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Review Article

Problems and Prospect of Open Spaces Management in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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Abstract:

In recent times, open spaces have become a prominent feature in physical planning and development. This is due to the comfort, aesthetic view, relaxation and recreation that open spaces provide. It has become a means by which the components of the environment-the individuals, community or population are interrelated. Its continuous development and preservation are now vitally considered to attract both private and public bodies. With the use of secondary source of data gathering, the paper reviews the literatures on the value of open spaces and the challenges associated with managing these resources. The paper asserts that there is need to establish open spaces and recreational centers in Nigerian cities, since, they have a marked effect on many aspects of the quality of the urban environment and the richness of life in a city. This study recommends that open spaces should be made an integral component of the environment by the design of well landscaped and managed parks and recreational areas. This will eventually contribute to the quality of life and well-being.

Keyword: Open spaces, development, planning, prospect and management.

1.0 Introduction:

Open spaces are valuable resources. They help to improve the quality of life in urban areas, have essential environmental functions, and increasing the attractiveness of the places in which people live and work (Ahern, 1991; Al-hagla, 2008). Open space provides a range of benefits to citizens of a community, beyond the benefits that accrue to private landowners. Parks and natural areas can be used for recreation; wetlands and forests supply storm-water drainage and wildlife habitat; farms and forests provide aesthetic benefits to surrounding residents (Wald and Hosteller, 2010). In fast growing urban and suburban areas, any preserved land can offer relief from congestion and other negative effects of development. Both publicly held and privately held lands can provide open space benefits (The

Trust for public land, 2009). Concern over the preservation of open space has been growing in recent years as rates of development have increased. There is evidence to suggest that in some areas, the rate of land conversion to development doubled in the late 1990s from rates of earlier decades (USDA 1997). In response, state and local governments, private land trusts, and even the federal government have undertaken a number of activities to preserve different types of land from development.

Nigeria as one of the nations in Africa had shown several characteristics of urbanization both in the time past and recently. This is experienced in the inadequate consideration and neglect of open spaces development and landscape planning. It has observed that these green areas and open spaces have been

converted to other more demanding land uses like housing, industry and commercial areas due to pressures from increased population and economic condition (Alabi, 2009).

Functions of Open Spaces:

Open spaces are areas for recreation, serve other functions like giving form and aesthetic value to a community. Indeed, open spaces serve very basic human needs and values as Banon (1976) asserts "there is certain physical relief in open spaces that cannot be underestimated. It gives us visual relief from the tangled, jarring and often monotonous sight of urban development and a sense of orientation and community identity. Very few can picture the location of every street in town, but most of us can immediately place the location of an attractive open space in our mind's eye". Little (1969) on his own part, further puts the functions of open space being:

- For the establishment of recreation opportunities
- For the establishment of attractive community design, a visually pleasant landscape and the environment amenity this supplies.
- For the maintenance of natural processes or in a word, conservation.

Each of these three basic approaches to open space, has inherent physical, social and economic benefits and in many cases all three functions can be served by one piece of land or one system of open space. This goes to suggest that air and water pollution and providing it with recreational facilities like open spaces (Kabir, 2006). For instance, the development of Onitsha holiday resort has helped to check the health hazard caused by erosion, prevented the striking nature of the stream that ran through it and also took care of an area which could have been a good habitat for mosquitoes and other water-borne diseases.

Open spaces serves as an important tourist attraction and is why it is being integrated into the development plans of both the federal and

state governments of every country as a strategy to improve their economy, beautify the environment and raise the social standards of the people. Therefore, one way of developing tourist centers is by developing open spaces. This can be achieved by developing them to international standard like New York City Parks which are known to attract people from far and near. That is to say, that apart from such known tourist centers like zoological gardens, hotels, holiday resort etc, the government should realize that open space are also one of such agents with which it could boost tourism. Therefore, one can rightly say that tourism overlaps with recreation as a way of using leisure.

Benefits of Open Spaces:

Open spaces has tremendous benefits, beyond simply scenic beauty and recreational opportunities. Some of these benefits include:

- **Quality of life:** They contribute grossly to the quality of life. It unusually attracts high quality of life, encourages the springing up of new business, retains existing ones and sustains local and regional economic growth of jobs and income.
- **Property Values:** It enhances property values. As homes adjacent to these community assets are increased and equally provides recreational opportunities.
- **User utility:** The user utility provided by these parks yields unquantifiable satisfaction to the park users at no cost or below the actual cost of provision.
- **Ecosystems:** Preservation of open spaces and natural resource ensures that the area enjoys multi ecosystem services. Without ecological life support system, including clean air, fresh water, fertile soil and an amenable climate, communities and their economic will suffer. Ecosystem services include climate regulation, water supply, erosion control, nutrient recycling, waste treatment, food production and genetic resources aside from the lands recreational and cultural values. These services have an

economic value. Without the maintenance and preservation of open spaces the quality and value of the environment in which open space is located will decline.

- **Health, education and public benefit:** They provide a variety of benefits that accrue to other public sector service providers, to individual park users and to the broader community. These include health benefits through recreational opportunities, educational benefits through wild land, fire fuel reduction activities.
- **Tourist attraction:** it serves as a tourist attraction that is why it being interpreted into development plans of both the federal and state governments as a strategy to improve their economy beautifies the environment and raises the social standards of the people.

