ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS THAT AFFECTS THE AESTHETICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITIES OF AWKA TOWN, ANAMBRA STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The aesthetics and environmental quality in terms of the arrangement and maintenance of the physical and social facilities of the land use that traditionally make up the environment of Awka town is far from the prescribed standards and they do not conform to urban planning, principles and standards as a result of the rapid rate of urbanization. The rapid rate of urban growth and expansion which is majorly uncontrolled as a result of poor development control coupled with influx of in-migrants has considerably affected the aesthetic environmental quality of various land use types in Awka town. This research assessed the factors that affects the aesthetics of Awka town and how noncompliance to building standards set by Anambra State Physical Planning Board affected the aesthetics of the environment in residential areas of Awka Town. Three major areas were selected for the study which included Amaenyi, Agu Awka and Ifite Awka. A total of 399 questionnaires were shared randomly among the respondents in the area studied, which included both landlords and tenants. The results were analysed using some analytical tools like Likert Weighted Mean Score, Mean, Standard Deviation and Simple Regression Statistics. The study found out that factors such as poor housing design, encroachment of commercial activities into residential areas have serious negative impact on aesthetics of Awka town. The study concluded that factors such as aesthetic degradation, loss of landscape harmony, visual cluster and congestion result from non-compliance to planning standard in Awka town set by the Anambra State physical planning board. Furthermore, the study recommended that there is need for the government to address the issue of non-compliance to planning standard in Awka town and ensure all buildings in the residential areas adhere to the building standard set by the State physical planning board.

Key words: Aesthetics, Environmental Quality, non- compliance, planning standards, residential land uses.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental aesthetics according to Nathan and Robert (1999) is the interaction between individuals and the environment in relation to beauty which includes the physical environment and the objects that occupy it, as well as the psychological process of human perception. The rapid rate of urban growth has a remarkable effect on the pattern of land use in urban areas if such development is not controlled. Studies of pre-colonial land use pattern in traditional Nigerian cities has indicated that there was harmony and orderliness as well as recognition of the need for adequate space for residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, recreational, institutional and other forms of land use. The urban environment then was quite tolerable and conducive to human habitation. However, with rapid population growth and influx of migrants to urban areas uncontrolled land use development emerged. All around the world, a greater number of individuals now live in urban regions than in rural area with 55% or 4.2 billion individuals of the total populace living in urban regions in 2018 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA, 2018). With the rapid increase in urbanization,

the original designs of most urban areas are replaced by multiple housing units, crowded buildings and largely incompatible land use which has profound influence on environmental quality of the urban areas. There are increasing concerns about the effects of expanding cities mainly on human health, livelihood and environment, particularly the appearance of the urban area (Muhammed, Sabiu and Khalil, 2015).

According to Chawla (2012), correctly designed and coordinated cities are not only attractive but also gifts to humanity, in contrast to improperly and haphazardly built cities, which may be disasters waiting to happen. Land use planning aims to make the best use of land so that cities become well-coordinated, well planned, aesthetically beautiful, and most importantly, improving the lives of the inhabitants. Observation in most urban centres in Nigeria shows that the arrangement and maintenance of the land use that traditionally make up the urban environment is far from the prescribed standards and no longer in conformity with urban planning, principles and standards as a result of the rapid rate of urbanization. In many urban areas of Nigerian, land use encroachment is a typical occurrence and if unchecked, may eventually degrade aesthetic quality. Such land use distortion and disorganization in arrangement results to poor aesthetics of the environment which in many cases lead to displeasure and disgust.

Statement of the problem

The rapid rate of urban growth and expansion which is majorly uncontrolled as a result of the near absence of planning authority coupled with influx of in-migrants has considerably affected the aesthetics of the environmental of various land use types in urban areas. In Awka urban, several settlement experience land use encroachment, over the years this occurrence has been unchecked and so these areas have degraded in aesthetic quality. Effective urban land control and management is essential in addressing growing land use incursion and other issues associated with land use like slum formation, flooding, overcrowding, land degradation through erosion and congestion among others in order to achieve sustainable city development and ensure the safety and health of the populace and maintain urban orderliness, it is imperative that effective and efficient urban land control and management is practised. This is especially true in areas with rapid urban growth, like Awka Town. Urban land planning and management issues, as well as the creation of policies to address them, have received significant attention from scholars, professionals, and decision-makers. Despite these rules, regulations, standards, effective and efficient practise on urban and development control is poor, most part of Awka urban areas have issues with urban land use management and compliance.

