



THE URBAN PUBLIC PARK OF 21ST CENTURY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT: The negligence of adequate planning and development of urban public parks in Nigeria is a huge setback to cities achieving maximum utilization in their social, economic, physical, and environmental sectors. This is coupled with many other managerial problems in maintaining the few available ones; and as such it has led to the gradual decay of the nation's public parks in urban centres and, hence reduced their benefit to the built environment. The garden has become a part of our daily lives. It has become increasingly important since the 18th and 19th centuries. Parks in the city have begun to be abandoned and city dwellers are more comfortable spending their time in the countryside away from the hustle and bustle of the city. However, since the end of the 20th century, urban residents have begun to realize the importance of urban parks in their daily lives. They have begun to realize the importance of a quality environment and life. To meet these changing needs and wants, it is important to re-evaluate the construction of our city's public parks by looking at their true function in meeting the needs of life, environment, and socio-culture of the users. An open-ended questionnaire administered with twenty-one participants (regular users of public urban parks), reviews the literature on the general need for developing urban parks in Nigeria and critically examines the planning, development designs, and the important facilities and management procedures for urban parks. The result of this study will ensure dignity and remove the intrigues attracted to implementing urban renewal and regional planning programs and it will ensure the sustainability of every urban park project in Nigeria. These benefits include general beauty, healthy lifestyles, increased leisure activities, communal interaction and preservation of natural systems, and maximizing abandoned land spaces.

KEYWORDS: Built Environment, Design, Planning Regulations, Recreational facilities



INTRODUCTION

Increased population in Nigerian cities has led to the demand for more land spaces for other land uses like residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and industrial activities at the expense of public urban parks and open spaces (Ogundele and Jegede, 2011). This has resulted in multiple developments of squatter settlements, ghettos, and illegal structures that describe our urban settings and once-beautiful cities (Fasakin, 2009, Alabi, 2010 and Aluko, 2011). It is to be noted that the fast growing of public urban parks is not accompanied by necessary planning, development designs, and physical planning provision; hence, unguided and uncontrolled developments are prevalent (Olujimi, 2009; Alabi, 2010 and Wald and Hosteller, 2010). However, these huge drastic planning and developmental oversights cannot de-emphasize the unquantifiable value/need for urban park facilities in our cities today. Recreation is defined as a re-creation or restoration of depleted motor power or emotional state. It was also described as a socially acceptable leisure experience or activity that rests men from work, brings satisfaction often by giving them a change, and restores them for work (Hutchinson, 2005). Okolie (2008) described recreational facilities to provide green places for people to come together promoting communal bonding among city residents and infuses the social content of life.

Economically, He and Jia (2004) noted that urban parks and private planted areas surrounding buildings have a marked effect on many aspects of the quality of the urban environment and the richness of life in a city. Similarly, Chiesura (2004) contributed that, the presence of natural areas contributes to the quality of life in many ways and besides many environmental and ecological services, urban nature provides important social and psychological benefits to human societies, which enrich human life with meanings and emotions. Furthermore, Thompson (2002), acknowledged that, access to some form of “nature” is a fundamental human need and therefore, a vital part of access to open space. In addition, Ahianba et al (2008) emphasized that physical environment is an important component of the environment and it is through that which organisms, individuals, communities or populations are in contact. As such, a well landscaped physical environment, also known as the built environment should be an integral part of the human environment.

Urban growth involves a twin process of maintaining the already built-up areas as well as maintaining and rebuilding newer ones (Omole, 2000). The presence of slums, for instance, poses a very great threat to the financial strength of the town. The urban parks in many developing countries particularly Nigeria is fast decaying. The rapid urbanization, rural-urban migration and decades of steady economic downturn, decay of urban infrastructure and negligent urban park housekeeping (World Bank, 2005). One problem of the Nigerian urban public parks is noncompliance with building bylaws and regulations. The major areas of default are the area of zoning, setbacks, building along utility lines and non-adherence to the provision of adequate ventilation. The neglect has resulted in environmental degradation; which invariably is a menace to human health, brings traffic injury and death and undermines civic pride.

