

The Relevance Of A Good Urban Design In Managing Urban Sprawl In Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: The condition of cities in Nigeria has become very alarming today, considering the state of planning in the country. Many cities have grown haphazardly without a plan, making it take the form of a slum and shanty settlements; it is expected that urban design principle can be utilized to design a habitable and aesthetically pleasing environment. This paper seeks to discuss the ways in which urban sprawl can be managed with good urban design principles.

Keywords : Urban sprawl, urban design.

1. INTRODUCTION

Developing countries are experiencing a rapid rate of urbanisation. The growth rate of urban population is more pronounced in Nigeria than most other countries in the African continent. The number of urban centres in Nigeria has risen drastically in the last one hundred years. The resultant effect has been the formation of more urban centres, which are densely populated. Studies have shown that the rapid rate of urbanisation in Nigeria and explosion of urban population have not been matched by a corresponding commensurate change in social, economic and technological development (Mabogunje et al 1978).

2. WHAT IS URBAN DESIGN?

There is no easy, single agreed definition of urban design. Reeke(1972) suggest that, it is a general design of a group of building and associated structures, roads and open spaces forming part of the town, also Tibbad (1988) view urban design as a vital bridge giving structures and reality to two dimensional master plans and abstracts planning brief, before detail architectural or engineering design can take place. It is important to note that the central trust is concern with the relationship between mass and void within the context of socio-economic activity and physical development of settlement in question. (Achi, 2002). The work of Rapoport (1977), while identified four aspects of organization of space, consisting the attributes of urban design, points to the fact that the total package of urban design includes functional efficiency within and with the adjoining environment and with great sensitivity to aesthetics. Urban design plays a significant role in relation to the various factors that control development of a city. This is true because the resulting built environment ultimately rest on the plans prepared and the type of control put in place. However, the credibility of any plan hangs on the scientific rationality input relevant to issues in question and whether they are implementable. From the work of Reeke(1972), it shows that urban planning and development takes place in some specific logical sequence or process involving the efforts of trained and qualified professionals-planners, architects, civil engineers, urban designers etc. he further pointed out three (3) parts of designing a built environment i.e., planning stage, urban design, and construction stage.

- The planning stage involves allocation of land areas for various uses, general location of building and

open spaces and provision of services and surface communication. This stage provides a framework within which other planners' activities that will create the built environment in such a way that waste, mis-use of scarce resources must be curtailed.

- Urban design stage specifically establishes relationship between man-made and natural elements by striking a rhythmic aesthetic balance of scale.
- Construction stage is the actual construction using plans.

A good urban design if translated during construction will create a well built environment. Therefore a good urban design is expected to perform the following functions.

- Development control
- aesthetic functions
- management functions
- space organisation and structure.

3. URBAN SPRAWL IN NIGERIA

Urban sprawl can be described as the outward spread of built up areas caused by expansion which is usually in an untidy manner. Urban sprawl is known to be one of the bye-product of urbanisation, as cities are considered as centres of economic opportunities for the cities themselves and their surrounding hinterland. This is the reason why the cities attract rural dwellers via rural-urban migration from their surrounding hinterland. Without any doubt, an urban centre would only serve as an engine of development if it is economically healthy, properly planned and managed in a way that would allow for efficient and functioning operations of infrastructural facilities among others. Otherwise, it can truly be drag on economic development. (Ravallion, 2001). Due to uncontrolled urbanisation, one major feature of Nigerian cities is urban sprawl. This is characterised by haphazard housing development in the urban suburbs, where majority of the structures are without planning permit in uncoordinated layouts. Most residents that find it difficult to afford residential accommodation in city choose to settle in squatter settlement and make-shift tent in the suburbs. This improper coordination of physical development promotes high level of inaccessibility within the area. (Olujimi J, 2009). These areas lack essential social and welfare infrastructure like water, electricity, health care and

educational facilities among others. The unsanitary condition poses a health hazard to inhabitants which is dangerously unsafe for living because of its associated social vices. There is no Nigerian city that can be exonerated from the stigmatisation of urban sprawl, even the federal capital territory that is said to have a carefully design master plan suffers from the unpleasant environmental situation.

4. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR URBAN SPRAWL IN NIGERIA.

