10 Principles for the Design of New Towns

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A Manual

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This Manual is part of the publication *To Build a City in Africa. A History and a Manual* (Rachel Keeton and Michelle Provoost (eds), NAI010 Publishers 2019).

It is about the design of cities, not about urbanization in general or even about the -equally important - economy, technology, or governance of building cities.

It is widely known that Africa has become the world's fastest-urbanizing continent. This urbanization is a huge challenge in areas with fragile institutional frameworks and chronic poverty.

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The Manual - 10 principles

An important part of the book is the Manual, which offers an alternative approach for planners, developers and other decision-makers aiming to construct more inclusive and sustainable New Towns in Africa.

The Manual consists of a set of ten design and planning principles:

The principles are organized in a way that loosely follows the order from long-term and large-scale decisions and processes to smaller scale and urban design advice.

These principles and problems in Africa are mostly close to the situation in Iraq in general and Kurdistan Region in particular, hopefully it can be used.

1. Planning is an ongoing process

No city is permanent or static, and everything that was once modern eventually becomes outdated.

The most effective cities are those that reflect and adapt to changes over time.

New Towns should be conceptualized as a very long-term process, rather than a short-term product.

They need time to develop into complete and vital urban environments.

All cities continuously evolve over time, and this evolution should be clearly addressed in terms of phasing, sequencing, maintenance, and financing.
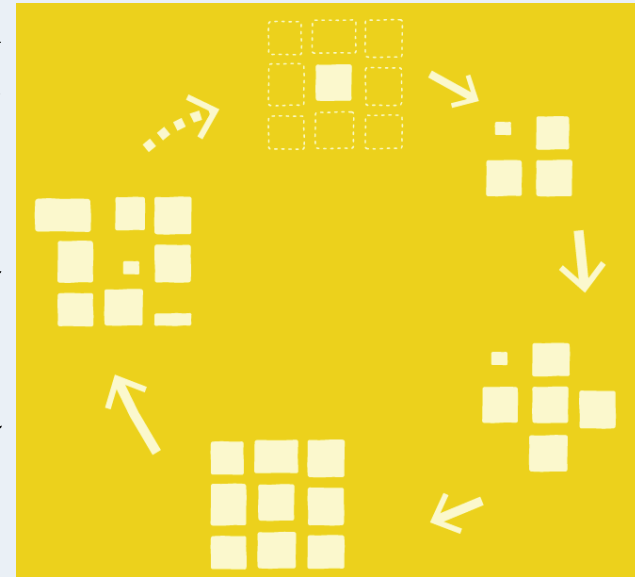
2. Plan for adaptivity

When a city is conceived according to a master plan aimed at a single, final result, it limits the New Town's capacity for change.

For this reason, New Towns have historically struggled with the need to adapt to dynamic economic or social conditions.

Their master plan was conceived at a single moment in time, and because planning reflects the conditions at that one moment, a master plan is frequently obsolete before it is even realized.

To adapt successfully, New Towns must be able to absorb influxes (of varying sizes) through increased density and/or extension.
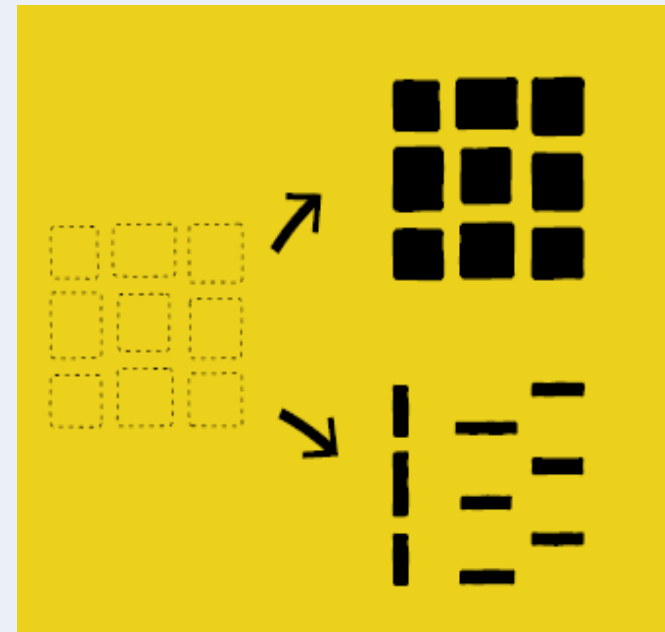
3. No New Town is an island

