

Planned Community and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: In view of the failed government effort at providing a decent planned community, this study looks at various types of planned community and the importance of community participation in such projects. It is concluded by imploring the government to involve users in all stages of development so as to make the project more users friendly.

Key words: Planned community, new towns, community participation, development

INTRODUCTION

Past effort of the federal, state and local governments at providing decent planned community have not been fruitful because the right policy framework has not been put in place. Where they have, such have been characterized by weak execution leading to general dissatisfaction among residents. In a study by Amole and Mills-Tettey^[1] of the FESTAC Housing Estate in Lagos, they found the majority least satisfied corroborating the earlier work done by Awotona^[2] in the same estate that found only a moderate level of satisfaction from the respondents. Also the kainji resettlement scheme done by the federal government was also not successful as the socio-cultural ways of life of the people were ignored in the accommodation provided for them.

This study therefore focuses on the reasons why planned community has become a challenge to the different tier of government. First the essence of planned community and the various types are discussed in order to highlight the problems associated with them. Finally the role of community participation is also examined.

What is a planned community?: Planning is not a straightforward subject in which there is one right answer or a fixed set of rules; it all depends on what one wants to achieve and on the answer to the question 'How do you want to live?'

Towns and cities are not God-given or 'natural'. They are the result of centuries of decision-making by individual owners and developers and of government intervention. Therefore a planned community is one in which the people, the government in conjunction with the planning professionals have greatly contributed in producing to secure the maximum level of economy, convenience and beauty. Nineteenth-Century planned

community was down-to-earth in its concern with public health, sanitation and with meeting the functional requirements of industry and transport.

The demand for planned community called forth by a combination of the effects of three main factors, industrialization, urbanization and population growth and the related problems of overcrowding and diseases^[3].

A planned community as a physical entity is composed of many different elements that relate to each other functionally and spatially. Just as a pile of parts becomes a well-functioning car only when arranged in the right functional and spatial order, so disparate community elements create a 'good' (i.e. a well-functioning, people and environmental-friendly) city only if they are orchestrated in an appropriate functional and spatial order that enables the elements to interact effectively.

A good planned community evolves on the basis of local characteristics and design principles and enhances urban activities, improve on the well-being of the citizens and create a balanced relationship with their local and global environment. These ensures their preservation and long-lasting because they function well and express their citizen's history, collective memory, values and beliefs and pride.

The essence of planned communities: Today most people live in cities and conurbations and their population is growing world-wide. According to the World Resource Institute and the Institute for Environment and Development, in 1986 and 1988-9 the urban population of Europe was 71.6% and that of UK was 92.1% of the respective total population^[4]. The community is accordingly the place that influences and shapes the life of a vast number of people. For this reason alone the quality of the community is of paramount importance. This in turn highlights the significance of planning and designing the community.

Planned communities provides access to services and facilities; it has stimulating features and represents an intellectual challenge; it offers comradeship; and most obviously and importantly, it offers work places.

A good planned community provides for all the physical needs of its citizens: a place to live and work, a reasonable income, education and training, transport and the possibility to communicate, access to services and facilities.

It offers security and protection, a visually and functionally ordered and controlled environment free of pollution, noise, accidents and crime.

It offers a conducive social environment where people have their roots and children have their friends; it enables the individual to be part of Community and provide the feeling of belonging to a place and to a territory.

It has an appropriate image, a good reputation and prestige; it gives people a sense of confidence and strength, a status and dignity. It offers people a chance to be creative, to shape their personal space and to express themselves; it offers communities the neighborhoods according to their needs and aspirations. It is a well designed, aesthetically pleasing, physically imageable and a place of culture and a work of art. A well-planned community enhances the community's advantages and to minimize if not eliminate the community's disadvantages. The community must become more equitable; it must provide every citizen with a fair share of its advantages. On the other hand the community needs to be shaped so that a considerable reduction of noise and pollution is achieved, so that mobility is possible without congestion of roads and without pollution, so that planned and spontaneous communication is possible and so that people enjoy a high level of privacy and freedom.

