

URBAN RENAISSANCE: REDEFINING STREETS FOR PEOPLE IN PORT HARCOURT MUNICIPALITY

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Article Received on 12/06/2019

Article Revised on 02/07/2019

Article Accepted on 23/07/2019

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ABSTRACT

Urban streets are becoming unattractive and unpleasant for urban dwellers to appreciate. The aim of the study is to redefine streets for people in Port Harcourt municipality to enhance liveability of residents. The objectives are to identify the causes of obsolescence in the streets of some selected planned neighbourhoods in Port Harcourt

municipality; assess and examine the impacts of the identified causes of obsolescence on the social and economic systems of the residents of these streets and neighbourhoods; and suggest sustainable approaches to redefine the streets of these planned neighbourhoods Port Harcourt municipality to enhance urban quality and liveability of residents. The study adopted purposive and simple random sampling techniques and key informant method for collection of data. Two planned neighbourhoods were chosen for study namely: PH Township and Diobu (Mile 1, 2 and 3). A total of 80 respondents (40 respondents each) were interviewed from the selected neighbourhoods. The study found that the main causes of obsolescence in the streets of these neighbourhoods are street trading, population growth, security concern, increase in vehicular traffic, unauthorised on-street parking, indiscriminate change in use of property, dumping of waste in street, noise, social disorder and poor maintenance of street. The impacts of these factors include noise and air pollution, traffic congestion, overcrowding, insecurity and safety problems, filthiness and loss of community identity and bond. However, the obsolescence in the streets and neighbourhoods have negatively impacted on study area and should be address holistically. The study suggested that proper landuse management and planning system should applied in the study area to

forestall orderliness, sanity and control urban growth and development in these neighbourhoods; proper survey of the streets should be carried out to identify problems; systematic approach should use in the provision of new and maintenance of existing infrastructural facilities and services that will ensure and enhance attractiveness and pleasantry serene for living, recreating and working; short, medium and long term plans should be prospered for managing, planning and maintaining of streets; and collaborative planning approach should be employed to involve all stakeholders including government, residents and businesses to manage and maintain the streets and its environs to achieve sustainable urban system that will redefine the streets character and form.

KEYWORDS: Urban Renaissance, Street and Neighbourhood Obsolescence and Impacts and Sustainable Urban Planning.

INTRODUCTION

Streets are essential elements of the urban environment that we use every day (Urban Design Alliance (UDA), 2002). Recently, streets within urban areas are transforming into unpleasant and unattractive place to live, work and recreate as a result of rapid urbanization. This has brought to the forefront of city managers and decision makers the issues of streets functionality, safety and security, convenience and aesthetic (UDA, 2002). All these issues mentioned have given concern to how streets are planned, designed, managed and maintained to enhance liveability and attractiveness to improve quality of life of the urban dwellers. Streets are expected to serve the internal portion of a local area and neighbourhood either residential, commercial or industrial area (Rangwala, Rangwala and Rangwala, 2009). The streets are expected to facilitate communication between people, provide air and light to properties within them and space for laying public utilities and services that will enhance the properties values and make life worthwhile for users (Rangwala *et al.*, 2009).

Urban streets are provided to enhance circulation and identity base on the expected functionality and the economy to achieve its intended purposes (Gallion and Eisber, 2005). The accelerated and unprecedented urban growth and population especially in developing countries have triggered many urban problems which has effected the functionality, character and structure of many urban streets such as poor air quality, unattractiveness and unpleasant serene view, loss of sense of community bond, decay of the central city, loss of open spaces and high cost of infrastructural facilities and services provision and maintenance (Enger, Smith and Bockarie, 2006).

These unmanaged urban problems have reduced quality of life in urban areas especially in urban streets and Port Harcourt municipality is not an exception especially the old planned neighbourhoods are faced with same problems of unpleasant and unattractive views, loss of open spaces, increase cost of provision and maintenance of urban facilities and services leading to streets and neighbourhoods obsolesces. The study is focus on redefining urban streets in the old planned neighbourhoods in Port Harcourt municipality to improve the living conditions and urban environmental quality of the residence in the study area.

Statement of the Problem

There are many changes occurring in our urban areas especially in the developing countries. This new urban transformation is taking place as a result of rapid urbanisation which being experienced because of urban population growth and spatial area increase. Many of these urban environments are characterized by unpleasant and poor functionality of the streets that is supposed to provide pleasure, attraction and connectivity. However, the decay of many urban streets has portrayed obsolescence in structure, form and character.