Many New Towns in Africa are developed on sites that are chosen for their low price, the transparency of ownership, or relationship to a person with political influence.
This can cause problems related to access as New Town residents find themselves with long commutes to and from a 'mother city'.
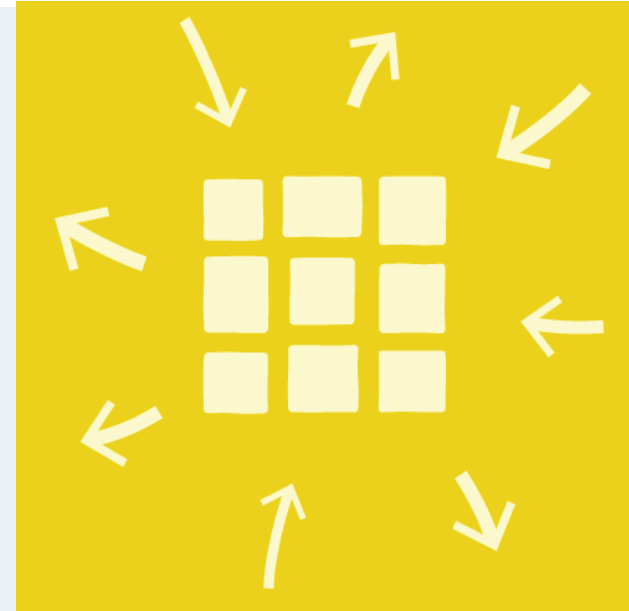
A location that is not connected by existing infrastructure can also seriously limit the New Town's growth: residents or businesses are less likely to move to a New Town that is difficult to access.

The site selection phase is therefore critical to the future success of the New Town.

4. Use no cut-and-paste universal model

There is no one-size-fits-all model for New Towns: models from one part of the world don't guarantee success when exported to another part.

The economic acceleration of a city like Dubai doesn't mean that a similar model can be equally successful or appropriate in African countries with completely different economic and demographic compositions.

However, they are witnessing a growing number of planned cities in Africa that take models from the Middle East and Asia as archetypes to emulate.

The reason for this is that international companies have pinpointed urbanization in Africa as the next global opportunity for profit.

Not only private companies, but also state-owned companies in China, South Korea, and Singapore aim to prolong their success in other parts of the world by exporting standard urbanization models from their own countries.

As a result, the influx of foreign parties also results in the import of foreign urban concepts, often uncritically adopted by local governments.

This shows how global capitalism has become perhaps the most powerful force for the homogenization of contemporary urban environments.

Instead of accommodating this imported uniformity, every country should be capable of developing its own urban models based on local culture, climate, politics, social needs and financial possibilities.

To support this contextualization, local capacity-building within the planning discipline, planning and design education, and training are necessary and should be stimulated at national, regional, and local levels.

5. Embrace new ideas

The culture of New Towns is forward-looking, with an emphasis on innovation and experimentation.

This ambition is optimistic and should be fostered.

Every New Town in history has attempted to surpass cities of the past and showcase state-of-the-art urban design, technology, finance, or architectural techniques.

Recent innovations have included experiments in the fields of sustainability, climate change response, and energy, as well as social changes such as participatory design, resident engagement, and revisions of the relationships between government and residents.
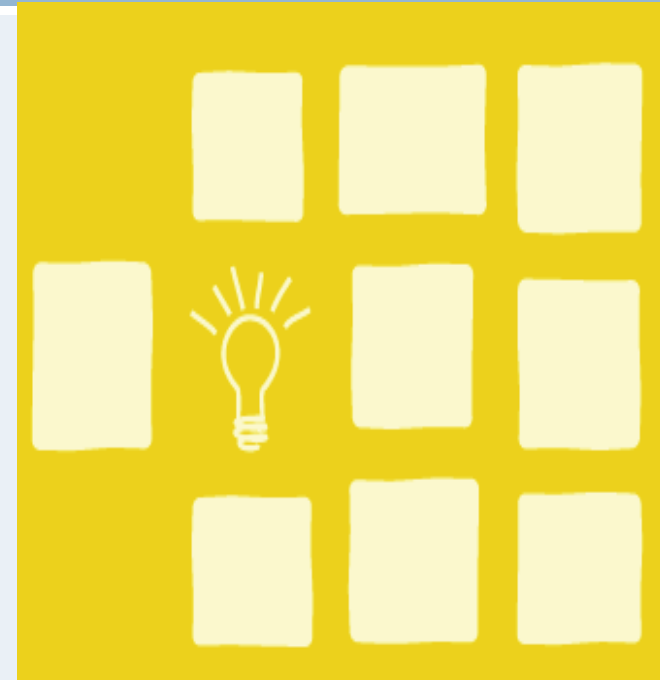
For future New Towns this means the development of new solutions (not only in technology but also social, cultural, political and financial innovation), should be supported in order to improve the fairness and competitiveness of the city.