A good planned community combines the central qualities of the traditional city—culture, exchange of ideas, services and facilities—with the qualities of the suburb—privacy, solitude, freedom, quietness, good air, garden, parks and promenades—without taking on the unsustainable characteristics of many of today's suburban and peripheral areas—single use, low density, sprawl and monotony.

Types of planned communities: Five types of planned communities, categorized by size and location^[5].

New town in-town is a term invented by Harvey Perloff to describe communities developed within the urbanized limits of existing cities. Being within a highly urbanized setting like the FESTAC town, one usually can expect high-density, high-intensity development—perhaps 70 or more person per acre. Social concerns and

participation by the surrounding community will be strong considerations, often in direct confrontation with the economic objectives and resources of the developer.

Satellites are the most common type of new town. They range from subdivision of 1,000 acres to so-called new towns of 15,000 acres or more. In form, density and life-style the satellites basically are continuations of the suburban fabric. Typical densities range from 5 to 15 persons per gross acre. To the architect familiar with the design of large subdivision or large apartment/townhouse complexes, the satellite could look superficially similar. To some extent this is true, but when more than 3,000 person or 500 acres are involved, new design issues arise. These often are system design issue.

New cities differ from satellite by being functionally independent of a nearby metropolis and relatively self-sufficient with a full range of activities. There are no new cities in the United States, but they have been crated in other countries as tools of a deliberate national policy of urban and industrial decentralization. Brasilia, Cumbemald and the British and Russian new towns are examples.

Recreation new towns are springing up all over the United States. They usually involve 1,000 to 15,000 acres in remote locations or naturally beautiful, often magnificent properties. Because of a combination of marketing and ecological considerations, they often demand more of their designers and developers than conventional new towns.

The planned unit development (PUD) is not a new town in the usual definition, but it is extremely important as a concept and a key component of any new town. The PUD is a natural design area for architects. Usually covering 20 to 500 acres, it can be part of the framework of a larger new town or a traditional suburban development.

At a site plan scale, the PUD is the fundamental building block of a new town. If all suburban growth were carried out in the PUD pattern of 50-to-100-acre sites and a high level of community services, the results would look like the new towns being built in the Unites States today.

Major variables: The five-types of new towns have many factors in common. It is the ways in which they vary that will determine their unique character.

The general one is the nature of the developer. Until recently the developer typically has been a private firm with a strong individual at the helm. But now developer is becoming less dominated by a single man of vision and is more often a corporate firm with substantial experience in real estate development. With growing frequency, major industrial corporations are entering the field as a means of diversification.

Since the Greenbelt new towns, the public sectors has not taken an active developer role, but this is changing. At the federal level, Title VII of the 1970 housing act provides the private developer with a mixed bag of carrots and sticks for new-town building. At the state level, the New York Urban Development Corporation is acting as a public developer capable of combining public powers and private entrepreneurial drive to achieve rapid action in the public interest. Other states are following the lead.

The developer's primary objective is to make a "reasonable" profit on his (and others') investments while keeping the risk within "acceptable" bounds. The developer's definition of a reasonable profit, typically measured as an internal rate of return (IRR) of 20 % or more, may have a direct bearing on the ultimate quality of the project, its scope and the design budget. Acceptable risk may affect the use of innovative solutions and the pursuit of a secondary objective that might increase capital risk.

To the extent the public enters the picture, the priority of socioeconomic objective may change. But profit is still number one because it is the private sector's fundamental incentive.

The context: Another major variable among types of new towns is the natural and man-made condition of the site and its surrounding area-the context. The natural context is the location and size of the property and its related climate, vegetation, terrain, geology and hydrology.

If the location is urbanized, the level of community services in place, previous responses to natural conditions and the legal and regulatory complexities affecting the project alters the total context. In a new town in-town, for example, the existing utility and community-service network could outweigh, in design significance, the natural conditions that would be of paramount importance to a recreation community built in a rural area. And urban projects usually encounter much stronger political and regulative controls than do rural projects, though increasing concern for the natural environment is changing this.

