Investigating the Placemaking Context of Resort and Recreation Parks Development in Nigeria

[1]Abdulwahab Engworo Etudaiye & [2]Ibrahim Yusuf Baba
[1]*Department of Architecture, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria*
[2]*Department of Architecture, Bayero University Kano*

Abstract

Today in Nigeria, it is no longer a doubt that in attempt to creating meaningful resort and recreation parks are sited without recourse to the 'place-people' context. This result in a wide spectrum of approaches to place and image-making, importing foreign architectural character into Nigerian urbanism with high demand for western building components and ideas that have little consideration for the development of indigenous styles and expression. This paper, therefore, examined the context of place-making in resort and recreation parks development in Nigeria using contextual, critical, and perceptual approaches to placemaking. The study reveals a myriad of approaches adopted in the making of the place to include the contextual, the critical, and the perceptual which translates into vernacular or regional, critical regional to contemporary. It has also been revealed that cultural consciousness is necessary, and took precedence in most of the resorts and recreation parks. Therefore, one of the foundations of sustainable tourism development is the understanding of 'place', and transforming a space into a 'place' means recognising and maintaining place identity as this is one of the many ways of avoiding mass tourism and duplication of destination products.

Keywords: *Leisure, Place, Place-making, Recreation Park, Resort, Tourism*

Corresponding Author: Abdulwahab Engworo Etudaiye

Background to the Study

The man has unconsciously engaged in recreational activities right from the ancient age where he wandered through the dark virgin forest in search of light, shelter and food, to the renaissance via a modern search for novelties and fun (Egbaiji, 2007). The development of these activities with western culture is what brought about tourism as it were today (Akpan and Obang, 2012) and the importation of architectural character has flourished over the years and high demand for western building components and ideas have little room for the development of indigenous styles and expression (Oluigbo, 2009). As a result of European colonization of various countries of the world, European sporting, leisure, and recreation practices were transferred and adapted by the colonizers into the colonial settlements they established, and overtime was taken up in varying degrees by the indigenous peoples of and other migrants to those countries (Jennings and Weiler, 2005). This colonization, industrialization, and its consequent globalization have, however, made most African countries including Nigeria acknowledged different contextual approaches to placemaking of the resort and recreational development.

Leisure is a category of human experiences found in recreational and creative behaviour pursued with a relative sense of freedom from obligations, and regarded as personally pleasurable (Leiper, 2004). Godale and Godbey (1999) defined recreation as what an individual would do given a minimum of constraints on high autonomy or "it is a set of personally ideal activities in the mind of the individual which given the opportunity he or she will undertake. By these definitions, leisure and recreation can be understood to be the two sides of a 'tourism coin', and any object designed to achieve this relaxation can be referred to as resort or recreational facility. In this context, resort and recreational facilities are taken to be the structures or physical assets such as amusement park sport, football pitches, playgrounds, galleries, bar and restaurant, and games arcades, which accommodate recreation activities.

One can ask how many of the recreation parks and their compositions have their relationship with the site i.e. portraying the place culture and environment. Are they designed concerning with the site and region in which they are situated? How many of them are situated around the "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty" (AONB) like interesting topography, availability of natural landforms e.g. Rocky outcrop, water bodies, good scenery and meet the need for quiet enjoyment of the countryside and having regard for the interests of those who live and work there? Since every state in Nigeria is gifted with some unique and cherished cultural and environmental characteristics, therefore the attribute of place identity should be adopted in solving the problem of spatial interaction and circulation inherent in parks development. According to Salama (2014), place or Image making is a continuous worldwide practice of architects and designers whose concern is to create meaningful environments. Such a practice results in expressions that either reflects the regional context or mirror the wider global culture. This study, therefore, investigates the 'place-making' of leisure and recreation parks in Nigeria.

Literature Review
Context of Recreation Parks Development
Within academic literature, and as cited by Jennings and Weiler (2005), leisure tends to be defined based on a duality of work and non-work time, particularly non-work time that is free from obligations (Neulinger, 1974; Goodale and Godbey, 1988; Seabrook, 1988; Godbey, 1994; Bennett, Emmison, and Frow, 1999; Iso-Ahola, 1999), while recreation is seen as the refreshment of the mind and the body after work, especially by engaging in enjoyable activities or can be understood as the activity a person takes part in for pleasure or relaxation rather than as work (Gray, 2001). Consequently, the development of this Resort architecture, according to Emalfalga (2007), is referred to as a building or a group of buildings designed in a particular setting to cater to both relax and recreational activities. Several books and researches have been written about, recreation, leisure, tourism. The work of (Jennings and Weiler, 2005; Veal, 2002; McCool and Moisey, 2001; Gartner and Lime, 2000) and many more. These provide reach literature path to tourism, leisure and recreation development and maintenance of identity which this research has exploited, with the likes Salama (2014), Oluigbo (2009) focusing specifically on the cultural context of placemaking. Therefore, this study investigates the context of placemaking and the architectural identity that is associated with the parks and recreation facilities in Nigeria.