New Towns can be excellent laboratories for experimentation, as well as implementation of the sustainable urbanism goals outlined in the New Urban Agenda.

6. Infrastructure and mobility for all, from the start

New Towns are usually located at a short distance from their 'mother city' but still programmatically connected when it comes to work and services.

Strong and diverse transportation connections are therefore essential.

Many New Towns begin phased development with housing construction, leaving public transport for a later moment, and usually this has proven to be a mistake.

The provision of public transport within the city and to surrounding cities from the immediate start of development is a main factor in the success or failure of New Towns.
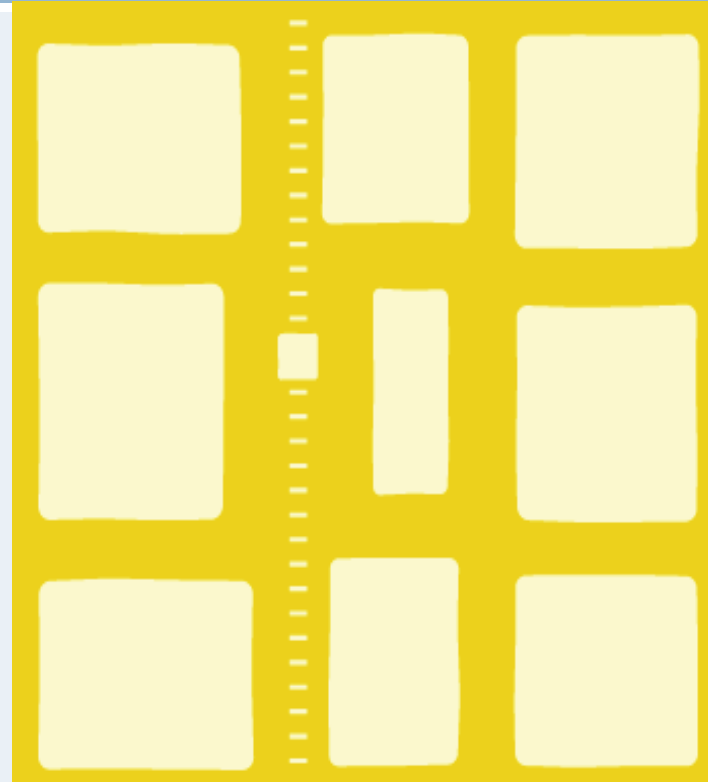
7. Use a blue-green infrastructure as the central framework

According to UN-Habitat's urban design principles, green spaces should account for 30 percent of the total area and offer safe, quality public spaces that are open and accessible to all.

Green spaces should be multifunctional areas for social interaction and cultural exchange.

This network should underpin every New Town design by combining ecology, flood prevention, and water retention with public space and leisure.
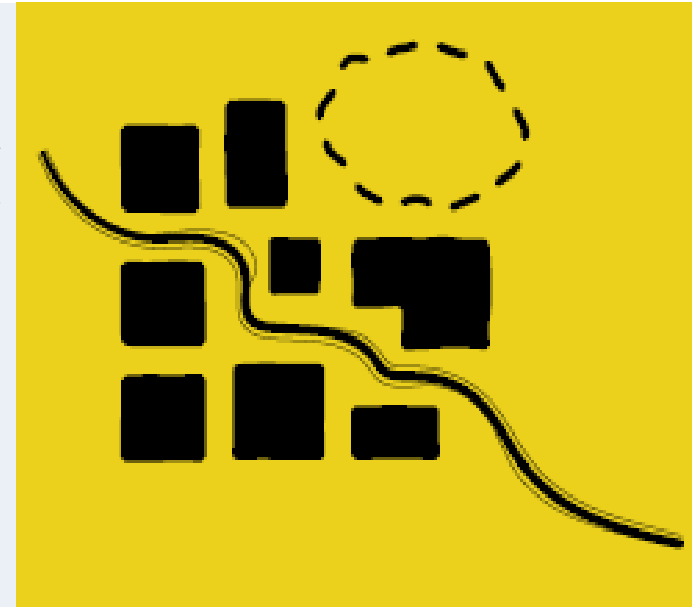
8. Incorporate local cultural heritage(s)

Many contemporary New Towns are developed by international companies with limited knowledge of the local context.

