrowding. Hasan's (2010a) case study of four low- to lower-middle-income housing sites in Karachi, Pakistan found that high-rise buildings are too inflexible to the needs of growing families. The study employed hypothetical redesign scenarios to assess the potential of low-rise alternatives to high-rise housing. The findings revealed that "relatively low-rise, flexible, high density housing design makes for better settlements, healthier communities, and cheaper homes and infrastructure than high-or medium-rise apartment complexes" (Hasan, 2010b, p. 1).

The redesigns adopted the concept of incremental housing, which is commonly supported as a locally appropriate solution to housing deficits (Beattie et al., 2010). According to Wakely et al., (2010, p. 1), "[t]he basis for 'incremental housing' was that the cost of housing could be reduced by recognising that poor urban families already build and extend their own dwellings incrementally in response to their needs and the availability of resources." As an informal building strategy, incremental housing is typically supported through upgrading or sites and services schemes (including in the Windhoek example) where municipal government does what households cannot effectively do (i.e. provide basic infrastructure and services) and where households do what governments cannot effectively do (i.e. supply affordable housing to meet demand) (ibid). According to Wakely et al., (2010, p. 2), "incremental housing can be a means to reduce uncontrolled urban sprawl in favour of high-density compact development".

#### 4.5 Contrasting EuroAmerican and Southern compact city models

From the analysis above, two very different approaches to compact urban form and high density are identifiable in EuroAmerica and the global South. Figure 4.1 summarises these differences, highlighting how the institutional and demographic contexts, modes of urbanization, planning goals, environment and development agendas, knowledge bases and governance modalities are largely divergent.

These differences expose the conceptual boundaries of the EuroAmerican compact city paradigm when applied in the global South. They also call into question the extent to which paradigms, as a package of commonly accepted praxis, are relevant given the diversity of urban realities that exist both within and between cities worldwide. This brings us full circle back to Robinson's (2002) call to generate alternative planning theory that is grounded in the realities of cities in the global South.

However, the use of deconstruction to challenge the conceptual boundaries of the compact city paradigm as a basis for 'unlocking' Southern alternatives is not without its limitations. Firstly, there is no guarantee that Southern alternatives will necessarily be any more appropriate or progressive than their Euro-American counterparts. Indeed, high density low cost housing can increase risks to disasters and other environmental hazards if land for housing is situated in unsafe and poorly serviced areas, as discussed above. Secondly, by reversing the binary, deconstruction has effectively reinforced the opposition between Euro-American and Southern compact city theorists to the advantage of the latter. In doing so, it is implicitly assumed that planning theory must necessarily be situated in the context in which planning is practiced and thus cannot be generalised or borrowed between the North or South. Thirdly, in reversing the binary, opportunities to combine or hybridise Euro-American and Southern theories are thus also limited. As a consequence, there is little common ground where Euro-American and Southern theorists can talk to one another and contemplate more appropriate theoretical and practical solutions to the challenges facing contemporary cities in both the so-called North and South. Instead, theorists would become pitted against one another in a struggle for power and legitimacy within international debates that would ultimately become increasingly divided and confrontational.

Despite these limitations, deconstruction has nevertheless revealed the importance of considering the assumptions implicit within theories that may reflect their place of origin, but that may not reflect the realities of the places in which they are transferred to. It is clear that these assumptions must necessarily be addressed if planning theory is to have any relevance for planning practice, particularly in diverse, rapidly changing Southern urban contexts. It is also clear that much more attention needs to be paid to the power relations between Euro-American and Southern planning theorists within international debates that have historically favoured the former at the expense of the latter. Fostering communities of inquiry in which planning theorists and practitioners from different parts of the world could come together to discuss the relevance of planning theory and the conditions under which it could be appropriately and effectively applied in different places could provide a way forward within international debates surrounding the compact city among other 'travelling' planning ideas.

**Figure 4.1.** Comparison of EuroAmerican and Southern compact city alternatives

	<b>EuroAmerican Compact City Paradigm</b>	<b>Southern Alternatives</b>
<b>Institutional Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacitated and coordinated planning systems</li> <li>• Effective enforcement regimes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incapacitated and uncoordinated planning systems</li> <li>• Ineffective enforcement regimes</li> </ul>
<b>Demographic Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow urban population growth</li> <li>• Low densities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid urban population growth</li> <li>• Relatively high densities</li> </ul>
<b>Mode of Urbanization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overlapping informal/ formal systems</li> </ul>
<b>Planning Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban containment</li> <li>• Increasing urban density</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening up access to safe and serviced land</li> <li>• Maintaining high urban density</li> </ul>
<b>Environment and Development Agenda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green agenda (climate change mitigation, environmental protection, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Green' agenda and 'brown' agendas (increased access to land outside of ecologically sensitive lands/ hazard-prone areas)</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge Base</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal planning 'experts'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal and formal knowledge co-production</li> </ul>
<b>Governance Modalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributive justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragmented urban governance</li> </ul>

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## 5. Conclusion

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This paper has shown how deconstructive methods can be used to overturn binary oppositions in ways that allow Southern theorists to effectively 'talk back' to EuroAmerican theorists from a more authoritative position. As the majority of all future urban growth will occur in the global South, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, there is a clear need to 'unlock' Southern theorisation to better understand how planning can better respond to the challenges brought by rapid (sub)urbanization.

Beyond urban theory, there are a number of additional power relations running subtly through this paper that warrant acknowledgment. This includes socio-spatial fragmentation as a failure of the state to equitably distribute the immaterial benefits of participation in decision-making processes, which ultimately determine the allocation of material benefits (e.g. urban services and infrastructure) (Young, 1990). For Myers (2011), distributive justice is difficult to "locate in contemporary Africa... particularly given the maldistribution and injustice visited upon urban African peoples" (p. 123).

In such contexts, uneven power relations often lie at the heart of social injustice. They are deeply embedded in shaping and controlling theory and policy discourses, producing knowledge, and the social construction of urban space (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). Power relations therefore warrant more critical attention in future research efforts, especially those concerned with liberating Southern epistemologies and informal rationalities from the "geographies of authoritative knowledge" (Roy, 2009, p. 820). Broadening communities of inquiry to engage EuroAmerican and Southern theorists in debates on the conditions necessary for planning theory to be effectively and appropriately borrowed and re-situated within and between the North and South could provide a useful way forward within a more inclusive and locally sensitive narrative. As Healey (2011) argues, this involves learning about "local specificities as well as searching out knowledge and experiences from elsewhere" (p. 14).

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## DPU WORKING PAPER NO. 187

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