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REDRESSING THE RECREATIONAL LAND DEFICIT IN BENIN CITY: THE OPPORTUNITY AND POTENTIAL IN IYARO-URUBI

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Abstract

Urban planning affords cities the opportunity of accommodating all land needs for living, working and recreation. This helps to promote environmental sustainability and urban liveability. The apparent under-provision of recreational land use in Benin City, one of Nigeria's most populated urban centres, suggests a shortcoming in the spatial configuration. A redress is important under the present conditions of climate change particularly because research reveals that the city is challenged by inadequate greening and open spaces. One possible strategy for redress is to utilise every available opportunity such as identified by this study in the 0.92-hectare parcel of land at Iyaro-Urubi. The site allows Benin City to create the first recreational park in that location. Primary and secondary methods are used in the study. The city's recreational land need is established by reference to planning practice in established jurisdictions whilst residents' perceptions were sought using a questionnaire survey on the related issues of the adequacy of recreational land provision in the city; whether or not more space is needed; and whether or not the study location is better suited for recreational use. The findings indicate a great inadequacy of and need for recreational land space. Furthermore, respondents mainly agree that recreation is a greater need at the current time in that location. Again, new recreational space has not been provided since the 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Goals call for the creation of "inclusive, accessible, green and public open spaces" by Goal 11.7 on sustainable cities and societies. The study concludes that Iyaro-Urubi possesses the potential to serve, and would better serve, recreational purposes because it is located in a deficient area; where there is a need and where land of such a size is not easily available.

Keywords: Benin City; Greening; Liveability; Open spaces; Recreation; Urban land use

INTRODUCTION

Cities are human settlements which function as places for living, working and recreation. They may either evolve or come into existence as a result of conscious planning. Where planned, they easily accommodate all human needs for living working and recreation. Where they arise from a process of evolution in which urban planning was not involved, there are usually high chances of

deficiencies occurring in their spatial structure. Planning organises space, so the absence of planning in a city is reflected by its spatial configuration. Such settlements tend to be challenged by social, economic and environmental issues. Therefore, planning serves the advantage of creating human settlements which are more sustainable because they are environmentally responsible; more equitable because they provide economic opportunities for more people; and liveable because they offer a higher quality of life.

Even for a city which was planned from scratch, planning is not usually a once-and-for-all affair. Rather, it is a continuous process to produce the best possible conditions for living, working and recreation (Lohmann, 2006). The suggestion is that both planned and unplanned cities need urban planning management. This rationalises Keeble's (1982) definition of town planning as

> *"deciding in which ways a town should remain as it is and in which ways it should be changed for the better"* (Keeble, 1982: p.1).

The activities of living, working and recreation have implications for space provision in planning or re-planning an environment. Therefore, urban land use planning prioritises the accommodation of all land needs. This objective supports the optimal functioning of settlements principally by preventing inefficiencies, inconveniences and incompatibilities. The usual practice is to produce a master plan which guides all decision-making in the urban planning process where issues of design and implementation are key. Where cities are designed from scratch, adequate space should be provided for all anticipated land needs (Keeble, 1982). However, where a city does not have the advantage of being planned initially, its managers have the task of deciding how to overcome that disadvantage by deciding what aspects of the city should change for the better and those which should be allowed to remain. The change would be necessary for those aspects where modern facilities are lacking and functionality poor. For example, the challenge may be in a transport network whose inadequacy creates rush-hour congestion. There may also be an inadequate provision for children's schools in residential districts, thereby requiring longer journeys to and from school. These are instances of inefficiency. Again, there may be a poor provision for public play areas and other recreational facilities in residential neighbourhoods implying the denial of the right to recreation with implications for well-being. This situation amounts to a failure to show concern "*for health and maintaining well-being through averting diseases and illnesses associated with overcrowding, poor sanitation, and exposure to environmental pollution"* which, according to Hphp (2015), is the rationale of urban planning as a profession.

Nigeria's cities have challenges of orderly development. These have been documented by researchers such as Omuta (1988) on Benin City; Agboola and Agboola (1997) on Ibadan; Ikejiofor (2009) on Enugu; and Aluko (2011) on Lagos. These studies variously suggest the existence of deficiencies. For Agboola & Agboola (1997), they exist in a poor morphology. Aluko (2011) discovers the absence of regulation in urban land use which leads to an unbalanced land use pattern. In the case of Ikejiofor, the main finding is the absence of the State in the crucial

issue of land allocation and subdivision, leading also to an imbalance in the land use pattern, informality and unplanned development. The inference can rationally be drawn that there is a reign of informality in urban development which is reflected in the land use pattern of the typical Nigerian city. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of a master plan. However, studies on urbanisation in Nigeria have tended to look mainly at issues of environment, regulation, sanitation, housing, poverty and the like. There is a dearth of studies on recreation as *an urban need* and recreational land as *an urban land use* in Nigeria. This study aims to fill the gap by examining these two issues with particular reference to Benin City, one of Nigeria's urban settlements where the challenges of urbanisation and poor urban planning are evident (Omuta, 1988).

As mentioned, urban areas are places for living, working and recreation. Cities are planned to provide the best possible conditions for undertaking these activities. (Lohmann, 2006). Recreation is connected to work because it plays a role in good health, which itself, is connected to productivity. Thus, to live meaningfully, one should be able to engage in work, and thereby, become productive. Cities are centres of production where productive people thrive. Productive people are healthy people; recreation enhances health; good health potentially contributes to longevity. Therefore, the availability of recreational land; and its adequacy and accessibility are crucial to the functions of a city; its productivity; its sustainability and liveability.

