



ENHANCING RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN RESIDENTIAL LAYOUTS THROUGH THE NEGLECTED SPACES IN OWERRI URBAN

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Abstract

Recreational activities in residential layouts in Owerri urban have been largely informal and have existed in or around the neglected green spaces. Different kinds of recreational activities take place in these spaces. Some are play grounds for children and some serve as playgrounds for some type of games for adults. Most of these layouts were designed without any form of recreational spaces. This was due to the pressure of urban expansion caused by the influx of people into Owerri capital after it's creation as the capital of Imo State. These neglected green spaces have become the locations of recreational activities in some layouts for children and adults. These activities have not been properly organized but impact on the lifestyle of the residents. They affect the social, cultural, health of the residents and also their quality of lives. The study was to find out how the neglected green spaces could be used as well planned spaces for recreational activities that will offer relaxation in Owerri urban. The study was a survey research using questionnaires administered on residents of some selected layouts in Owerri. Obtained data was analysed using the frequency distribution and the Person Product moment correlation and multiple regression statistical tools. Findings reveal that if these factors are improved recreational activities will be improved within the layouts

Keywords: *green spaces, neglected spaces, recreational activities, urbanization*

Introduction

There has been widespread concern about the state of recreational facilities in Owerri urban. This is because there has not been manifest efforts by successive governments and individuals to ensure that urban residents enjoy well-planned recreational facilities. Casual observation reveals that urban residents convert available space around their homes that can fulfill these purposes to recreational spaces. Also, adults have been seen sitting in small groups at street corners to share stories, play games and interact with each other after the day's work. Some children convert streets and green spaces within the residential neighbourhoods into areas for football activities. Other recreational and entertainment activities are also conducted in and around these neglected green spaces in the layouts by adults and children. Examples of such activities include shopping, drinking and socializing.

A pilot survey of these green spaces, which were structured into the layouts in Owerri urban area, shows that they apparently have been abandoned, become bushy and have attracted undesirable activities within them. The urban residents have found ways to conduct informal recreational activities within and around these spaces. These recreational activities could therefore be located within these neglected green spaces for the residents in these layouts. There is a basic human need for these activities as they are important for physical and mental well-being. There is therefore the need for recreational activities for urban residents and enough opportunities should be created to meet it (GovHK, 2018).

It becomes important that there should be a deliberate planning for these green areas to include recreational activities in order to enhance the welfare of urban residents in Owerri urban. Recreational areas provide passive and active spaces. Passive spaces include sitting places and spaces for enjoying pleasant views and scenery for old and young. Physical activities such as running, cycling and playing take place in the active spaces (CIRIA open space, 2018). There is an ever increasing evidence that physical activity levels can be increased by existing green spaces in urban areas. This is largely due to the opportunities for physical activity created by the green spaces in the urban environment. Accessibility to these green spaces has greater chances of improving the frequency of use of these spaces. Active lifestyles in the urban areas are facilitated by green spaces. (Andrew Chee Keng Lee, 2015). These spaces could also be used as spaces for therapeutic exercises.

Literature reveals that urban recreation is connected with the psychological and physical regeneration of the urban residents and this can be facilitated through the recreational facilities in the urban environment. Also, because recreational activities, needs and their usage differ contextually in each environment, they could be organised, partially organised or spontaneous (Petar Mitković, 2004). Urban residents therefore may have varying needs, thus necessitating proper consideration in the location of recreational activities. Recreation parks have also been seen to emerge as health solutions for the public among urban residents. Nature, parks, gardens, urban forests and green spaces are known to support human health and wellness. Recreation and green spaces can therefore be designed for mutual benefits (Wolf, 2017). In addition, recreational facilities in these green spaces have been found to foster community relationships, connect people with each other and nature as well as enhance community pride (University of Delaware, 2014).

The objective of this research is to study the extent of recreational activities that take place in the neglected green spaces in Owerri urban. The null hypothesis guiding this research is that there is no significant relationship between the recreational activities in the layouts and the neglected green spaces.

Theoretical framework

Studies by psychologists and educationists have given some insights into the importance of recreation and relaxation which are major components of play among human beings. The two theories that will underscore this work are the theory of recreation and the cathartic theory. These two belong to the classical theories of play. These classical theories are the basis of modern theories that have further explained the relationship between play (recreational activities) and the well-being of human beings.

Theory of recreation of play

The theory of recreation put forward by the German educationist and psychologist, Lazarus, emphasize the need for mental and physical recuperation from the stresses and strains on individuals from other types of activities. It puts forward the need for individuals to participate in pleasurable and relaxing activities for physical and mental restoration. This theory shows that recreational activities can enable the individual to recuperate exhausted energies (Giddens, 2018; Groos, 2007). Research has mentioned that the weakness of this theory is that it does not mention the mechanism through which play restores lost energy as well the fact that some recreational activities could also be stressful.