The formal urban and regional planning activities in Nigeria began with the Planning Ordinance of 1902 which empowered the then Governor of the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria to set up Europeans Reservations. The Ordinance, which specified how European reservations should be located and segregated from the native location, was the first town planning regulation that made a conscious attempt to effectively plan for any segment of



a Nigerian town (Oyesiku, 2004). This was the first attempt to institutionalize urban development in Nigeria and form the prefix in which urban and regional planning projects execution is being carried out. Urban and regional planning delineates the forms in which urban growth should be channelled. A modern urban and regional planning law in Nigeria was the enactment of the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law Decree No. 88 of 1992. This was after forty-six years of the 1946 Ordinance, which is the first unified urban and regional planning law in Nigeria, where urban renewal projects were given providence. The Land Use Act of 1978 gave power to the governor of the state to have power over the control of land in the state and this resulted in the delineation of some areas for urban renewal projects.

In spite of the increasing knowledge of modern planning and the number of planners, physical development in cities of less developed countries remains an array of chaos and disorder. This, as manifested in urban sprawl, poor access to dwellings, bad drainage, housing congestion, uncontrolled and increasing density of physical development, among many other problems, characterizes the high-density areas of Nigerian urban centres. Although such measures of development control as the application of minimum lot sizes, standards on windows, doors, height of buildings, and road widths, among others, have been introduced to control buildings and the general appearance of cities (Olajuyin and Olayiwola, 1985), the problem of undesirable nature and pattern of development in high-density areas of our cities is still a serious one. The reason for the pattern may not be farfetched. The areas do not only provide abodes for the poor natives who hold tight to extended family properties but also provide locations of relatively high accessibility for businesses, cottage industries and services. For these, developers-individuals, corporate bodies, and even the government tend to develop or redevelop properties in the area to the fullest, with the ultimate aim of maximizing the use of space regardless of whether or not such an action is in the interest of physical planning. Their actions are made more manifest in the process of conversion and redevelopment of properties to accommodate more businesses or less importantly more dwelling units.

Nowadays, park has become part of the urban process. Urban public parks are an important aspect of the urban environment Reeves (2013). It is inseparable from the development of town and city. Cities and parks should be regarded as interdependent. As the dynamic of cities changes, the use, role and value of public parks also change Greenhalgh and Worpole (2015). Public Park has contributed to the social, economic, environmental and cultural program or development. At the same time, it improves the quality of the environment and quality of life. Nevertheless, their development and quality depend upon the good stewardship of their planner, implementers and managers.

PLANNING/DESIGN FOR PUBLIC URBAN PARKS

A well-designed, landscaped and managed urban park and open spaces within the neighbourhood/environment can offer play areas for children, communal space, and, a serene environment and also contribute to the quality of life and well-being. Planning for an Urban Public Park within human dwellings is an attempt to study human needs, scientific examination of contemporary resources, demographic growth and urban expansion. Planning is not complete without the proper distribution of parks and proposals for the construction of required varied facilities to provide indoor and outdoor activities which make up the balanced



programme. The purpose of planning is to promote, extend and make available the necessary areas and physical plants for more perfect administration of public recreational services.

In developing an Urban Public Park, factors for supply and demand are considered. The planner has a major role to play in the supply and resultant effects on the landscape and also on the recreational habits of the residents in urban areas. This is because leisure is essentially a matter of individual and normally reflected in the wide range of recreational activities. The choice is always conditioned by certain factors such as age, marital status, income, educational background and the availability of suitable resources and facilities to make proper use of them. Demand as used by the planner “is the number of persons required to take part in particular recreational activities and hence is manifested in demand for facilities” (Arler, 2017). This affects the design of various locations. The park has to be designed according to the demand of an area. Design is the search for forms that satisfy a program (Lynch, 1976). It deals with particular solutions, while the programs are concerned with general characteristics and destined outcomes. Designs with programming are modified as a design process. Design is in all human thought; it is not restricted to geniuses or separate form practicability, or a sudden relation (Lynch, 1976).