This study examines the apparent deficiency of land space for outdoor recreational use in Benin City. Observation reveals the predominance of residential, commercial and industrial land uses. These uses provide directly for the needs of living and working. Considering that human settlements are places for living, working and recreation, there is the suggestion of an imbalance. This study aims to establish whether or not an imbalance exists; the extent of the imbalance; and whether the study site has the potential to contribute to redressing the imbalance. The significance of this study is that it highlights an issue (that is recreation) which is given scant attention not only in the literature but also, in urban land use decisions made by individuals as well as the government. Furthermore, the study draws attention to two issues (a balanced land use pattern and greening) which are vital to liveability and environmental sustainability in Nigeria's rapidly growing cities as the country urbanises apace.

In terms of scope, the study centres on establishing the dearth of open spaces and recreational parks in Benin City generally, identifying the level of need for such facilities and considering the feasibility of using the identified site at Iyaro-Urubi as one step towards redressing the apparent imbalance. Whilst not implying that recreation is a greater need than education, the study seeks to assess whether the present circumstances in that very environment (in both the city and the locality) make recreation a greater or lesser need. The study discusses outdoor recreational land (or open space) which is deliberately provided and used for activities, passive as well as active, undertaken outside work hours. The time available outside work is known as leisure time. Thus, there is leisure time and there also is leisure (or recreational) activity. Leisure is time whilst

recreation is activity (Onwuanyi and Nwodo, 2018). There is outdoor as well as indoor recreation, but this study is concerned with the former.

The Study Area

There is a study site as well as a study area. The study area is in Benin City, whose population of 1,050,000 in Nigeria's last census of 2006, made it the fourth largest urban centre. Its current population estimate is 1,905,000, a 3.4% increase from 2022 (Macrotrends, 2023). The city now ranks sixth in the hierarchy of Nigeria's cities. Its population has been growing at an average rate of 3% annually in recent years. Benin City is a commercial hub whose location on the west-east transportation route adds to its business attraction. This makes it a preferred location for Nigerians in search of a good place of abode. The presence of an airport and as many as four tertiary institutions, numerous daily markets as well as the average annual population growth rate attest to the opportunities offered by the city.

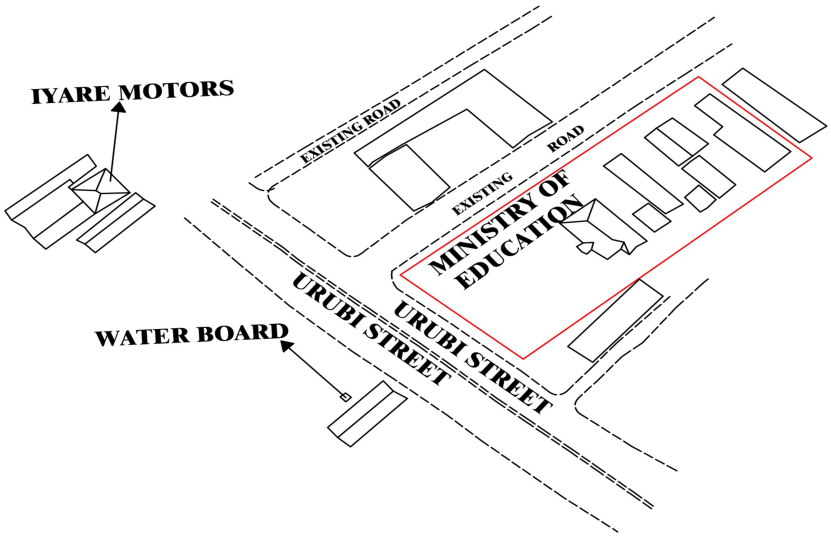

Figure 1: Sketch Map of the Study Area (2023)

Figure 2: Google Earth Image of the Study Location (2023)

The exact study location, the study site, is for the purpose at hand, described as Iyaro-Urubi, a coinage arising from the fact that it is located along Urubi Street in an area known as Iyaro. It is a 0.92-hectare parcel of land parcel which, for years, housed offices of the Edo State Ministry of Education and the National Library of Nigeria. In the satellite image, the site can be seen at the top end of the picture. It shows that it is already occupied by buildings, but the site has now been redesigned as an educational hub, though with some recreational facilities. The study site lies within a community, district or geographical space known as Urubi Quarters which is one of many others in the city, although Urubi is a subset of the city.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned, cities either evolve or are developed using a master plan. These outcomes have implications for the land use pattern, its adequacy and urban functions. Since urban land use configurations may not always be ideal, they would require the planner's interventions to accommodate deficiencies which tend to become pronounced with population growth and societal changes. Such changes could be precipitated by the age distribution of the population producing a greater number of either older or younger people. There may also be a shift in the urban economic base from business to production or even tourism. These changes have the potential to impact land needs and urban land use patterns. For example, Lagos was a small fishing settlement in the 15th century (Emordi and Osiki, 2008), but in the 1970s, upon becoming a city, the many changes which had taken place in the process impacted land needs. Transportation was one such need, leading to the construction of bridges, wider roads and another

seaport. This also came with the development of industrial estates for manufacturing activities and warehouses for the storage of both imported and locally produced goods. These are examples of the planner's responsibility for creating a better environment which will effectively serve the needs of society even to the extent of restraining, constraining and coercing the individual in the interest of others (Roberts.1999).