Context of Space, Place and Placemaking
Halpenny (2006) defines a 'place' as "spatial" location that is assigned meanings and values by society and individuals" and similarly in Oluigbo (2009), Agnew and Duncan (1989) outlined the three common meanings of place in social sciences as location, that is, the spatial distribution of social and economic activities; locale, which is routine social interaction in a place; and, sense of place, which mean the identification with a place emotionally or symbolically. Within the professional and academic communities, the interests in creating meaningful places always result in a wide spectrum of approaches to place and image-making (Salama, 2014; Altman and Low, 1992). Contemporary literature, however, has expanded beyond the work of Lynch (1960) of city image to include other parameters for understanding image-making. Conceptually, three approaches can be identified to understand the scope of relevant interests and studies in the field of environmental imagery. These are contextual, critical, and perceptual. In this respect, image-making is dealt with as an integral aspect of placemaking and as a result of the various forces that contribute to the shaping of places.

The contextual approach fosters an understanding of place by focusing on the regional, historical, and natural aspects of the city or the region within which it exists. The principal theories and practices of this approach have emerged as a reaction to the dissatisfaction with the universal nature of modernism, and the sustained discourse on image-making and symbolism in architecture is generally derived from the need to search for an identity. Regions, countries, and cities that have the cultural richness and multi-layers of history seem to be obsessed with that search (Salama, 2014). Contextual architecture responds to the immediate context of the site which is universal to all kinds of areas whether urban or rural (Patel, 2020; Altman and Low, 1992). These elements are represented through environmental imagery and formal aesthetics, and by depicting history, craft and cultural traditions, or current global trends (Salama, 2014).

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study is a descriptive and employed qualitative method based on a case study approach. Visual surveys and observations were used as instruments for data collection. Each case was studied based on the variables obtained from literature and interviews conducted on parks managers. The theoretical underpinning of this paper is that most architectural and urban design practices are oriented to functional, pragmatic, environmental, economic concerns, and several theorists and practitioners are in a continuous quest for a deeper design discourse that employs discussion of local expressions and contextually-based imagery toward creating place identities (Larice and Macdonald, 2007). Therefore, an in-depth assessment was made of the resort and recreation parks using a combined methodology; the contextual, critical and perceptual approaches to investigate the place-making. According to Salama (2014) reviewing design practices, three types of efforts towards image-making were identified. These are: a) utilizing symbolism in contemporary imaging, b) manifesting tradition and modernity discourse in search for image identity, and c) addressing the global condition towards image-making. The contextual and critical approaches were utilized to develop a critical analysis while employing key concepts that are mapped on actual examples from the city. In this respect, the analysis is directed towards place character and regional history, which act as sources for image and identity creation.

Consequently, the case studies selected for investigation was made to have regional representation that cut across the Nigerian space. Therefore, a total of eight (8) major public resort and recreation parks were selected based on their recognition and regional placement with three (3) chosen from Southwest; Jhalobia Park and Garden - Lagos, Elegushi Beach – Lagos, Ikogosi Warm Spring - Ekiti state, Wonderland Amusement Park and Resort, Abuja; one (1) from Southeast; Polo Amusement Park Enugu, and two (2) from the South-south of Nigeria; Obudu Mountain Resort – Cross River state, Pleasure parks - Port Harcourt, River State, and Yankari Games Reserves - Bauchi State. With photographs taken to set forth for contextual analysis.

Analysis and Findings
Polo Amusement Park, Enugu State

This amusement park is an example of High-Tech as it major characteristic building materials are glass and metal, has flexible planning criteria and use of modular components, expression of the structure, and exhibit relationship with the South-eastern region of the country that has been identified to be the technology hub of the Nation. According to Soyluk et al (2020), this type of architecture is also known as Late Modernism or Structural Expressionism which in its most basic definition, High-Tech is a style that rejects traditional methods and aims to develop construction techniques beyond time without forming any associations with past styles. It is a style that emerged in the 1970s, incorporating high-tech and industrial elements into building design. High-Tech architecture is an extension of the ideas supported by technological advances and emerged as a new movement.