Facilities and utilities should be provided for public convenience. These include dustbins, public toilets, canteens, snack bars, drink bars, ice cream stands, suya joints and benches. Every park and recreational area should have a well-prepared emergency plan. The plan must be specially related to park activities provided; for example, the size of the park, the number of people using the park and the proximity of these facilities to the users which depends particularly on the size and type of recreational area.

URBAN PUBLIC PARK DEVELOPMENT

When humans first erected a fence to protect an area of land, the world's first park was made Turner (1996). The Park is perhaps the oldest feature of the city primarily built to serve the recreational needs of its residents Chadwick (1966). It started with people having a park for their private use and enjoyment. Normally it is situated adjacent to their house in a natural setting and towards the pleasure garden.

The Public Park and park movement began during the 19th century, as an area of land laid out primarily for the public in the major industrial area. Parks act as the lungs of the city, refresh the air, improve people's health and provide beneficial contact with nature Conway (2012); Woudstra and Fieldhouse (2015). The social reform movement paved the way for early legislation to create open spaces in towns and cities. The park was based on public spending and private philanthropy.

Furthermore, in the early 20th century, the Garden City movement was inspired by Ebenezer Howard. More creation of useful landscapes within the town are being developed for the use and enjoyment of the public with proper planning. It was built for a beneficial purpose. Later people started giving value to parks in terms of economic, ecological, emotional and psychological.

Nevertheless, in the second half of the 20th century, as more parks were developed and the development of the city was becoming more complicated and denser, people tended to move

further from the urban area. As circulation and movement become more convenient and efficient, more people spend much of their leisure time outside the city and countryside. This is then followed by issues of lack of priority and problem of skill in managing and sustaining the urban landscape and urban park. People needs and demand of park have changed but the park design and development often fail to respond to these changes. This resulted in urban parks in many cities being neglected and given less priority. This whole scenario of urban public park development can be summarized as in diagram 1 below.