The environment of cities

Cities are adapted from the natural environment. In the process of adaptation, the natural environment is unavoidably disturbed. However, traces remain and are deliberately created such that the human living environment is usually a composite of people, nature and the various installed systems which enable functionality and a decent environment. This conforms to their conceptualisation as places for living, working and recreation. Primarily, therefore, they must be liveable spaces. Working and recreation are aspects of living. Liveability describes the conditions which make for a decent living in an environment. Such conditions should positively impact well-being in senses which are physical, social and mental. According to Lissandrello and Bruyere (2021), liveability constitutes quality-of-life factors which include *"a safe and stable built and natural environment"* in addition to *"access to water, food, transport, health care, education".* Indisputably, the physical and aesthetic environment of cities are important indicators of liveability given that the environmental quality significantly defines and impacts human existence.

The New Zealand Ministry for the Environment (2016) highlights the importance of the environment to urban residents by its definition of the attributes of successful towns and cities. These include being environmentally responsible by managing resources *"to take account of the needs of governance of present and future generations".* A well-managed environment is the major legacy which can be bequeathed to future generations and it is also the guaranteed way to make the future possible and profitable through sustainable practices. It is through sustainable practices that sustainable built environments are created and sustained.

Sustainable cities

A sustainable built environment reflects sustainability principles in its design, planning, building and management (Asadi, 2006). The sustainability principle is now the guide for physical development and built environments. The drive for sustainable cities and societies is articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (Global Goals) agenda which started running in 2015 and will end in 2030. Amongst its goals is Goal 11, which aims for the development of sustainable cities and societies. This agenda of human and environmental development places the focus on cities because 56% of the world's 4.4 billion population now live in urban areas with the percentage expected to more than double to 6 billion or 70% by 2045(World Bank,2023). The focus on the environment is also because improving lives cannot come without discouraging poor environmental practices which negatively affect how its resources (renewable and non-renewable) are used. In support of the development of sustainable cities and societies, the Global

Goals project calls in Goal 11.7 for the creation of *"inclusive, accessible, green and public open spaces"*.

The urban planning law in Nigeria

An inescapable effect of urbanisation (the increase in the proportion of a country's population who dwell in cities), is an increase in environmental, economic and social challenges. More people leaving the rural areas to settle in cities inevitably creates challenges of housing, environmental pollution, congestion, access to infrastructure, employment, poverty and more. Where urbanisation is rapid as in Nigeria, these challenges are experienced in housing, infrastructure, transportation service provision and employment. Housing tends to be a major challenge either because it is inadequate, unaffordable or poor in quality. Also, under rapid growth conditions, especially where the planning function is weak as in Nigeria, urban land uses are mostly privately and informally determined (Ikejiofor, 2009), and therefore, unreflective of all the land needs of urban society (Aluko, 2011).

Orderly development and effective management are key to the creation of environmentally responsible cities. The foundation for environmental order is provided by the planning laws. Accordingly, the guidance of physical development and protection of the environment are the objectives of Nigeria's Urban and Regional Planning Act of 2004 (Chapter 38, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria). The law provides for planning at three levels: federal, state and local and sets out responsibilities at each level. Amongst state responsibilities is: *"the provision of technical assistance to local governments in the preparation and implementation of local, rural and subject plans"* (Section 3c). On their part, the local government has the responsibility for: "*the control of development within its area of jurisdiction other than over federal and state lands"*(Section 4).

Thus, the successful operation of the Act requires a good relationship between the state and local governments. The state government is to act in the interest of the local government which, in turn, should be the master of its environment regarding the preparation and implementation of a town plan, a rural area plan, a local plan and a subject plan.

Sani's (2022) comprehensive review of the 2004 law reveals that the law *"was meant to be adopted by each of the 36 states…and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. However, 30 years on, full implementation of its provisions is yet to be effected"* (Sani, 2022: p.77). This suggests that urban planning management has not been empowered to achieve the desired transformation. As a consequence, according to Sani (2022:p.83), *"urban planning practice has remained basically as it was in most of the states before the law".* The tendency is that Nigerian cities will continue to grow despite the planning laws (Agboola & Agboola, 1997). The failure of implementation, and other constraints such as a lack of autonomy for local planning authorities, led Sani (2022) to conclude that "*The law does not appear to be appropriate for meeting the challenges of urban planning and development in contemporary Nigeria"* (Sani, 2022:p.86).

Local and state government relationships in Nigeria

There are three tiers of authority: the federal, state and local under Nigeria's constitution. (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended). The functions of state and local governments are spelt out, with the thirty-six constituent states having the responsibility of superintending the local governments, including making laws for the latter. The relationship between the state and local governments has tended to be unequal and less advantageous to the latter who usually interfere in the former's affairs beyond what is necessary for supervision. At the centre of this is the joint account system which the states operate with local governments. The arrangement means that local government funds can be accessed by the states and used for non-local purposes.

In the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution, *"the construction and maintenance of .....parks, gardens, open spaces, or such public facilities may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a State"* are part of the functions of local governments. The meddling of states in local government extends also to parks, cemeteries and motor parks which all are local government responsibilities. In Lagos, for instance, there is a Lagos State Parks Management Authority ostensibly established to oversee metropolitan parks. In the case of Edo state, the government in 2014 handed over one of the three public cemeteries (Third Cemetery), responsibility of the Oredo local government council, to a private operator under a public-private partnership arrangement. Also, in Lagos, Edo and a few other states, the local government's constitutionally granted right to levy and collect tenement rates has been usurped by the introduction of the Land Use Charge devised and collected by the state. The matter is made more disadvantageous for the local governments because the State decides what proportion of the revenue they eventually receive.