Pressure and form: All of these contextual elements, the developer's nature and objectives and many other factors interact to create pressures that ultimately affect the community's structural form. A direct response to any single pressure affects the options for response to others. In a rational, systematic design processes the pressures are assigned priorities and responses are chosen to balance cost against effectiveness.

The process of evaluating and selecting responses become more demanding as the pressure become more urgent and complex. The systems designer, as a

subordinate decision-maker to the developer, has the task of intelligently perceiving the key data and assisting his client in making rational decisions.

Social considerations aside, the first set of pressure are the natural conditions: land form and locations, a pattern of development opportunities will begin to emerge. It will indicate alternative "Least cost/highest return" locations and possible locations for land uses, pedestrian and vehicular transportation and utility systems.

Community participation in planned communities: An emerging methodology of community development is based on the conviction that social improvement does not occur until the people involved believed that improvement is possible^[6]. As citizens are brought to feel a sense of community and adopt goals that serve their concept of community, they develop a stronger sense of social improvement.

During the last two decades, there has been a considerable movement towards the direct involvement of the public in the definition of their physical environment. The increased sense of social responsibility took root in the mid - 1960's, when a feeling of community consciousness prevailed in many low-income urban neighborhoods. The concept of advocacy planning introduced the participation of non-professionals and non-designers in the process of decision-making. This means that the citizen ought to be heard, to be well informed about the reasons behind the planning proposals and be able to respond to them in the technical language of professional planners/designers^[7].

The advocate represents an individual, group or organization that assists the client(s) in clarifying and expressing their ideas. The advocate is responsible to the client, so he/she would seek to express the client's views and interests. "... Citizen participation is a categorical term for city power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future "... Participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power holders to claim that all sides were considered but makes it possible for only some of these to benefit. It maintains the status quo"^[8].

Current views of community participation: The purposes of participation have been more modestly defined to include information exchange, resolving conflicts and to supplement design and planning. Participation reduces the feeling of anonymity and communicates to the user a greater degree of concern on the part of the management

of administration. (With) it, residents are actively involved in the development process, there will be a better-maintained physical environment, greater public spirit, more user satisfaction and significant financial changes^[9]. Citizen participation has a different meaning to different people and even a different meaning to the same people according to the situation; different users prefer to participate in different ways according to the situation too. The two main purposes of participation are:

1. To involve citizen in design, planning and other governmental processes and, as a result increase their trust and confidence in government, making it more likely that they will accept decisions and plans and work-within the system when seeking solution to problems.
2. To provide citizens with a voice in design and planning decision making in order to improve plans, decisions and service delivery^[10].

An important point in the participatory process is individual learning through increased awareness of a problem. In order to maximize learning the process should be clear, communicable and open. It should encourage dialogue, debate and collaboration.

Thus, participation may be seen as direct public involvement in decision-making processes: citizens share in social decisions that determine the quality and direction of their lives. This requires the provision of effective communication media in order to provide suitable grounds for citizen participation in designing. There are many benefits accruing from such an approach for the community, the users and the designers and planners.

Firstly, from the social point of view, participation results in a greater meeting of social needs and increasingly effective utilization of resources at the disposal of a particular community.

Secondly, to the user group, it represents an increased sense of having influenced the design decision-making process and an increased awareness of the consequences of decisions made^[11].

Thirdly, to the designer, it represents an increased and up-to-date information than was possible before. Creating a methodological framework can enable the use of rational design methods without affecting the creative process.

Since participation has a diversity of expression, a design and planning solution from this approach will need to be made transparent so that the decisions are understood by the people who made them. By convening public forums that encourage community participation, people can openly express their opinions, make necessary compromises and arrive at decisions that are acceptable.

By involving as many interests as possible, not only is the product strengthened by the wealth of input, but also the user group is strengthened as well by learning more about itself.

The importance of a planned community cannot be over-emphasized going by its definition and importance. This is further enhanced by community participation in order to make the project user-friendly. Most of the abandoned housing estates in Nigeria would have been saved if this approach had been adopted.

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