Port Harcourt municipality which is the heart of Port Harcourt metropolis is observed to be decaying in urban structure and landscape. The rapid increase in population and human activities in municipality especially in the planned neighbourhoods has changed the fabrics of the neighbourhoods as planned by the Port Harcourt Master Plan of 1975 into unpleasant and unattractive for residents, businesses and visitors. The influx of people and businesses in these planned neighbourhoods in the municipality has created chaotic urban problems. This study is centred on three of the oldest planned neighbourhoods in the municipality namely: PH Township and Diobu (Mile 1, 2 and 3) neighbourhoods. The streets in these neighbourhoods are lacking basic urban facilities and services that will attract people, businesses and visitors. There are problems of human and vehicular traffic and congestion, overcrowding, unsafe and unclean (public health and sanitation issues), and poor coordination of activities in the streets affecting social and economic conditions of the residents in the neighbourhoods. This study is to assess these conditions and suggest sustainable approach to redefine and revive the streets structure, form and character to improve liveability and quality of life of residents in the neighbourhoods of the study area.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to redefine streets for people in Port Harcourt municipality to enhance liveability of residents. The objectives of the study are:

1. Identify the causes of obsolescence in the streets of some selected planned neighbourhoods in Port Harcourt municipality;
2. Assess and examine the impacts of obsolescence on the social and economic systems of the residents of these streets and neighbourhoods; and
3. Suggest sustainable approaches to redefine the streets of these planned neighbourhoods Port Harcourt municipality to enhance urban quality and liveability of residents.

Scope of the Study

The geographical scope of the study covers two (2) planned neighbourhoods in Port Harcourt municipality (see Fig. 1). These neighbourhoods are PH Township and Diobu (Mile 1, 2 and 3) of the municipality. Other parameters measured include causes of obsolescence in the streets of the neighbourhoods, the impacts of the obsolescence on the social and economic systems of the residents of the neighbourhoods and possible sustainable suggestions to redefine and improve liveability of residents.