In terms of impact, the 1992 law has not been effective. The challenge of unmonitored land development persists in the country's largest city. The incidence of construction failure is now like a recurring decimal. So also, is the conversion of land and open spaces to other uses without regard to urban planning principles. For instance, the 10-hectare Lagos Ikoyi (Victoria) Park was in the military-run 1990s converted to the present Parkview gated residential estate, leaving the area without any outdoor recreational space. Yet again, the Lagos Festac open spaces, fields and playgrounds over the last quarter of the 20th century were converted to residential use. Writing about Kano City, Balogun (2007) observes that *"the authorities abhor open spaces. Every available piece of land, especially along major roads, is soon sold and developed into a 'shopping complex' without the least regard for urban planning"*.

The "system" by which Nigeria's cities have been "managed" leads Aluko (2011) to doubt whether sustainable development can be achieved given that "*The foundation of sustainable urban development must lie in an equitable, rational and efficient land allocation system upon which development can take place with proper monitoring and supervision according to the law"*.

The tendency to deprioritise open spaces, which is not entirely restricted to Nigeria, makes environments less sustainable. It is the view of Pearce (1992), an advocate of *green economics* that the environment is usually traded off against economic activity because of profit. It seems lost to those who make these anti-environment decisions that cities ought to be ecosystems of people, nature and infrastructure (Urbanoikos, 2016). The prospects, then, are that urban greening deficiencies may continue.

Land use in Benin City

Benin City is a centre of economic activity. This status is reflected by its land use configuration which is mainly commercial, residential, transportation and institutional. According to Olayiwola and Igbavboa (2014), the size of the city in 2008 was established at 1,195 hectares (11.95 km2) using remotely sensed data from Landsat TM and Landsat ETM with ground truth done to corroborate the data from satellite images. Rapid urbanization and loss of land cover have been a feature of the city for years (Olayiwola & Igbavboa, 2014; Odjugo, Enarubve & Isibor, 2015). The latter's research reports the size of the city as being 359 km^2 as of 2013. Observation reveals that the land area expansion is taken up mostly by residential and commercial use. Subdivision of land at the periphery is unprofessionally executed by individuals and land-owning communities who are motivated by profit, and therefore, pay little regard to the principles of land use planning. There is usually no effort made to create an admixture of land uses. Also, with the regulatory authorities uninvolved and uninfluential in these expansion arrangements and locations of new development, there inevitably is created a deficient land use configuration.

Benin City takes its name from Ubini, the capital of the Bini Empire which lasted from circa 1180 to 1897 when it was destroyed by British invaders in search of a fortune(Franz,2009: paragraph 2). Ubini was a planned environment as revealed by reports of Portuguese and British explorers who traded with the kingdom in earlier times. Following the fall of the kingdom, the British created a Benin Township in 1920 for their purposes. This was also a planned environment as attested by a survey plan and the plotting of spaces for activities of governance. Elements of planning for the township included a ring road at the centre where government establishments were located. From the ring road was developed a radial road network leading to different parts of the township; an aerodrome at its outskirts; and a Government Reserved Area (GRA) plotted in a grid-iron pattern with wide tree-lined avenues (Aisien, 2015). Primary and secondary schools were designed and built and three public cemeteries were created in the township which was run by a town council and later a city council when its status changed (Igbafe, 1979). The post-independence period witnessed environmental order under the Benin City Council. However, this was disrupted by the civil war and the new orthodoxy arising from the aberration of a long military interregnum from 1967 to 1979; and subsequently from 1984 to 1999. This period saw a weakening of the civil service as a result of political interferences and the negation of established procedures (Abdullahi, 2013; Abuhere, 2015). These produced consequences for environmental order.

Land needs in Benin City

The reality is that Benin City for many years has displayed evidence of a near-total absence of urban planning. Evidence of this lies in the inability to sustain the colonial inheritance as regards the environment. The colonial practice of tree planting along the city's streets was discontinued and forgotten; laws of setbacks and plot development ratios were ignored; and the provision of open spaces was disregarded. Land use became focused on residential, commercial and industrial uses. As the city expanded in physical size and population, provision was not made for wider streets and more public spaces and places. Rather, those provided in the distant colonial past have tended to be converted to residential or commercial use, thereby creating and sustaining an imbalance in the land use pattern. As mentioned, these land uses essentially met the needs of shelter and work but effectively relegated the no less important need for recreation.

Recreational space is an important need of neighbourhoods. This fact is highlighted by the sustainable development goals call for *"inclusive, accessible, green and open public spaces"* Such spaces take forms such as amenity green space, parks and gardens, natural areas, allotments, outdoor sports areas, and children's and youths' play areas. These facilities bring a whole lot of benefits to people as well as the environment. The importance of recreation can be appreciated by asking the question: *what is the role of recreation in society?* It is apposite here to recall the long-stated, but yet valid and enduring view of Burton (1971) which answers the question by stating that recreation

> *"provides relaxation; it provides entertainment; and it provides a means for personal and social development. Thus, far from being an alternative to work, it presupposes the existence of it, to provide a contrast or complement to it"* (Burton, 1971: p.1).