This can result in New Towns that use generic urban models and architecture and miss opportunities to provide more vibrant and authentic urban environments.
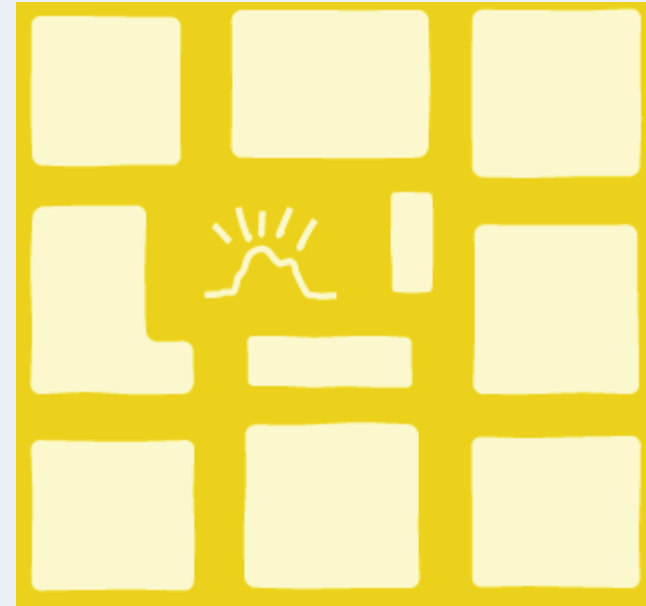
Alternatively, embracing local heritage has the power to stimulate the inclusion of more groups of people, and increase the connection between people and place.

Heritage can be architectural monuments or natural landmarks; it can also be local habits and histories or local building techniques and traditions.

9. Combine top-down and bottom-up

The first phases of a New Town are often managed by large organizations.

This is generally a heavily top-down period.

To encourage more democratic opportunities for public participation, New Towns should move towards municipal governance as soon as possible.
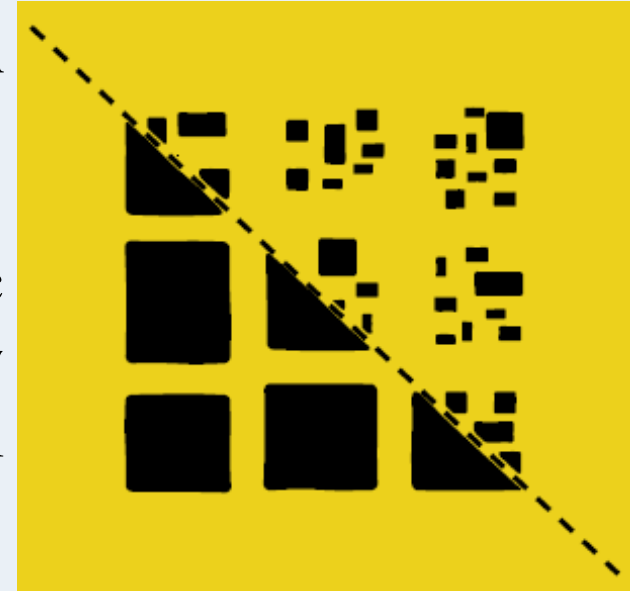
This allows for more representative governance and a greater diversity of feedback loops for urban managers and planners.

Early on, there should be room for many voices: residents' committees should be representative and engagement should be encouraged.

European and American New Towns have shown that after a few decades, they can become too vulnerable when dependent on just one institutional owner or developer.

During the course of the city's development, it will benefit from residents' involvement and private building, economic, and cultural initiatives.

The planning process should take this into account and provide the opportunity for more stakeholders to become part of the process of making a new city.

10. New Towns need diversity

When cities are diverse in their program, economy, and population, they are more resilient and less vulnerable.

Cities that have been built for only one economic group become vulnerable to small fluctuations.
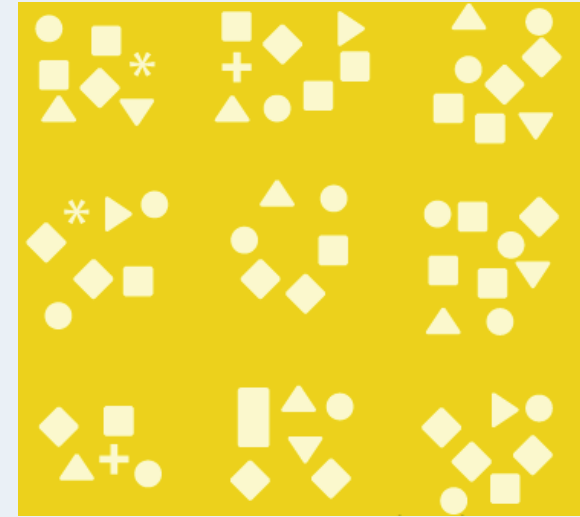
Cities that have been built with extremely limited housing types for only a few target groups do not offer enough choices for healthy long-term development.

Cities grow and mature because residents stay (and change), and new residents migrate to the city.

There must be room for these residents to live, work, and establish

their place in the culture of a city.

THANKS

QUESTIONS ?