Cathartic theory of play

The Cathartic theory of play which has its roots from the writings of Aristotle, the Greek philosopher postulates that recreational activities provide ways through which pent-up emotions and instincts could be let out (Zav, 2018). It further shows that recreational activities provide ways through which disorganised or painful emotions could be expressed in a harmless way. This theory deals more with reviving emotional energy which is also very important in the well-being of human being (University of Idaho, 2018). The weakness of this theory is that not all games or recreational activities have to do with emotions. These 2 theories of play will underscore this research.

Research Methodology

The study reported here is part of a wider research on the status of government planned green spaces that are neglected or lost and which occurred due to the pressure of urban expansion. Research data was obtained through survey method. Primary data and secondary data were obtained. Primary data was collected through questionnaires and interviews administered on the residents in the selected settlements. Photographs, observations and satellite images of these neglected spaces were acquired. Secondary data was gained from existing government records, books, published and unpublished related materials and maps.

Study population for the research was the 13 settlements in the Old Owerri urban out of which 7 settlements were randomly selected for this study. The planning areas/settlements structured by the planning authorities in Owerri were the study blocks. Owerri is a twin city made up of old and new Owerri. Layouts in Old Owerri were used because of the high occurrence of these spaces within it. There are 13 layouts in the old Owerri urban (see Table 1).

Random sampling was used in the research. Out of the 13 settlements, 7 were randomly selected for field work. They are as follows: Orlu Road Secretariat Layout, Aladinma Housing Estate, Otamiri South Layout, Aladinma Northern Extension, Ikenegbu Extension Layout, Ikenegbu Layout, and Emmanuel College Layout. In each layout, all the existing neglected spaces were studied. The formula for determining the sample size for a yet to be known population size was used to arrive at the 385 respondents for the questionnaires.

Table 1: Green spaces in 1987 Owerri layout plan (Old Owerri)

S/N	Layout	No of Designated Green spaces by the Planning Authorities
1.	Government Station layout	5
2	Emmanuel College Layout	1
3	Orlu Road Secretariat	1
4	New Market Layout	1
5	Ikenegbu Layout	4
6	Ikenegbu Extension Layout	1
7	Aladinma Housing Estate	4
8	Aladinma Northern Extension	2
9	Aladinma Prefab	4

10	Amakohia/Akwakuma layout	5
11	Ugwu Orji Layout	1
12	Otamiri South Layout	1
13	Nworie North Layout	2

Source: Ministry of Lands, Survey and Urban development, 2014

The research assumed a 95% confidence level, 0.5 standard deviation and a margin of error (confidence interval) of +/- 5% sample size expressed numerically for this study. The calculated respondent size was 385 respondents. For the 7 layouts that were studied, questionnaires were administered on these respondents.

For this study, the null hypothesis chosen to guide the research is that *there is no significant relationship between the recreational activities in the layouts and the existence of neglected green spaces.*

The following variables were also studied:

- i. Number of the neglected green spaces in the layouts
- ii. Number of informal playgrounds in neighbourhoods

Univariate and Bivariate analysis were conducted on the results. The univariate analysis was conducted on the aggregated frequency data for the seven layouts while the bivariate analysis conducted using the Pearson product moment correlation analysis tool to test the null hypothesis.

Presentation of Data, Discussion and Analysis

Neglected green spaces exist in the different layouts in Owerri in different numbers. In the 7 sampled layouts in Owerri urban, layouts with 1-2 neglected green spaces are more common. They represent 85.5% of the existing neglected green spaces in old Owerri urban as seen in Table 2 and Figure 1. Furthermore, layouts with 3-4 neglected green spaces represent 13.3% while layouts with 5-6 spaces are the least common and they represent 1.2% of the neglected green spaces in Owerri urban as seen in Table 2 and figure 1. Most of the neglected spaces in the various layouts are bordered by roads on at least one side. These generally increase the level of activities in and around these spaces and make the spaces easily accessible for any form of activities which take place in some of them. Informal recreational activities which include informal playgrounds, petty food sellers, food joints, small bars occur in and around these spaces. A lot of the recreational activities take place in the evenings when the children and workers are back to their homes as well as during the weekends. The streets that border these spaces are also part of these public spaces and increase the activities in some of them. These recreational activities could be situated in the neglected green spaces for the urban residents.