In addition, the role of recreation in the economy is highlighted by Onwuanyi & Nwodo's (2018) statement that

> *"The connection between recreation and well-being, between well-being and a productive workforce and between a productive workforce and economic development does not support the idea that recreation is a lesser pursuit"* than work (Onwuanyi& Nwodo, 2018:p.89).

Again, a bustling and stressful city without adequate recreational facilities and policies to promote recreation effectively places its residents under living conditions such as would be experienced by animals under confinement. In this regard, it is pertinent to mention the also long-stated, but still apt and valid view of Hookway (1978) that

> *"drawing on the increasing knowledge of animal behaviour under confined conditions, questions whether the human animal would not behave even more ferociously if our institutions, our disciplines, our patterns of life come under too much stress"(*Hookway, 1978:p.11-182).

The suggestion that a lack of provision for recreation may lead to the development of anti-social behaviour amongst stressed urban residents further highlights the role of recreation in society and the danger of viewing it as not being as important as work. Related to this is the role of open spaces in the proper development of children and the provision of comfort and safety for citizens, an issue captured by Balogun's (2007) observation that

> *"In our thoughtlessly built-up, barely inhabitable cities children hardly find space for play and recreation leading to heightening juvenile delinquency. There's hardly any open space left for people to assemble in cases of disasters such as a fire outbreak or take a leisurely walk without the fear of being run down by a car or the omnipresent motorbike. And in a country where electricity supply is abysmal there's no place to seek refuge from the blazing sun during the sweltering hot season"* (Balogun, 2007: paragraph 4). Even spaces for public seating, playgrounds plazas and vacant lots are unavailable.

Another dimension is how recreation may contribute to good health, well-being and longevity. Research has documented the importance of regular exercise on health and longevity. For instance, Sherer (2006) recounts that

> "*A comprehensive 1996 report by the U.S. Surgeon General found that people who engage in regular physical activity benefit from a reduced risk of premature death; a reduced risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and non-insulin-dependent diabetes; improved maintenance of muscle strength, joint structure, and joint function; weight loss and favourable redistribution of body fat; improved physical functioning in persons suffering from poor health; and healthier cardiovascular, respiratory, and endocrine systems"* (CDC, Surgeon General, as cited in Sherer, 2006:p14).

Again, it has been well documented that recreation parks offer mental health benefits by bringing people closer to nature. Green spaces which feature the biodiversity of nature can serve as calming and recuperative oases in stressful urban environments characterised by noise, heat and congestion (Regional Public Health (2010). Again, *"improving access to public open spaces has the potential to increase levels of physical activity, and to have mental health benefits and reduce health care and other costs"* (Hphp, 2015).

There is also a socio-economic dimension to recreation. Recreation provides the opportunity for unemployed youth, now a sizeable population, to be engaged to keep their mental balance and stay out of crime and juvenile delinquency. Witt and Crompton as cited in Sherer (2006) show that

> "*Recreational facilities keep at-risk youth off the streets, give them a safe environment to interact with their peers, and fill up time within which they could otherwise get into trouble"* (Sherer, 2006: p. 22).

According to Hphp (2015), there now is a new view of parks as *"valuable contributors to larger urban policy objectives, such as job opportunities, youth development, public health, and community building"* (Hphp, 2015: paragraph 2).

Recreational parks also perform an environmental role. The Iyaro-Urubi area is a built-up zone where trees and leafy vegetation are lacking. The major constructional materials (concrete, cement and glass) commonly used in the area, and indeed city-wide, make the environments hotter, creating a heat island effect (i.e. hotter temperatures) relative to rural areas. The natural cooling impact and function of trees through evapotranspiration are missing in Iyaro-Urubi. This makes the environment less liveable. Environmentally also, greening can positively impact the high levels of pollution caused by congestion and activities in that environment. Trees help to filter particulate matter and protect water bodies from pollution originating from storms and human activities whilst also releasing lots of oxygen into the environment.

The role of urban residents in urban planning

Urban planning is about people and their needs in the environment which they occupy. Since land constitutes a part of the environment and also provides the base for human activities, these needs cannot but be expressed in terms of the use, management and development of land. In these ways, land can be applied to serve the various purposes necessary for terrestrial existence. Again, it is because humans are social beings who settle in groups for protection and other interactions with each other, that societies have developed. As expressed by Roberts (1999), since

> *"planning is a part of the organisation of society, some control over the use of land is, and will continue to be, an important component of that organisation"* (Roberts, 1999, p.3).

The planner comes into the picture as that figure of control, empowered by society to exercise the power to compel, constrain or coerce into compliance those people who choose to act in defiance of the laws and the wider interests of society. In so doing, planning necessarily takes into consideration the views of residents of an environment. This accords with the planner's mandate which Roberts (1999) sees as different from that of geographers, economists, sociologists and others. Whilst the latter groups study urban and rural land use to seek an understanding, the former seeks to influence, change and control land use. This makes planning

> "*a part of the political process, that is the enunciation, establishing, weighing and the reconciling of different views held within a society on how it should be organised, how its resources should be deployed, and how far the individual should be restrained in the interests of society*" (Roberts,1999)p.5-6).

Given then that planning is a part of the political process, the people for whose welfare and security the process exists, and whose mandate society's leaders hold, automatically become the focus of planning.

Redressing the recreational land deficit

No visible effort has been made to address the recreational land deficit in Benin City since the 2015 commencement of the Sustainable Development Goals project. A failure to do this in good time suggests that little or no progress will have been achieved by the 2030 end date.