The problems confronting Nigerian cities have resulted largely because urbanisation has not been matched by the growth of resources to tackle these problems or think ahead of them. Resources needed to manage cities have continued to dwindle in the last two decades or so. (Oluwasola, O. 2007). The problem of inadequate resources to manage the cities were complicated the problems of;

- Declining economic fortunes which resulted from internal and external economic crises. Economic crises in the country has brought about reduction in urban subsidies which has left residents with little infrastructural and poorly maintained public services, and unfortunately; more population has been moving to the unplanned settlement in the outskirts of the city which lack infrastructure and basic amenities required for a decent standard of living.
- Poor economic policies that employed the trickled down development strategy which concentrated development at the urban centre at the expense of the rural areas, thus forcing a massive exodus of people from the rural areas to the cities.
- Issues of lack of transparency, accountability and political instability have also contributed in urban distortion causing urban sprawl.

It is important to note that the unprecedented increase in population in Nigerian cities continues to put pressure on the existing housing facility. Rural migrants to the urban areas are mostly low income earners who cannot afford a bargain in the housing market but prefer to settle in suburbs of the cities. Land speculation and hoarding in the suburbs has also compounded the problems of urban sprawl, where most of the land hoarded are not subjected to conventional design layout that would seek planning approval, even when such parcel of land are design into layouts most of them are not properly charted to allow for coordination. Also government's inability to effectively develop their compulsory acquired parcels of land (e.g. university of Jos around Ungwan Rogo) in the some states , because of non readiness to pay for compensation on un-exhausted resources in the acquired land to owners. Thus, the unwillingness of land owners to release fully, the acquired land to the government and also their continuous disposal of the land to individuals that continues to develop without reference to planning authorities in order to seek planning permission.

5. RELEVANCE OF A GOOD URBAN DESIGN IN MANAGING URBAN SPRAWL IN NIGERIA.

As urban design is interested in providing a well planned en-

vironment that ensures functional efficiency within and with adjoining environment and with great sensitivity to aesthetics, it must be done with the people and not for the people because whatever the quality of the urban design it must receive the overwhelming support of the people to be able to transmit its initial goal to reality. Urban design as a professional discipline also recognises the importance of public-private partnership in making a well built environment. Most cities are sprawling because of the notion that planning is the exclusive preserve of urban planners, it must be giving a multi-disciplinary approach, involving professional from other related discipline such as; urban design, architecture, building technology, land/ quantity survey and engineering. Urban design comes handy when considering the three (3) dimensional characterization of the nature of the building to be placed on the site in the future. This will go a long way to check the indiscriminate sprawling areas. A good urban design makes provision for space organisation and effective connectivity within the urban fabric, so that the basic infrastructures are adequately provided within the available space. According to Okpoechi C (2005), which is summarised below, it is important to note that a good urban design must consider the following principles to be successful;

- a. Character of the area: The area must be design to portray its own identity and not to force an alien culture on the city.
- b. Ease of movement: there should be a well laid out transportation network connecting the entire city and easy to get through.
- c. Sustainability/balance with nature: It must consider having a balance between natural and built environment and reduce degrading the land.
- d. Diversity and mixed of uses: creating a room for variety and choice for urban residents, that is; having something for everyone and to meet the diverse range needs.
- e. Equality of urban realm: a good urban design creates appealing space with attractive and successful outdoor areas. Public and private spaces should be carefully distinguished and adequate infrastructure provided for effective utilization of the spaces.
- f. Order: It must create order in the urban environment and harmonisation of all the features that make up a city ranging from public infrastructure, private building and public and private spaces.

6. BENEFITS OF A GOOD URBAN DESIGN

A good urban design gives a pleasant outlook to a city and makes all other aspect of human interaction well coordinated to give a peaceful and happy environment. Okpoechi, C. (2005) identifies three important benefits of a good urban design as follows;

- a. Economic benefits: It helps increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the city. This is so because a good urban design adds premium to the value of housing, increases viability of local facilities and extend useful economic life by delaying loss of viability and functionality. It also enhances economic activity.
- b. Social benefits: It reinforces a sense of identity among the residents of a neighbourhood and

encourages people to become more actively involved in managing their environment.

- c. Environmental benefits: It improves the general aesthetics of a city and important sanitary conditions that makes the cities habitable.

RECOMMENDATION/CONCUSSION

Planning must be done with due consideration of the citizens, that is, it must put the people at the centre stage, so as to achieve its set target and also, public enlightenment should make emphasis on checking indiscriminate development within the city centres. For effective management of urban sprawl, urban design must also consider the option of public-private partnership (PPP) in physical development of Nigerian cities with a focus on checking urban sprawl, and most importantly the approach should be interdisciplinary.

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