Management of Open Spaces:

Management is concerned with efficiency in the conversion of opportunity and resources into wealth. It is a vital aspect of realization of set goals and objectives of any organization, institution or government especially in the case of those in charge of development of open spaces and it is the pre design stage of the park planning process for the effectiveness of the recreational area. Akpala (1992) confirms that management refers to people and also the process by which people do things. As people, management comprises those who guide actions in organization towards the achievement of the ends or goals for which the organization is established. However, it is observed that inadequate recreational opportunity could be made productive with good administration, but that the best result could not be achieved without it. It goes a long way in influencing the extent and quality of recreational program, services and available opportunities. Allsopp(1979), defined management as the selection of goals and the planning, procurement, organization, coordination and control of the necessary resources for achievement. It is concerned with

the dynamite of circumstance and activity as it is generally motivated by the need to economize in the use of resource and the time in activating predetermined objectives.

Ngene (1990), in his study saw that good management demands that the needs, aspiration and the interest of people to be served should be taken into consideration. Planning is for people and recreation must be built around the desires and interest of people for effective participation on the park users. Butler (1940) opined that management should extend to the relationship between employers and the employees in, order; to accomplish their set purpose. They must be one in mind and purpose. Poor relationship result in lack of enthusiasm o work, indifference in a half heated effort and labour unrest. These result in failure to understand the motives that makes man work, such as their hopes, ambitions and prejudices. Furthermore, design and management are related. Design management involves the initializing organization and control of all these matters to enable effective results to be obtained; this involves a design staff, an organization and a design process, while the whole interaction taking place within design and drawing offices of various kinds (Dennis lock and Nigel Farrow, 1989).It is obvious that management has become an important field in complex modern organization like open space. Since, Fadiro and Atolagbe (2006); Ahinmba, Dimuna and Okogun (2008) has identified that the major problem of open space development in Nigeria is the poor quality and mismanagement of open spaces in the built environment. There is need for the formulation of better policies and strategies for managing both new and old ones; preventing further degradation of the environment through proper planning, design and development.

Management Objectives:

It is essential to understand the management objective of any program embarked on. The management of open spaces is for social, economic, environmental and health benefits

(Tang, 2008). Generally, management objectives can be categorized under the following:

- 1) **Financial motive:** This is a major objective in Estate management where the management goal would be to maximize resource and profits on the investment interest in the property. The policy to be adopted in achieving such objectives may depend on the circumstance and attitude of the owner. For instance, a private developer would most likely have contrasting aims and policies to those of a public authority. Maximum returns here would also include the capital value of that particular interest.
- 2) **Political motives:** Management decisions may be politically motivated. For example, the independence square, Lagos. Here, there is no question of income being generated or received. Management satisfies the need of the status required of that property. However, economy in the maintenance will be considered.
- 3) **Prestige:** The objectives of managing certain estates may be prestige oriented. In Britain for instance, the management goal of the Buckingham palace is among other things to maintain its status or prestige. Also in Nigeria, management of the State House and palace of certain paramount chiefs are to maintain their prestige and ensure that such historic buildings are well preserved for the benefit of all and posterity.

Problems of Managing Open Spaces

- 1) **Conversion and misuse of open spaces:** There is an increased demand of land from the public for the various human activities. This has led to open spaces being misused by being converted illegally for other uses like refuse dumps, corner shops, mechanic workshops, residential buildings, squatter homes and other uses other than that which it was initially developed for (Alabi, 2009; Ayatamuno, 2010). It could become a

security problem to people around such open spaces as criminals and wild animals perceive it to be a hideout.

- 2) **Lack of coordination:** The inadequate coordination of physical planning activities within cities has resulted in the unpleasant and unattractive quality of open spaces. There is lack of harmony in carrying out their individual and cooperate task in planning, development and protection.
- 3) **Urbanization:** There is an increase in the demand for higher levels of development by urbanization in developing countries like Nigeria. This has sponsored to a large extent the ineffective use of open spaces (Daramola and Ibem 2010).
- 4) **Illegal development:** Majority of the private developers are involved in illegal development of their buildings. They build without relevant approval from authority and hardly measure up to the stipulated statutory regulations while developing their lands. This has defeated the management plan, design and landscaping (Arigbola 2008, Aluko, 2011).
- 5) **Poor Organization:** Most Nigerian cities are poorly organized in terms of physical planning and, hence, characterized by inadequate open spaces. The available ones have been over-taken by un-organized and haphazard planning resulting from weak development control (Olotuah and Babadoye, 2009).

4.0 Conclusion:

Open space is an essential part of any urban development and serves several functions that are expedient for basic living. However, the continuous growth of urban areas without effective management and monitoring of their use has led to environmental consequences such dilapidated parks that has become hideouts for criminals, illegal structures, lack of adequate facilities/amenity and open space policies, lack of a capable agency in handling development and maintenance, poor intergovernmental relationships, shortage of landscape, financial constraints and lack of

citizen inclusiveness in participation. Simply put, these negative effects of mismanagement have resulted in the poor quality and further decay of the built environment. As this paper has observed these setbacks in open space management and made suggestions in dealing with the problems, it will become a journey to better prioritizing, channeling of human, finance and functional institutional resources to abate the dire consequences of a nation's dwindling open space reserve.

4.1 Recommendation:

The following suggestions are made towards addressing the management issues of open spaces in Nigeria.

- There is need for proper planning and efficient use of open spaces in Nigerian cities.
- There is need for a more precise approach to urban development in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness.
- The strict enforcement of statutory guidelines for development. By formulating effective urban planning policy.
- To combat cities deformed by degradation and dilapidation of open space structures and facilities; there is need for urban land monitoring, development control and effective management.
- The need for well-designed and landscaped open spaces to enhance the aesthetics of the environment. This should include tree plantings, shrubs, grassing, ground cover, rocks, and water fountains these add to the beauty of the environment by providing shade, beauty, circulation, serenity and well-being.
- Provision of amenities and open space policies to guide the maintenance of parks.
- Conversion of unutilized and empty lands constituting nuisance in the cities to be designed as public open spaces in addition to the few existing ones.
- Proper education and awareness should be delivered to the public.

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