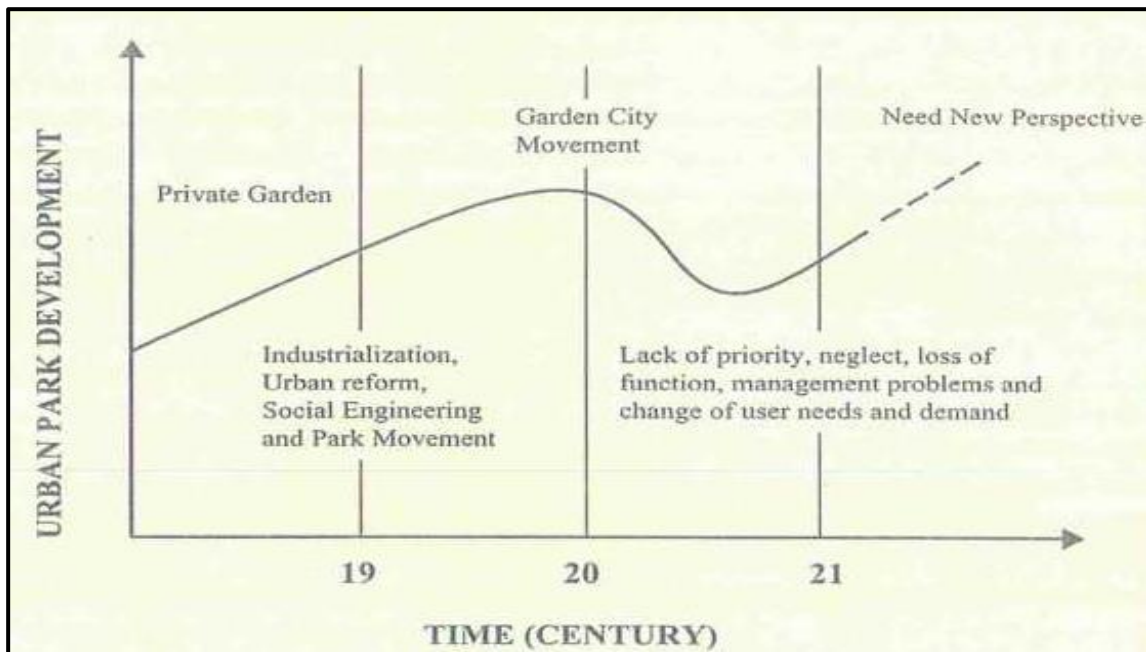


Figure 1: The rise and fall of Urban Public Park Development

Nowadays urban Public Park is part of the urban open spaces which have a whole range of types that include neighbourhood parks, town parks, pocket park, linear parks, regional parks, school playing fields, children's playgrounds, community gardens, urban woodlands and green corridor and green linkages. In some urban spaces, it also includes pedestrian streets and lanes, market or public squares, promenades, pavement and footpaths.

21ST CENTURY CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF URBAN PUBLIC PARK

Concerns about the environmental quality and living quality among urban dwellers have increased recently. People are now more concerned about their living quality and the environment surrounding them. They are now very proud of their park, which serves as a source of local continuity in the rapidly evolving urban environment and a sense of location. Figure 2



Figure 2: Playground for a neighbourhood

Urban parks are an enormous resource for towns and cities and there are opportunities for them to contribute much more in improving the quality of urban life and play Park is no longer just a spot for fun Greenhalgli and Worpole (2017). Its function has to be diversified and, in the future, it should be more multi-functional. The park is expected to play its role in various ways and meet the changing needs of urban life see Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Central Park close to the residential neighbourhood

The development and management of urban public parks should take into consideration the following factors that parks can play a major role.

The Urban Patrimony

As an urban heritage and asset to the city, Park should act. Urban Public parks and other public spaces are core aspects of the identity of a city and serve as functional components of city life McInroy (2018). In a city's landscape character, it functions as a strong feature. The Park can provide the feeling of space and the pride of the area. As a local distinctive, it can link with past matter and can give the feeling, quality and emotion of the place see Figure 4. Therefore, it is important to develop, manage and sustain the park accordingly to achieve that recognition.



Figure 4: Park that Provides Sense of Space

Social Interaction

The development of the park, its design and its structure create opportunities for their user to have their activities. Typically, the way a group uses a park is expressed in the park's layout and design. Park, besides the function of providing the active and passive recreation needs of the user, should also act as a place for social renewal, and social interaction and foster community development (Musa et al., 2022). Cranz (2016) suggested parks as a mirror of society and are expected to sustain communal values that urban society as a whole fails to uphold. Parks should have the capacity to act as space not only for recreation but multifunction areas for large events and gathering activities. Hence this can help reduce social tension. The park should also act as an integrated space and provide a set of facilities linking two or more existing spaces and facilities.

Park has also a psychological advantage and a calming effect that can improve health and living quality. Parks should make a place accessible for people to escape the pressures of urban life and physically and emotionally escape urban stresses Harrison and Burgess (2015). For the

potential growth of urban parks, this partnership between public parks and public health is a significant prospect. As parks become closer to the community and the public, they can be a place that allows for voluntary involvement and a place for training and education. Park can eventually be managed and maintained by voluntary organizations Figure 5.



Figure 5: Urban Park needs to meet the needs of Modern Urban Life

Economic Attraction

Parks can increase the attraction of a place for business investment. It helps create a better place for work, live and leisure. With the additional attraction and better environment for working provided by park, it can assist the economic revival of a city. Nowadays, more innovative new buildings and facilities are being sited and developed in park. Value of building and properties with park also increased. With proper planning and design, park can be developed as tourist attraction. This will eventually create more business opportunity and improve the economy of the city.