Tackling the challenge calls for innovative strategies. This is where urban planning's role of deciding in which ways a city should remain as it is and in which ways it should be changed for the better (Keeble, 1982) comes to the fore. A master plan is an important starting step. This should identify areas of recreational land need and provide ways of meeting the need. This may involve the conversion of existing residential and commercial spaces in built-up areas as well as denying permission for redevelopment in some cases. This study is based on that strategy. The study location is not a vacant site but has been in use as offices of the Ministry of Education. Now that it is being redeveloped as an educational hub, no longer be a secretariat. This amounts to a re-purposing of an existing infrastructure on the part of the government. This action is being undertaken because a need has been identified, but this is not a particular need of residents of the study location. This paper argues that the re-purposing should have been directed to a local need. Perhaps if the residents had been consulted with a range of alternative uses of the site, educational use may not have been their choice. Enlightened residents are most likely to see the need for recreational provision. Where this is not the case, an enlightened government ought to see this need and educate residents. The government can approach the task by the presentation of alternatives to residents. Urban planning must carry out this function, but it is usually hampered by the political process of which it is a part. This constitutes a *top-bottom* approach to urban planning and service provision, rather than a *bottom-top* approach.

The site is feasible for conversion to a recreational park because it has only a few buildings. Thus, the costs would involve the demolition of the old, clearance, redesign and the creation of a park using resources supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture. Some of the old buildings have been derelict since a fire incident occurred over a decade ago. The site was chosen because it is located in an area without any parks; it is sizeable and it is in a built-up area where undeveloped land is scarce. Another important strategy is that ungoverned spaces such as the sidings of the Benin Moat which covers some 6,500 km^2 (Darling & Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2012) should be recovered and re-integrated into the urban management system as a part of the city. The Moat has potential for tourism and as green space and a shelter belt as examined by Onwuanyi, Nwodo and Chima (2021).

Against this background, this study seeks to investigate the apparent under-provision of recreational land space in Benin City to redress the situation. To achieve these aims, the study will:

(a) Investigate the adequacy of land space provision for outdoor recreation in Benin City.
(b) Determine whether recreation is a greater need than education in the study location.
(c) Establish the recreational role suitability of the Iyaro-Urubi site.

METHODOLOGY

The study involves primary and secondary research methods. Open space standards used for recreational land planning were obtained from established jurisdictions. Analytical methods were then used to establish the current provision in Benin City. Between the two figures, the extent of recreational under-provision was established. In acknowledgement of the importance of residents' opinions in matters of this nature as occupiers of the environment and the focus of planning policies and actions, a questionnaire survey was undertaken. The questions particularly related to the adequacy of recreational land provision in the city; whether or not more recreational land space is needed; and whether or not the study location is better suited for recreational use. The fact of involvement of environmental and recreational issues influenced the choice of the target population for the survey. This required an understanding by respondents of land use, land use patterns, recreation, recreational parks, sustainable development goals, climate change, and also, a knowledge of the study location. Therefore, it was decided that the population be drawn from people who possess a modicum of such knowledge and also are city residents. This population was identified as the members of the Faculty of Environmental Sciences (academic staff, technologists and final-year students) of the University of Benin, the city of the study. The list was drawn from the faculty and departmental sources. The faculty is comprised of five academic departments: architecture, estate management, geomatics surveying, quantity surveying and the fine and applied arts. The entire population consisted of one hundred (100) persons. This figure comprises the sample frame for the study. Since the figure is within a manageable size, it also constitutes the sample size. Therefore, the questionnaire was administered to the identified 100 persons. The questions were designed to elicit "yes" and "no" answers to the issues of observed deficiencies in the existent land use pattern, the adequacy or otherwise of existent recreational land provision, the need for additional recreational land provision, and based on these assessments, which purpose, between recreation and education, better fits the Iyaro-Urubi site under the current circumstances of climate change and a deficient provision of recreational facilities. The retrieved questionnaires were analysed by simple descriptive tools to provide a basis for making inferences.

RESULTS

(i) Open space standards

The adequacy or otherwise of open space provision in Benin City was assessed against the standards in established jurisdictions. Specifically, reference was made to British standards published by Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) and Fenland District Council (Fenland District Council, 2013).

The recommendation of ANGSt (2013), is that: "*everyone, wherever they live, should have an accessible natural green space*

- *of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres(5 minutes walk) from home;*
- *at least one accessible 20-hectare site within 2 kilometres of the home;*

- *one accessible 100-hectare site within five kilometres of the home; and*
- *one accessible 500-hectare site within ten kilometres of the home; plus*
- *a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature reserves per thousand of population".* (Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard, 2013:p.12).

Local nature reserves are places where access is available to the natural environment close to where people live and are often managed in close cooperation with residents. This requires a call for a bottom-up approach by planners to ensure the consultation and involvement of residents in the issues concerning their environment. Accessibility implies that the space is inviting to those who approach it, regardless of the purpose of their visit.

Fenland District Council (2013:p.9) reports the following standards amongst English Local authorities on parks and gardens.

