

Public Open Space: An Urban Development Strategy for Enugu Metropolis.

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the value of organized green spaces in Enugu and its phenomenal landscape, by identifying public open spaces as catalyst to urban developmental strategies especially with sustainability and urban regeneration at heart. In the urban context, the various locations of public open spaces are developmental issues that need to be treated with utmost care and caution because of their inherent benefits to everything living and non living alike. Their effects are far reaching physically, socially, psychologically, politically, economically, ecologically and other wise. Considering the current rate of urbanization, modernization and increasing rate of literacy on one hand, and the continuing abuse, misuse and encroachment of available public open spaces in Enugu metropolis on the other hand, this research seeks to show how important public open spaces are to the proper development of the town in general and the populace in particular. Public open spaces in addition satisfies peoples outdoor recreational needs enhancing and protecting resource base and mitigating urban heat island and climate change thereby stimulating livable environment.*

Keywords: *Climate change, Development, Open space, Public, Strategy, Urban,*

I. Introduction

In the urban context, the various land uses are mapped out following laid down rules and regulations, which go a long way in enhancing the beauty of the environment. The attributes of the environment such as aesthetics, symbolism, historical values and psychological relief all form part of concern to man. Public open space is defined as space not built over which maybe air, land, or water located in the big city or open country side remote from urban development, [1], Open spaces can benefit the affluent by maximizing leisure and the poor and depressed areas by stimulating economic activities and therefore enhance the quality of life. Public open spaces can be privately or publicly owned for formal and informal activities, [2]. The smart growth network defines it as natural areas both in and surrounding localities that provide important community spaces, habitat for plants and animals, recreational opportunities, farm and ranch land (working land), places of natural beauty and critical environmental areas (e.g. wetlands and watershed).

1.1 Public Open Spaces and the Environment

Public open spaces are vital elements in our environment because they are places of contemplation and solitude, [3] Public open spaces in the environment can take various forms from local parks through community wide or regional facilities natural areas (coastal shores, waterways, wetland etc), [2]. They perform necessary and positive functions such as recreational opportunities, protecting physical resources (water, air, soil, plants and animals) and enhancing

economic development. Public open spaces take cognizance of needs and desires of the people and then influence other developments. Things like tourism, neighborhood pattern and aesthetics, real estate values, environmental quality and urban heat are positively modified.

1.2 The Need for Public Open Spaces in the Urban Environment

Cities had always evolved around some kind of public open spaces which can be seen from our traditional villages having large expanse of open space in the centre of the towns, serving various purposes (market square, festivals, meeting arena, recreation, shrine, etc), [4]. This can also be traced through medieval agora in Greece, fora in Rome down to New York central park, etc. Public open spaces were at the heart of Ebenezer Howard's garden city concept at the turn of the 20th century in London. This concept was conceived to deal with prevailing environmental problems of industrialization at the time and encouraged natural aesthetics while enhancing the health of the citizenry, [5].

Public open spaces are important design elements that affect the pattern of development of any city. They perform necessary and positive functions, which are essentially part of the planning process in urban development. When public open spaces are taken alongside other land uses the effectiveness of the functions of the spaces are enhanced and the beauty of these land uses are brought to the fore. The core issues of variety, accessibility and interconnectivity are very vital in the planning of open spaces. There must be variety of open spaces to cater for all needs, all categories of the population (the very young, teenagers and adults) and many activities (passive, active sports, conservative etc). The open spaces must be accessible to all whether by foot, bus and car. The open spaces must be seen to be connected, even if just visually. These public open spaces include all setbacks in private and public compounds, right of ways, pocket parks, parks, plazas, outdoor recreational centres, urban wilds, etc.

The functions of open spaces primarily serve the purpose of meeting human needs of fresh air, sunlight, physical exercise and psychological retreat. It could also be used in bringing people together and separating incompatible land uses. Secondly open spaces enhance and protect the resource base by preserving the natural environment (air, water and soil) such as reducing flood damage, increasing water supplies and nourishing soil by percolation, [6]. Thirdly open spaces influence physical development and affect economic decisions such as tourism potentials especially for depressed areas and influence neighbourhood patterns and real estate values.

Public open spaces can be grouped into three major activity areas such as: Active open spaces used for organized sporting and recreational functions (field sports, outdoor sports, etc); passive open spaces for other recreational needs including scenic purposes, relaxation spots, picnic areas and natural areas for resources conservation (wetlands, storm water management site, water catchment areas), [2]. Finally there are the working open spaces such as farmlands, ranch land, etc used for agricultural purposes.

1.3 The Study Area

Enugu is the capital of Enugu State, in South-East Nigeria. It lies in the south eastern foot of Udi hills. Enugu is located on latitude 6° 27' north of the equator and longitude 7° 29' east of Greenwich. It has a plus 1 hour

Greenwich Meridian Time (GMT) on the world time zone. Enugu metropolis is comprised of three (2) local government areas (Enugu North, Enugu South and Enugu East). Enugu is characterized by undulating terrain of hills and valleys. The climate of Enugu is that of savannah region in the warm humid zone with moderate to high rain fall, high temperature and high humidity all the year round.

II. Methodology

At the inception of Enugu as an urban centre the colonial masters had planned the town through planning schemes set out as the need arose. With these planning schemes the following public open spaces could be identified; zoological garden, market garden (fruits and choice flowers were grown), Polo field, Ngwo field, Onwudiwe park, Eze park, Ejindu park, etc in different layouts as was implemented, [7]. It is sad to note that most of these public open spaces are no more. They had either become residents or abandoned to weeds and refuse dumps maybe due to urbanization pressure, lack of financial resources to maintain them or poor management styles. With the subdivision and abandonment of the public open spaces in the older layouts of the city, new planning schemes made adequate provisions for public open spaces but were not implemented. There is a wide gap between provision and implementation of public open spaces as in planning schemes. These public open spaces are subdivided as soon as the layout becomes functional as if they were reserved land for future expansion.

III. Conclusion

In summary therefore and from available literature public open spaces can be seen as a very important land use type which affects all aspects of human life both living and non-living things alike. It is therefore recommended that our people be properly educated on the inherent benefits of open spaces to them, their health implications, physical and mental growth and economic development.

Planning of towns or cities' public open spaces should be taken alongside other land use development, such that they will be interconnected system between all the open spaces created to maximize their benefits, [8]. The institutional framework for the management and maintenance of these public open spaces should be properly coordinated, involving all the tiers of government and private individuals. There should be proper synergy between the private and public stakeholders in efforts geared towards taking care of these public open spaces, making sure that once put in place it will not be subdivided at will. The various sources of funding for open spaces, should be redefined to enhance the way these public open spaces are maintained so their use ability and lifespan are assured.

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