These problems associated with non-compliance with building standards and other consequences of unplanned and uncontrolled urban growth leading to land use incursion and the consequent impacts are widespread in Awka Town. These land uses are residential, commercial, institutional, recreation, agricultural, communication, transportation and vacant land use. Each land use has a stipulated standard of conformity and once the standard is distorted in any way, visual pollution occurs. This study concentrated only on residential land use. The aesthetics of Awka town is affected with the proliferation of shops and street markets in strictly residential areas. Filing stations, restaurants, cinemas, clubs are all intermixed with residential areas, thus creating high levels of noise pollution, solid waste dumps, traffic congestion and overcrowding. This study examined how compromises in urban planning standards of the land uses affects the aesthetics of the urban environment in Awka Town.

Study Area

The study area, Awka town which is the capital of Anambra State Nigeria is located between latitude 6 ^{0}25 N and 6^{0}15^{1} N and longitude 7 ^{0}E and 7^{0}5^{1} E. It is located 72 kilometres South-West of Enugu and also about 35 kilometres North-East of Onitsha, Anambra state, Nigeria. Awka is part of the rainforest vegetation with two seasonal climatic conditions, they are the rainy season and the dry season. Awka falls within the high forest zone and it comprises of tall trees with thick undergrowth and numerous climbers. The typical trees are deciduous in nature, such trees are palm trees, raffia palm, iroko trees, oil bear trees and gravelina trees. The urbanization of Awka witnessed a great expansion since 27th of August, 1991 when Awka was made the capital city of the new Anambra state. This attracted a lot of investors, businessmen, who invested in the state. Many civil servants returned to their indigenous homes and increased the urbanization of Awka. The Nnamdi Azikiwe University with their high rate of students' enrolment led to the great explosion of the population in the study area.

Methods

The area of study for this research is Awka Town where three zones were selected based on their population density, the three zones included Ifite-awka, Agu- awka and Amaenyi. Data were collected using both field observation and the use of questionnaire. The observation method was the physical assessment of the study area to determine the level of non-adherence to residential building standards. The questionnaire enabled the collection of data based on the factors affecting aesthetics of the residential areas from the viewpoint of the residents.

The data emanating from the study were analysed using descriptive techniques and inferential statistics. The descriptive analysis includes the use of frequencies and percentages of the various factors that affects the aesthetics and environmental quality as well as non-compliance to building and land use standards. Inferential statistics that was used for this study includes Likert Weighted Mean Score, Mean, Standard Deviation, Simple Regression Statistics and T-test as data analysis tools. The results emanating from the analysis were represented using tables.

Results

Analysis of findings

The analysis of this study was done based on the 360 out of 399 correctly filled and returned questionnaires.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on extent to which aesthetic variables/factors impacts negatively on the visual appearance of Awka.

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	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation
Uncompleted buildings	380	0	2.6605	1.17943
Dilapidated building/structures	380	0	3.2395	1.14768
Incompatible land use such as siting of markets in residential areas	380	0	2.8947	1.22398
Unpainted houses	380	0	2.0211	1.38769
Crowded buildings	380	0	3.7579	1.39895
Old buildings	380	0	3.5842	1.43119