Table 2: Comparative Green Space* Standards of English Local Authorities

S/N	Name of Local Authority	Standard (No. of hectares per 1,000 population
1	Fenland	4.0
2	Cambridge City	4.1
3	Huntingdonshire	3.73
4	Peterborough City	3.77
5	South Cambridgeshire	2.8
6	South Holland	2.43
7	Haringey London Borough Council	4.34

*Overall green space consists of (1) Amenity green space(2)Parks and Gardens(3)Natural areas(4)Allotments(5)Outdoor sports(6)Children's and Youths' play areas and (7)Informal spaces

Source: Fenland District Council (2013).

Considering then that:

(i) Parks and gardens standards are a part of overall green space; and

(ii) For most of the authorities parks and gardens standards range between 0.4 hectares to 2.2 hectares per 1,000 persons or residents; and

(iii)The revised standard as recommended by Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (2013) approximates to 1.6 hectares per 1,000 persons. The standard of 1.7 hectares per 1000 persons is adopted for the study.

(ii) Open space availability in Benin City

In an earlier study, Onwuanyi and Ndinwa (2017) established the available public open space in Benin City as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Major Open Spaces in Benin City

S/N	Name of Place	Location	Area(hectares)	Owner
1	Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium	Stadium Road	1.50	Edo State
2	Benin City Golf Course	Reservation Road	16.36	Benin Club
3	Benin Museum Compound	Ring Road	3.79	Edo State
4	UBTH Golf Course	Ugbowo	25.14	UBTH
5	University of Benin Sports Complex	Ugbowo	1.8	University of Benin
6	Ogba Zoological Gardens	Ogba	42.30	Edo State
7	Ramat Park	Ikpoba Hill	3.13	Edo State
		Total	94.02	

Source: Onwuanyi and Ndinwa (2017)

(iii)Recreational space need in Benin City

Since no additions have taken place, 94.02 hectares are adopted in this study as the total provision of public open space in the city. The city's population in the last census which took place in 2006 was 1,147,188 persons. Using the National Population Commission's 3.5% per annum official growth projection rate for Nigerian urban areas, the 2023 population of the city is estimated at 2,053,466 persons. Applying the adopted rate of 1.7 hectares per 1,000 persons to a population of 2,053,466 persons, the provision should be:

$$\frac{2,053,466}{1,000m^2} = 2,053.466m^2 \text{ per } 1,000 \text{ persons.}$$

On a per resident basis, this is equivalent to: $\frac{2053.466}{1,000}$ or 2.053 m^2 per resident.

Based on population, the recreational land provision for the city should be 2.053× 2,053,466 persons or 4, 216, 722 m^2 which is equivalent to 421.67 hectares. Compared with the present 94.02 hectares provision, the shortfall is a massive 327.65 hectares (or 3,276,522m^2. In percentage terms, the shortfall is over 300%.

Table 3: Survey results

S/N	Issue	Response Rate			
		Yes	%	No	%
1	Is Benin City lacking in outdoor recreational spaces, public parks and green spaces?	48	100	0	0
2	Is there a great need for outdoor recreational spaces, public parks and green spaces in Benin City?	46	95.84	2	4.17
3	Are outdoor recreational spaces, public parks& green spaces important to urban liveability and environmental sustainability amidst climate change threats?	39	81	9	19
4	Are outdoor recreational spaces, public & neighbourhood parks, green spaces and children's play areas important for good health & well-being?	43	89.58	5	10.42
5	Is the Iyaro-Urubi site better suited to outdoor recreational and public park use at the current time?	42	87.5	6	12.5
6	Is Iyaro-Urubi better suited to educational use at the current time?	6	12.5	42	87.5

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Adequacy of recreational space provision in the locality and the city

From all indications, the Iyaro-Urubi recreational hub project is targeted at all residents, not only people in the locality. A dearth exists in recreational land provision in the city and the Urubi locality. The locality mirrors the city in this regard. Ideally, the locality should have neighbourhood parks and play areas which are easily accessible to residents. This is not the case in Urubi. If there were a central park in the city, Urubi residents would have to go a distance for their recreation needs, but local access to smaller-size facilities would be more efficient and convenient as is the practice in established jurisdictions.

A city of the size of Benin City should have a network of accessible recreational facilities at central and local levels. Currently, the locality has no "inclusive, accessible, green and public open spaces" which the Sustainable Development Goal 11.7 requires to be provided between 2015 and 2030 in sustainable cities and societies. Since the locality mirrors the city, there are no "inclusive, accessible, green and open public spaces" city-wide. The largest available space, the golf course, is exclusive to members of the Benin Club and their guests. The next largest two, the city stadium and the University of Benin Sports Centre, also are accessible for a fee. Since accessibility means the absence of a barrier, and fees constitute a barrier, the conditions of inclusivity and accessibility are not met. For spaces to be inclusive and accessible, they should be open to all. Such spaces will serve their open recreational purpose if they are planted with trees, and provided with benches for sitting, swimming pools, gymnasia, sports and other facilities for

leisure time activities. A central recreational park which can accommodate these facilities is lacking in the city. This raises the question as to whether or not residents are consulted as to the needs of their environment which task, in any case, is better undertaken by local government rather than the state government. The unequal relationship between these two government tiers means that local views may be relegated or not factored in at all liveability and the promotion of health and well-being.

Following these observations, the inference can be made that both the locality, in particular, and the city, in general, are places for living and working. However, they cannot be realistically described as places for recreation in the true sense, particularly outdoor recreation which impacts individual and societal well-being. This deficiency means that the city is lacking in a quality important to liveability. The deficiency is made more serious by the phenomenon of climate change whose effects are becoming increasingly evident in the frequency of flooding events, storms and higher temperatures. It is axiomatic that an adequate response to the phenomenon of climate change is vital to creating and sustaining the cities of the future. Measures of mitigation and adaptation necessarily include the provision of green spaces and places as represented by recreation parks, urban greening and street trees.