Plate 1: Polo Amusement Park, Enugu State. A manifestation of Technology
Source: Field Survey, 2020

Jhalobia Recreation Park and Garden, Ikeja Lagos

Modelled after the traditional palatial house form and structure of the Southwestern Yoruba people of Nigeria, the exquisite park made use of available indigenous building materials such as thatch and timber, altogether referred to as plants as shown in plate….. The park and garden structures are built using local materials and designed to meet up with all the needs and requirements of the traditional Yoruba culture that also reflect the modern functionality. The structures built are not just made by using vernacular materials but even the planning is done keeping in mind the necessities of native society and culture. The rich vernacular tradition of a typical Yoruba setting starts from the natural settings of the site and responds to climate, local skills, construction materials and appropriate technology. As Demir (2010), observed, vernacular architecture that reveals knowledge of the past accumulates in the historical passage of time. Among the factors determining vernacular architecture are climate, geography, natural building materials, lifestyles based on traditions and religious behaviour, socio-cultural structures and methods of production.

Plate 2: Typical Yoruba Palatial Village Setting of Jhalobia Recreation Park & Garden, Ikeja Lagos
Source: Field Survey, 2020

1. **Elegushi Beach, Lagos State**

Developed on the beach of Lagos State, Nigeria is an example of eco-architecture. This, to a large extent, has helped not the tourism industry but also helped to revive the economy of Lagos state. This ecotourism architecture has helped to espouse the coastal culture of the people. The adaptation of local forms and materials was hinged on the proper planning of the beach that spatial distribution and facilities juxtaposition is flexible and embraces the requirement of both traditional and modern functionalities. The park is generally dependent on landscape and plants for its functions. According to Bromberek (2009), Eco-tourism appears to be a value- (or philosophy-) laden approach to tourism, aiming at environmental sustainability. One has to ask, however, what is sustained (natural environment, culture, the activity itself) and how is it sustained (at what costs and benefits, and who is to benefit).

Plate 3: Elegushi Beach; typical coastal area House form
Source: Field Survey, 2020

2. Yankari Games Reserves, Bauchi State

The Yankari games reserves is a perfect example of Tradition-Modernity architecture. This is because vernacular material and construction techniques and planning strategies were distinctively used to create regional identity in a modern way. This is characterized by natural and locally available materials such as mud, palm frond, use of cultural elements and forms that respond to the local climate and the regional Hausa architecture. Molotch et al (2000) agree on the fact that locality still matters. They have reasoned that locality matters since similar outside forces can have very different consequences depending on the local context. The architectural design of the Yankari games reserves and resort approach focused on traditional reinterpretations, with traditional design and decoration. *See plate 4.* This type of place-making embodies the quality and style that helps to mediate between tradition and the universalising forces of modernism. According to Salama (2014), addressing the sensitive relationship between tradition and modernity is another approach that manifests continuous attempts to construct architectural or urban identity towards the making of an image or iconic building. Tradition in this respect can be seen as an internal action or as a reaction to external forces. In essence, the result of the interaction between internal influences and external forces creates an identity.

Plate 4: Construction style concerning local craftsmanship, materials and climate – a manifestation of regional expression
Source: Field Survey, 2020

3. Wonderland Amusement Park Abuja

This typically conform to the context of critical regionalism architecture as the park is constructed around a rocky outcrop and built with stones – an example growing of buildings (AONB) around the area of outstanding natural beauty. All this place characters help to create a unique architectural environment in its location. According to Salama (2014), the manifestations of critical regionalism are typically viewed as a way to show cultural, economic, and political independence. In essence, the approach has resulted in a growing interest in discussing the role of identity creation through visual qualities of buildings and the landscape.