Poor housing designs	380	0	3.2921	1.25672
Encroachment of commercial activities into residential areas	380	0	3.3237	1.43568
Absence of good road network	380	0	2.4316	1.42093
Non-adherence to planning standards	380	0	3.0789	1.25993
Poor street layout	380	0	2.9974	1.25296
Undeveloped bushy areas	380	0	2.3684	1.41087
Indiscriminate waste disposal	380	0	3.2105	1.26361
Absence of open space	380	0	2.8368	1.27890
Poor hygiene/filthiness	380	0	3.2974	1.24069
Graffiti (writings on roads, fences and public areas)	380	0	2.9289	1.25935
Vehicular traffic congestion	380	0	2.8684	1.27221
Haphazard arrangement of signposts/billboards	380	0	3.0289	1.31631
Stagnant water/waterlogged streets	380	0	3.0316	1.29095
Absence of drainages	380	0	2.9553	1.26891

SPSS 25 computation

Field survey 2024

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation on extent to which aesthetic variables/factors impacts negatively on the visual appearance of Awka. Data presented in the table shows that factors that have serious negative impact on visual appearance of Awka includes dilapidated buildings/structures, crowded buildings, old buildings, poor housing design, encroachment of commercial activities into residential areas, indiscriminate waste disposal, poor hygiene/filthiness, haphazard arrangement of signposts/billboards, and stagnant water/waterlogged streets with mean scores of 3.23, 3.75, 3.58, 3.29, 3.32, 3.07, 3c congestion and absence of drainages with mean scores of 2.66, 2.89, 2.02, 2.43, 2.99, 2.36, 2.83, 2.92, 2.86 and 2.85 respectively.

Table 2: Responses on whether respondents are in compliance with the front space land use standard in Awka town

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Comply	242	63.7	63.7	63.7
	Not comply	138	36.3	36.3	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

Field survey, 2024.

Table 2 shows that 63.7% of the respondents are in compliance with the front space land use standard in Awka town while 36.3% are not in compliance.

Table 3: Responses on whether respondents are in compliance with the rear space land use standard in Awka town

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Comply	155	40.8	40.8	40.8
	Not comply	225	59.2	59.2	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

Field survey, 2024

Table 3 shows that 40.8% of the respondents are in compliance with the rear space land use standard in Awka town while 59.2% are not in compliance.

Table 4: Responses on whether respondents are in compliance with the right space land use standard in Awka town

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Comply	244	64.2	64.2	64.2
	Not comply	136	35.8	35.8	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

Field survey, 2024.

Table 4 shows that 64.2% of the respondents are in compliance with the right space land use standard in Awka town while 35.8 % are not in compliance.

Table 5: Responses on whether respondents are in compliance with the left space land use standard in Awka town

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Comply	178	46.8	46.8	46.8
	Not comply	202	53.2	53.2	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

Field survey, 2024

Table 5 shows that 46.8% of the respondents are in compliance with the left space land use standard in Awka town while 53.2 % are not in compliance.

Discussion of findings

This study assessed the factors that affects the aesthetics and environmental quality of residential land uses in Awka town, Anambra State. The study found that there are several factors that have serious negative impact the aesthetics of Awka town and they includes dilapidated buildings, crowded buildings, old buildings, poor housing design, encroachment of commercial activities into residential areas, indiscriminate waste disposal, poor hygiene/filthiness, haphazard arrangement of signposts/billboards, and stagnant water/waterlogged streets.

There is low compliance of Awka town to residential land use standard set by Anambra state physical planning board as the rear, front, left and right space standard set by the planning board was not complied to in most of the residential buildings of the studied area.

Based on factors responsible for non-adherence to building standards in Awka town, the study found that taking things for granted, knowing that nothing will happen after violating the condition, poor and ineffective development policy and control, corruption and lack of respect for statutes and laws of the land, poverty and lack of resource to build standard structures and ignorance of the conditions and liabilities stated in the C of O's constitute the factors that are responsible for non-adherence to building standards in Awka town.

5.3 Recommendations

The study based on its findings recommended that: **(1)** Anambra State physical planning board should take necessary measures in addressing non-compliance to land use residential standards in Awka town as this will help reduce the aesthetic degradation of the town. **(2)** Punishment should be melted out to those whose building and structures are not in compliance with the Anambra state physical planning board. **(3)** There should be strict monitoring of building and structures that are erected in the town by the planning board to make them comply with residential land use standard.

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