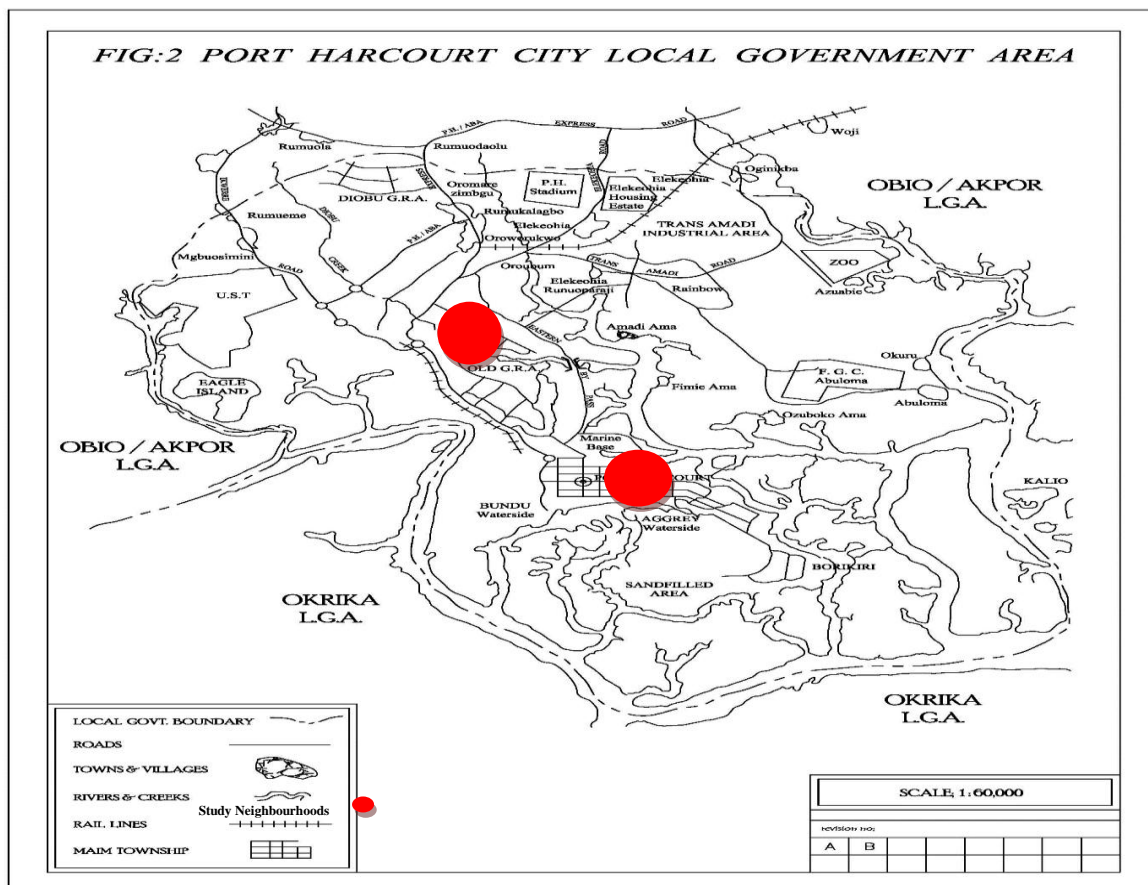


Fig. 1: Map of Port Harcourt Municipality showing the Study Area.

Source: Surveyor General Office, Port Harcourt, 2018

LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban Street Forms and Elements

Cities and their elements are what constitute urban forms and brings the identity and character of the cities (Oliveira, 2016). The elements that distinct a particular city form from another are buildings, plots, streets, street blocks, roads another street furniture. These elements are combined to display the originality, uniqueness and environmental quality through physical planning regulations and standards including their quality architectural elements and features. The process of maintaining these qualities in any urban area is a continuous process that have been adopted by the city stakeholders over the years through a defined and refined decision making processes (Oliveira, 2016). Though, other elements that project urban forms are not limited to buildings, plots, streets, street blocks, roads and street furniture but other natural elements in the environment that enhances the identity of a city. Natural elements such as plants, relief and water bodies contribute to influence urban forms and street patterns (Guerreiro, 2011 cit. Oliveira, 2016).

Man-made and natural elements help to align streets and buildings in the city that specifies the functionality of all urban spaces provided and bring their distinct character and identity. This is achieved through careful understanding of these elements and the users of these spaces that will contribute to the totality of the urban form (Oliveira, Monteiro and Partanen, 2015).

Causes of Obsolescence in Urban Streets and Environment

There are several factors identified that causes obsolescence in streets within urban areas that changes their character, identity and form. Three notable factors identified that causes obsolescence in streets and neighbourhoods in urban areas include dearth of social life, economic depression and environmental degeneration which are associated with urban decay (Hans, 2003). This process occurs when a previously functioning part of a city is neglected and suffers social, economic and physical depression and degeneration of the urban fabrics that makes it attractive, safe, and pleasant for people to reside, live and work (Hans, 2003). This is as a result of poor governance system and failure public institutions to carry out their statutory functions.

The immigration of people from other settlements and the peripheries of the cities without control to the inner city is another issue that degenerate urban streets and neighbourhoods (Lupton and Power, 2004). Uncontrolled and planned migration overcrowd the environment

and put pressure on existing infrastructure and services available in inner city streets and neighbourhoods that defaces their character. There are also issues of poor planning decisions by politicians through the physical planning mechanisms in urban areas that encourages the gradual deterioration of streets and neighbourhoods neglecting the socio-economic conditions of the populace as many of the residents are not employed increasing the percentage of economic disadvantaged group and urban poverty level (Grogan and Proscio, 2002).

Impacts of Obsolescence on Urban Streets and Environment

Streets and neighbourhoods are places of activities and therefore impact on the environment of the urban form. Street and neighbourhood activities such as residential, commercial, recreational, office and institutional activities affect the social and economic conditions of the urban environment (Thompson, 2018). The impacts of urban activities are numerous that encourages and set the conditions for obsolescence in streets and neighbourhoods. The social conditions of obsolescence include increase in population and densification and heavy vehicular traffic leading to overloading and overcrowding in available housing stocks, bottleneck and congestion of both human and vehicular traffic (Polidoro, Augusto de Lollo and Barros (2011). Other social conditions include loss of community social heritage and opportunities especially recreational and neighbourhood ties, increased cost for community services such as policing, fire and emergency services, concentration of urban poverty due to deteriorating housing, environmental and infrastructural quality decreasing liveability (Thompson, 2018; Polidoro *et al.*, 2011).