Environment Improvement

Park can help to conserve natural system within the urban environment. It acts as a green lung to the city. Park with all the vegetation can refresh the air and absorb pollutants. By protecting and providing natural features, especially trees, which act as important filters, urban air pollutants can be significantly reduced figure 6 Johnston and Newton (2016); Flores, Pickett et al. (2018). It also helps to moderates the city climate and encourages airflow. This will hence help to improve the quality of urban environment.



Figure 6: Green Park helps to Conserve Natural System.

Natural Habitat

The park can create biodiversity in the city as it provides beneficial contact with nature. It is an important aspect of the place for wildlife in the city of Woudstra and Fieldhouse (2018). This can be done through proper planting and management of the site. Nature enhances well-being and is especially beneficial for urban inhabitants.

The impact of nature on the psychological state of mind of people displays a number of advantages as a result of looking at or witnessing the '**natural**' landscape from relieving mental exhaustion, to influencing mood changes and relaxation Rhode and Kendle (2016); Kellert and Wilson (2015).

This nature and natural habitat can be created by having creative and innovative urban public park planning and design. The experience of quality urban Public Parks and the coexistence with nature qualities is a central part of the good life Arler (2017). The presence of such qualities can make life richer. True respect for future generations implies the preservation of the qualities, which is most important after thorough investigation and mutual discussion De-Shalit (2017). Eventually, parks can provide evidence of the quality of the city as parks help to improve the urban environment and urban living.

METHODOLOGY

The study is more of an observatory study. The available urban and regional planning laws were carefully studied in relation to Urban Public Park. The various Urban Public Park projects carried out in some states within the country between 2007 and 2012 were also identified and the profile of each project was obtained from the State Ministries of Physical Planning and Urban Development and was followed up by site investigations to determine the compliance of the projects with the existing planning laws and standards. The information obtained from



the Ministries was carefully analysed with information obtained from site investigations and compared with the provisions of the planning laws/regulations and the available literature in the twenty-first century for the purpose of this study

CONCLUSION

Fresh perspectives are required for the future of the Urban Public Park. This is the challenge for the professionals concerned, politicians, implementers and park managers (landscape architects, planners and other stakeholders involved). More innovative and creative design ideas and proper planning and management are necessary, in addition to the budget and regulations. It should be noted that urban parks should strive to enhance public health, the environment, the economy and culture. The urban landscape and urban park should be multifunctional, taking nature into account; it is useful, and important and also takes into account the cultural memories and users' changing needs.

Over time, urban public parks are becoming more important for living in the area. The creation and maintenance of quality urban public parks and other urban green spaces should be aimed at creating better quality urban landscapes and the environment. Recent concerns about sustainable development and a growing emphasis on the need for more Liveable cities should be reflected in planning this quality urban public park.

Ultimately, this would achieve a healthy urban climate and a higher standard of living. Quality of life and environmental performance are essential to sustainability. The 21st-century urban public park deals not only with aesthetics but also with the user's need for meaning, functions and improvements. The task is to create, maintain and carry out the urban public park's future purpose from its new perspective.

In a situation where the government provides recreational facilities (e.g. sports stadiums and centres); there is a need for proper maintenance and sustenance. The cost of maintenance may force the government to commercialize such facilities and if care is not taken the bill may be too much for the public to bear, eventually the public may be discouraged and such facilities may not be put to their maximum use. Local government could help in establishing public urban parks and centres. In the same vein, there are other institutions such as corporations, industries, firms and companies that can assist greatly in the development of these facilities. The health of employees and the public should be the concern of any company that wants maximum workers and output. Many commercial and government institutions are now conscious of the importance of physical fitness and health programmes for their employees fostering the need for planning and developing more public urban parks.



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