Critical regionalism, as propounded by Frampton and elaborated upon by Tzonis and Lefaivre, is the primary theory of this approach (Frampton, 1985; Tzonis and Lefaivre, 2003; Salama, 2014). It adopts the principle that the reading of a region's history to extract its essence and utilize it to suit the spirit of the time should be a primary design focus. The theory recognizes the interactional value of climate, culture, religion, and craft in making an image. The building that reflects the traditional, vernacular and regional form has generated structure that is truly suitable for climate and environment. Important design element for the creation of a sense of place, native materials such as wood, brick, adobe, bamboo, thatch, rock and local shells are cheap and often have useful qualities, as well as forming perception tokens of place related experience (Huffadine, 2000)

Plate 5: Wonderland Amusement Park and Resort, sitting around (AONB) Igneous Rock Outcrop. Use of Stones for Landscaping - an expression of critical regionalism
Source: Field Survey, 2020

4. Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort, Ekiti State

It is an example of critical regionalism architecture. The construction style is that of local craftsmanship, materials that are in tune with the climate and the environment. This takes into consideration the existence of a natural feature that enhances the tendencies of several recreation activities; the mountains and rocky outcrop, the confluence of the springs, and vegetation etc to accommodate skiers, hiking as means of recreation. In the introduction to the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), regional architecture is defined in terms of two fundamental qualities: being manmade or the products of time (Polat, 2016).

Plate 6: Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort; Situated on a rocky outcrop and use of stone embodied construction, an expression of Critical regionalism
Source: Field Survey, 2020

5. Obudu Mountain Resort, Calaba:

Generally, the context of the design is derived from the mountain architecture tradition, with a blend of 'Cross-Riverians' heritage architectural design tradition; abundant use of natural materials – primarily timber and stones, sloping roofs as seen in *plate 7*. The architectural style is elegantly rustic and solid, and of proportions in tune with the terracing contours of the site. Embellishments and decoration are also observed only in the internal sculpting and finishing the functional building elements. It is an example of critical regionalism architecture. The sensibility of the park lies on the organic unity of local material and textural looks to the uniqueness of the site, climate, vegetation, cultural characteristics, irregularities of the physical landscape and the blending of the local form and traditions that are deeply rooted in the local condition. The Obudu Mountain Resort architecture provided an authentic response to natural conditions of mountain settings and has created a simple tradition that is fitting with the natural environment.

Plate 7: Use of timber with indigenous House form – a manifestation of critical regionalism
Source: Field Survey, 2020

6. Port Harcourt Pleasure Park

The Park is an architectural marvel of contemporary design. It is a public recreation park in Niger-Delta's oil-rich garden city of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The park is serving as both a tourist destination and a revenue generator for the state, operated by an international staff of Julius Berger Nigeria Plc. The park boasts a wide range of facilities for all ages including a 5-star Cinema, an International restaurant, reclaimed stream, and the surrounding landscape of plants to complement the facilities at the park. The architectural design of the pleasure park has a clear and essentially unique identity – 'richness and contemporary' with very strong characters that are not suitable for everyone. The "richness and contemporary" identity of social aspects of being chic, good, and fashionable is achieved with the location and orientation of the site within the urban fabric and employing warm and intimate interior design philosophy that focuses on communicating directly with a specific target market segment – the educated and rich people. The strategy adopted here is that of environmental sustainability which helps the host community and the state to seek economic development that relates to a strong economy and a clean environment. Within the context of the theme of a clean environment, urban parks are an important element of a sustainable city. They provide opportunities for ecology, environmental improvement; active and passive recreation, aesthetic appreciation and a community focus (Faizi, 2006) as shown in *plate 8.* Urban nature is important for citizens' well-being and for the sustainability of the city they inhabit (Chiesura, 2004). The elegant use of contemporary materials such as glass, aluminium and concrete with

the blend of natural areas to provide environmental and ecological services contribute to the quality of life to offer social and psychological benefits to human societies. According to Chiesura, (2004), "public parks" and "recreation areas" are often mentioned as important factors to make the city liveable, pleasant and attractive for its citizens. The relation between urban parks and city sustainability is addressed through the investigation of the value of urban nature as the provider of social services essential to the quality of human life, which in turn is a key component of sustainable development.

Plate 8: Pleasure Park, Port Harcourt – an example of contemporary architecture
Source: Field Survey, 2020

Conclusion
The investigation revealed that most prominent public recreation parks in Nigeria have been designed to have a semblance of place; an architecture which relates in its base forms and materials both in the place and to the international. The sense of place has been employed in resort land-use decisions and construction through a myriad of environmental and cultural expression. Contextually, the peculiarities of the region have been carefully factored into design decisions and the quality of the environment has also enhanced the attraction, recreation perception, and experience, and has resulted in a highly intelligent, appropriate, and sustainable tourism and recreation park development. The paper established the multidimensional approaches adopted in the making of the place to include the contextual, the critical, and the perceptual which translates into vernacular or regional, critical regional, to contemporary. It has also been revealed that cultural conscience is necessary and recognizing and maintaining place identity is one of the many ways of avoiding mass tourism and duplication of architectural products.

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