Some economic impacts of obsolescence according to Polidoro *et al.* (2011) include disinvestment in inner city area for renewal programmes due to pressure of disjointed urban policies by government. This disinvestment in inner city neighbourhoods encourages poor urban services and increase infrastructure obsolete due to uncontrolled, unmanaged and unplanned urbanization because of poor urban governance system. Thus, some condition of disinvestment includes poor waste management system and inadequate public and safe water supply that may increase public health problems such as poor air and water quality, littering of streets causing unpleasant and unattractiveness within the urban environment which negatively affects quality of life of residents (Thompson, 2018). There are issue of continuous landuse changes that are fast occurring in neighbourhoods in urban areas and this has attraction of people and activities to urban areas especially in inner city areas and this has

impacted on the social and economic dimensions of the urban environment (Cui and Shi, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study neighbourhoods from the 1991 population result was 123,664 and projected to 2018 is 387,407 at 4.32% growth rate in urban areas in Nigeria (World Bank, 2016 cit. Trading Economics, 2018). In order to obtain relevant information and data on the redefining streets for people in Port Harcourt municipality, the study adopted various data collection, handling and analytical methods. The study employed the purposive sample technique and key informant method for data collection. These methods were used to collect both primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from the residents of the studied neighbourhoods, government officials and experts through interviews, physical observations and photographs to characterize the state of the streets of the neighbourhoods from the residents in the study area. The first stage, the study purposely selected two (2) old planned neighbourhoods (PH Township and Diobu – Mile 1, 2 and 3) for the study. The second stage, the study purposively selects 80 respondents (household heads) from the two neighbourhoods for sampling (that is 40 respondents each from the neighbourhoods). Simple random sampling technique was randomly to select the 80 respondents from the two neighbourhoods chosen for the study for interview (see Table 1). Furthermore, key informant method was used to interview staff of the Rivers State Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development, and other professionals/experts in the built environment such as Architects and Town Planners to seek their opinions about the subject matter. Secondary data were collected from government Ministry, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to profile the neighbourhoods as regard to the street and neighbourhood quality, safety and security, provision and maintenance of street infrastructure and services.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution in the Study Area.

S/N	Sampled Neighbourhoods	No. of Questionnaires
1	PH Township	40
2	Diobu (Mile 1, 2 & 3)	40
	Total	80

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Factors Contributing to Streets and Neighbourhoods Obsolescence

Thus, the study observed that there are many factors that are responsible for obsolescence of the streets and neighbourhoods in the study area. The study in Table 2 identified street trading, population growth, security concern, increase in vehicular traffic, unauthorised on-street parking, indiscriminate change in use of property, dumping of waste in street, noise, social disorder and poor maintenance of street as factors responsible for the streets and neighbourhoods obsolescence character. And among these factors the respondents said that noise, street trading, indiscriminate change in use of property and increase in vehicular traffic which represents 17.5%, 15%, 12.5% and 11.2% respectively are the prominent factors responsible for the condition of obsolescence in the streets and neighbourhood.

Notable activities that contribute to noise in the streets are private generating sets because of inadequate public power supply as many properties have been change from residential to commercial, institutional and light industrial uses such as worship centres, printing press and drinking bars. Even areas designated for open spaces, recreational activities and pedestrian walkways have been changed and used for local market, street trading and taxi bays for loading and off-leading of commuters and goods (see Figs 1, 2, 3 and 4). These changes have attracted more vehicles to streets and neighbourhoods in the study area. However, with cheap house rents in these neighbourhood more people have moved to these neighbourhoods increasing the population and causing high human traffic. Furthermore, the poor maintenance of streets by the government have increased social disorder as some major streets and intersections in these neighbourhoods especially along Aggrey, Ikwerre, Creek, Okija and Afikpo Roads are used by destitute and prostitute activities. More so, in the study rapid population growth, unauthorised on-street parking and security concern (theft, gangster and violence, and petty crime incidence) are some of the concerns threatening residents comfort and well-being in the study area.

Table 2: Factors Responsible for Street and Neighbourhood Obsolescence.