Table 2: Number of neglected spaces

Number of neglected green spaces in sampled layouts	%
1-2	85.452
3-4	13.341
5-6	1.208
total	100.000

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

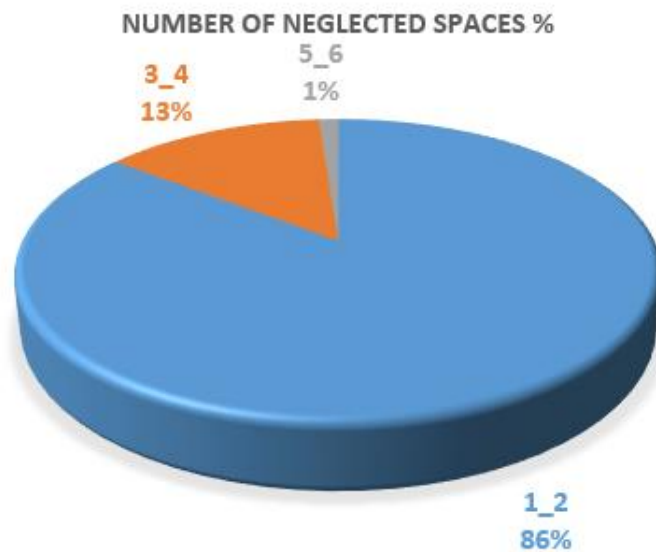


Figure 1: Number of neglected spaces.

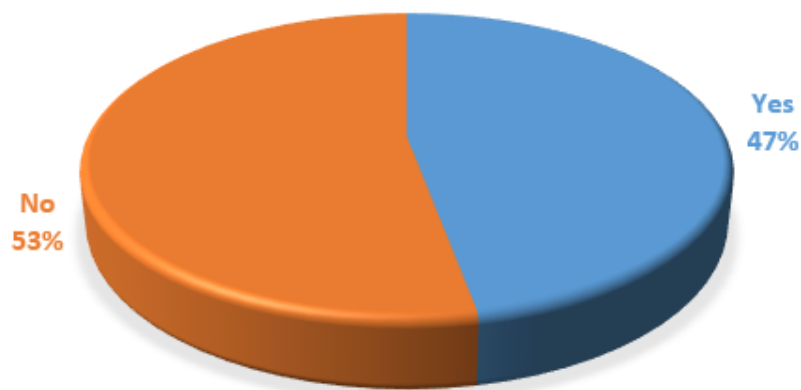
Source: Fieldwork, 2015

The research reveals that several recreational activities take place in and around these neglected green spaces for adults and children. Some of these activities are passive recreation while some are active recreation. Some children play football in and around these spaces. Informal playgrounds exist significantly in these neglected spaces in most of the layouts (47.1%). Petty food vendors, informal football fields and informal children’s’ playgrounds are also present in these spaces during the daytimes and evenings. Local bars offer passive relaxation to some of the adults after the day’s work. Some adults engage in some table games like chess in the evenings as well some group discussions. Children were seen playing football on the streets near these spaces in the evenings, weekends and public holidays. This is illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 2. This is in line with the classical theory of recreation and the cathartic theory of play. This shows that human beings have the natural inclination to play for physical and mental recreation. This is seen in the tendency for the children and adults to drift towards these spaces when they return from school and work.

Table 3: The presence of informal playgrounds in the neighbourhood

Value label	%
Yes	47.071
No	52.929
total	100.000

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

THE PRESENCE OF INFORMAL PLAYGROUNDS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD %**Figure 2: The presence of informal playgrounds in the neighbourhoods.**

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Here, the hypothesis of interest is *'that there is no significant relationship between the recreational activities in the layouts and the neglected green spaces'*. The two variables in focus were interval scale variables so Pearson product moment correlation analysis tool was used to test the nature of relationship. The result of the analysis showed a correlation coefficient value of 0.510**. This implies a good, positive relationship exists and is correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) that is 99% compliance. The null hypothesis that *'there is no significant relationship between the recreational activities in the layouts and the neglected green space'* is therefore rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The results of Spearman Rho correlation analysis

Variable			Corr Coefficient	Remarks on hypothesis
Ho	i	ii	.510**	Rejected at .510** corr. coefficient

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Conclusion

The research reveals a significant relationship between the recreational activities and the neglected green spaces. This result corresponds with contemporary research which states that green spaces serve as providers of passive and active recreation and so help to meet the leisure needs of community and provide spaces for play, sport, recreation and other special events. The neglected green spaces if revitalized could provide opportunities for activities for all age groups as well as offering opportunities for children to have fun. Location of recreational activities within the neglected spaces will aid the meeting of the physical and recreational needs of the residents by providing pleasurable and relaxing activities for physical and mental restoration. Activities such as petty food vendors, informal football fields and informal children's playgrounds were also present in these spaces during the daytimes and evenings. Local bars offered passive relaxation to some of the adults after the day's work. Some adults engaged in some table games like chess in the evenings as well some group discussions.

The 2 classical theories of play which underscored this research: the theory of recreation and the cathartic theory of play both recognize the need for human beings to have mental and physical recuperation from the stresses and strains on individuals from other types of activities. This is very important for urban residents who are faced daily with stresses and challenges of urban life in some cases, some of these residents need to get away even from their homes due to the pressures of family life in order to have some mental relaxation. These spaces need to be developed into well managed green areas which should reflect the immediate recreational needs, which could be passive or active, to enhance the quality of lives of the urban residents in the respective layouts in Owerri urban.

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