Is recreation a greater need than education in the study location?
According to the survey, 12.5% believe that educational use of the site at present is preferable. However, an overwhelming majority of 87.5% think recreational use is better, considering the existing deficiency and the advantages for urban liveability, the promotion of health and well-being; and environmental sustainability. It is important to note that the question did not ask respondents to state whether or not the site is suitable for the two types of use. By their answers, neither group says that the site is not suitable for both types of purposes. Rather, the groups were asked to express their preferences at present and in the present circumstances.

The satellite photo reveals that Iyaro-Urubi is a built-up area; densely settled, lacking in open spaces, play areas and greenery generally. In addition, the area is residential and commercial in character meaning that it generates a lot of carbon from the congestion created by human and vehicular traffic, particularly during the rainy season when flooding events also occur. This makes it a microcosm of Benin City. The physical environmental challenges of the city as highlighted by Omorotiomwan (2012); Ogeah &Omofonmwan, 2013); Adamolekun et al., (2017) and Onwuanyi& Ojo, 2021 indicate that it has in recent decades forsaken planning as much as planning has forsaken it.

The recreational role suitability of Iyaro-Urubi
There is a clear suggestion of recreational potential in Iyaro-Urubi. This view comes from the findings; observations of the locality; and the literature on the city's environment and planning issues as reviewed earlier. Recreation has the potential to benefit far more residents than the educational project. Educational use of the site does not seem to be a pressing need in the locality

and the city where recreational facilities are greatly lacking. Recreational use also has the potential to serve both old and young, able and disabled, rich and poor, residents and non-residents. The potential exists in the site because it is located in an area of dire recreational need. Besides, since there is no tradition of seeing residents' views on such projects, the decision for educational use was not made by consultation with residents.

An outdoor recreation park at Iyaro-Urubi, as envisaged, would offer green space comprising trees, gardens, park benches and play areas for children. This would offer an oasis of peace amongst the cacophony of traffic noise and congestion in the area. It would also be a social space for people to meet and interact with each other. The education hub, as a new project, can be located elsewhere, but recreation is more site-specific, especially in densely settled areas where having a liveable and sustainable environment is a challenge.

The feasibility of the Iyaro-Urubi site for recreational purposes cannot be faulted because the land belongs to the state, rather than the local government or that recreation is a local responsibility, not the state. These arguments can easily be refuted on the two grounds. Firstly, both are tiers of government. Secondly, both have urban planning responsibilities under the Urban and Regional Planning Act of 1992. Thirdly, the State constitutionally supervises the local government and must identify its needs. Fourthly, there are Nigerian instances where state authorities took over local government land and facilities for their projects. Two prominent examples are the mid-90s conversion of the 10-hectare Victoria Park in Ikoyi to the present Parkview gated residential estate. In the same manner, Enugu's 8-hectare Polo Park which was built by the colonial authorities in 1952, was taken over by Enugu State from the Enugu North Local Government in 2009 and unilaterally converted to the present Polo Shopping Mall (Onwuanyi & Nwodo, 2018). If these local government facilities could be taken over for state projects, then state land should also serve local purposes.

CONCLUSION

Given the apparent dearth of outdoor recreational land in Benin City, the study set out to ascertain the level and adequacy of provision. This was done to argue the case for an effort towards redress by using the 0.92-hectare Iyaro-Urubi site which the government has devoted to educational purposes. Residents' perceptions were sought on this and related issue issues. 100% of the respondents agree to a deficiency of recreational space in the city; 95.84% identify a need for more recreational space whilst 87.5% believe that Iyaro-Urubi would better serve recreational needs at the current time. Given the established under-provision of recreational land; findings from the literature on the city's environmental challenges; and the fact that the respondents in this study rate recreation above education at this particular time, the conclusion is that Iyaro-Urubi is more suited for recreation. The potential which it possesses lies in its being located in a deprived area whilst the opportunity presented is its being available in a location where land of such a size

is difficult to come by. The study concludes that Iyaro-Urubi possesses the potential to serve, and would better serve recreational purposes.

The findings are that the city's land use pattern does not provide adequately for all needs. Furthermore, a glaring dearth exists in recreational space, greening, neighbourhood parks and play areas. Lastly, despite the sustainable cities targets of the Global Goals project, efforts have been lacking in amending these deficiencies by creating public open spaces and places which can enhance urban liveability and sustainability.

The findings mean that the city falls short of the requirement that human habitats be places for living, working and recreation. As matters stand, it is a place mainly for living and working, but not really for recreation per se. Furthermore, the principles of modern urban planning are not very evident in the city given the deficiency in open space provision and the failure to make any redress over the years. In addition, the city's management appears oblivious to Target 11.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals. This situation makes it less likely that much progress will be made towards achieving that target by 2030. This would not improve the city's rating for liveability and sustainability.

Flowing from the conclusion, the study justifiably recommends that the site at Iyaro-Urubi ought to be used to address the deficit in outdoor recreational land space in Benin City. However, the feasibility of this option is now challenged by the ongoing State government's development of the site as an educational hub. Nevertheless, it is further recommended that urban planning attention be redirected towards addressing the city's land use pattern, particularly the recreational land deficit, to improve liveability, sustainability and economic well-being.

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