Factors	Frequency	%
Street trading	12	15
Population growth	8	10
Security Concern	6	7.5
Increase in vehicular traffic	9	11.2
Unauthorised on-street parking	8	10
Indiscriminate change in use of property	10	12.5
Dumping of waste in street	4	5
Noise	14	17.5
Social disorder (destitution, prostitution)	4	5
Poor maintenance of street	5	6.3
Total	80	100

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018



Fig. 1: Street Completely Closed by Trading Activities Making Residents Uncomfortable.

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018



Fig. 2: Pedestrian Walkway Used for Trading Activities along Aggrey Road.

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018



Fig. 3: A Neighbourhood Playground (No. 3 Field) Converted to Market Place within Bende and Niger Streets at PH Township.

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018



Fig. 4: A Local Street Use for Taxi Loading and Trading at PH Township.

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018

Impacts of Obsolescence on the Streets and Neighbourhoods

The study revealed some impacts caused by the identified factors responsible for the condition of obsolescence in streets and neighbourhoods that have caused unattractiveness and unpleasant scenario in the study area. However, the common impacts as recorded by the respondents in Table 3 include pollution, traffic congestion, overcrowding and increase in densification and insecurity and safety challenges representing 28.8%, 23.7%, 18.7% and 12.5% respectively. Other impacts experienced by respondents are loss of community identity and bond (10%) and filthiness of the environment (6.3%). The types of the pollution

that are experienced by residents are noise from power generation sets, vehicular movement, printing equipment and music sound from worship centres and music vendors. The dumping of waste along streets corners and open spaces cause air pollution and filthiness in the environment (see Fig. 5).

The indiscriminate and increasing change of use of property by landlords and rapid increase of population have attracted people to the neighbourhoods thereby increasing the densification of the neighbourhoods from its original design causing overcrowding of humans in a particular point. This infiltration of people to the neighbourhoods has cause security incidents and threats to the dwellers. Poor maintenance attitude by government of streets furniture such as street lights, conversion of open spaces attitude by government have also contributed to safety concern by residents as it is unsafe to walk and recreate at night hours in the neighbourhoods as petty crime, assault and violence acts are perpetrated by gang and armed groups.

Table 3: Impacts of Obsolescence in Street and Neighbourhood.

Impacts	Frequency	%
Loss of community identity and bond	8	10
Pollution (noise and air)	23	28.8
Insecurity and safety problems	10	12.5
Filthiness	5	6.3
Overcrowding and increase in densification	15	18.7
Traffic congestion	19	23.7
Total	80	100

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018



Fig. 5: Street Corner Used for Dumping of Waste

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2018

CONCLUSION

The preservation and maintenance of streets and neighbourhoods character and form is essential to the identity, attractiveness and pleasantry of urban areas. The revitalization of streets and neighbourhoods that are going obsolete in function and character is a cardinal point for city planners, managers and all stakeholders. Major cities in the globe identifies activities and spaces that will keep them working to meet the demands of its dwellers. However, in Port Harcourt municipality streets within some of the old planned residential neighbourhoods are experiencing obsolescence nature as they are becoming unattractive and unpleasant for residents to live, work and recreate. Most facilities provided are decaying and there is gross change in landuse in the properties. Therefore, to solve this situation there is need to the identify and assess the causes of the conditions that is facing these streets and neighbourhoods and adopt a holistic, efficient and appropriate approach to revive and enhance the liveability of the neighbourhoods in the municipality. To achieve this, the study suggests the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be proper and active landuse management and planning system in the municipality that will forestall orderliness, sanity and control in the management of urban growth and development in the planned neighbourhoods of the municipality;
2. Proper survey of the neighbourhoods should be undertaken by local authorities to identify and analyze the streets problems to guide urban planners and decision makers on how and why to improve the quality of the streets in the neighbourhoods and general urban environmental quality;
3. There should be systematic approach in the provision of new and maintenance of existing for essential infrastructural facilities and services that will ensure and enhance attractiveness and pleasantry serene for living, recreating and working;
4. There should be a well-structured framework of short, medium and long term plans for managing, planning and maintaining streets in the neighbourhoods for sustainable urban development; and
5. A collaborative planning approach involving all stakeholders including government, residents and businesses should be incorporated in the management and maintenance of the streets and its environs to achieve sustainable urban system that will redefine the streets character and form.

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