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RETAIL ACTIVITIES IN THE NEGLECTED GREEN SPACES IN OWERRI URBAN: ASSESSMENT OF IKENEGBU AND ALADINMA NORTHERN EXTENSION LAYOUTS

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Abstract

Urban areas experience the pressure of economic activities due to the law of demand and supply. Human activities within the respective layouts generate a surge and demand of economic activities that make it imperative for planners to ensure adequate spatial provisions for exchange of goods and services within the respective neighbourhoods. The absence of neighbourhood shops in layouts in Owerri to accommodate retail activities in the layouts create opportunities for residents to use available spaces without identified specific functions for these activities. Neglected green spaces within the neighbourhoods, though structured into planning schemes have been misused and have become attractive for indiscriminate economic activities and negate the urban environment. The study was carried out on layouts in Old Owerri urban to find out how the neglected green spaces in layout could be used as well planned informal spaces for these retail activities that will offer relaxation and quick access to goods and service. This research will however focus on the findings for Ikenegbu layout and Aladinma Northern extension layouts only. The study was survey research using questionnaire administered on residents of 7 randomly selected layouts in Old Owerri urban after which 2 layouts were extracted for this study. Obtained data was analysed using the frequency distribution and the Chi square statistical tools. Findings reveal that if these spaces are integrated into the neighbourhoods, they would fulfill spatial demands for small neighbourhood retail outlets in Ikenegbu layout and Aladinma Northern extension layouts as well as relaxation for their residents and hence would improve quality of life of the residents.

***Keywords**: green spaces, parks, retail activities, urban areas.*

INTRODUCTION

Economic activities are an integral part of the existence of man. The exchange of goods and services among urban residents is a very important issue in the design of layouts and estates. Green spaces possess the potentials for great economic contributions to urban communities. They serve as an economic development tools, provide neighbourhood linkages and increase property values around them. They also increase tourism potentials, provide ecosystem services as well as provide community gathering spaces. Green spaces have been known to improve quality of urban life (The Trust for Pubic Land, 2014). They generate economic benefits for municipalities and for individual residents because high quality urban environment could have significant impacts on the economic life of urban centres

(Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2004) by increasing the city's attraction, and increasing their image as places for investment.

Research on green spaces reveals that economic benefits include the boost in retail sales, increase in tourism, and the ability to enhance inward investment as well as encourage employment. It is said to relate to the positive impact on property value by having a positive influence on housing values and the outdoor environmental quality. This quality contributes to house-buyers preference for houses close to natural parks (Cilliers, 2015).

Research reveals that creating places where people want to live and work can lead to economic regeneration. It was found out that good quality green space makes important contributions to the regeneration of a neighbourhood. It improves the image of an area and also builds the confidence and pride of communities and makes the layouts attractive for businesses to invest and locate in. (forestry.gov.uk, 2006). Green spaces form a basis for thee creation of new enterprises and jobs. The research also noted that poor quality greenspace could have adverse effects on the economic performance in a layout and also on the general wellbeing of urban residents. Upcoming businesses prefer the location of green spaes or proximity to parks and recreation areas. Some studies have also shown that greenery and flowers increase retail activities, attract shoppers and residents to urban areas thereby increasing economic activities and growth (Project Evergreen, 2018).

The increase in retail activities can be noticed in the neglected spaces of these two layouts in Owerri urban but these activities are largely disorganized in terms of function. Certain goods needed by the residents in these neighbourhoods are sold in and around these spaces, thereby fueling the forces of demand and supply. Some of these activities also generate waste and disorder in and around these neglected spaces. Retail activities could therefore be organized within these spaces in order to serve the residents and enhance the proper functioning of these spaces, hence improving the environmental quality of these layouts in which they exist. This will give greater meaning to the residents on the existence of these spaces. It will also forestall the unbridled pressure of developers who want to buy off these spaces for other purposes thereby depriving the neighbourhoods the openness created by the existence of these spaces.

This research will assess these 7 randomly selected in Owerri urban but will report on the findings in Ikenegbu layout and Aladinma Northern extension layouts only within the context of this theory. The tendency for urban residents to seek easy availability of goods and services makes it possible for economic activities to spring up close to where people work and live. These activities have become common place in some of the layouts examined in Owerri urban.

The objective of this research is therefore to examine the retail activities that take place in these neglected green spaces in Ikenegbu layout and Aladinma Northern extension layouts. The hypothesis chosen to guide this work is that there is no significant relationship between the presence of retail activities in the neglected green spaces and availability of the neglected green spaces for different types of activities.

Theoretical Concept

The Central place theory by Walter Christaller states that people gather in cities and urban areas for purely economic reasons and to share goods and ideas. It put forth some assumptions regarding human behavior. Humans will always purchase goods from the closest place where they can get the goods. Furthermore, it says that goods in high demand will be offered close to the population (Briney, 2017).This theory attempts to give reasons for distributtion patterns, size and number of cities and towns.

The Central place theory is a spatial theory in urban geography. The sub-discipline of urban geography is a branch of human geography that emphasizes, location, space and study of spatial processes that create patterns in urban areas. Urban geography is also concerned with economic, social, and political aspects of a city (Briney, 2017). Urban geographers futher define a city as a concentration of people with simlar interest such as job type, cultural preferences, political views and lifestyle.

Study Area

Ikenegbu layout and Aladinma northern extension layouts are two layouts in Old Owerri urban. The residents in Ikenegbu layout are mainly civil servants (54.5%), businessmen (63.6%) and others (9.1%). Aladinma Northern extension has civil servants (2.9%), business men (45.7%) others (41.4%). Residents live with their families and dependents. The house types are predominately flats and a smaller number of family houses. There is a lot of demand for goods and services within the layouts from the respective families. 2 neglected green spaces are within Aladinma northern extension and are shown in Figure 1 while 4 neglected green spaces are within Ikenegbu layout and are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Aladinma Northern extension neglected green spaces

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

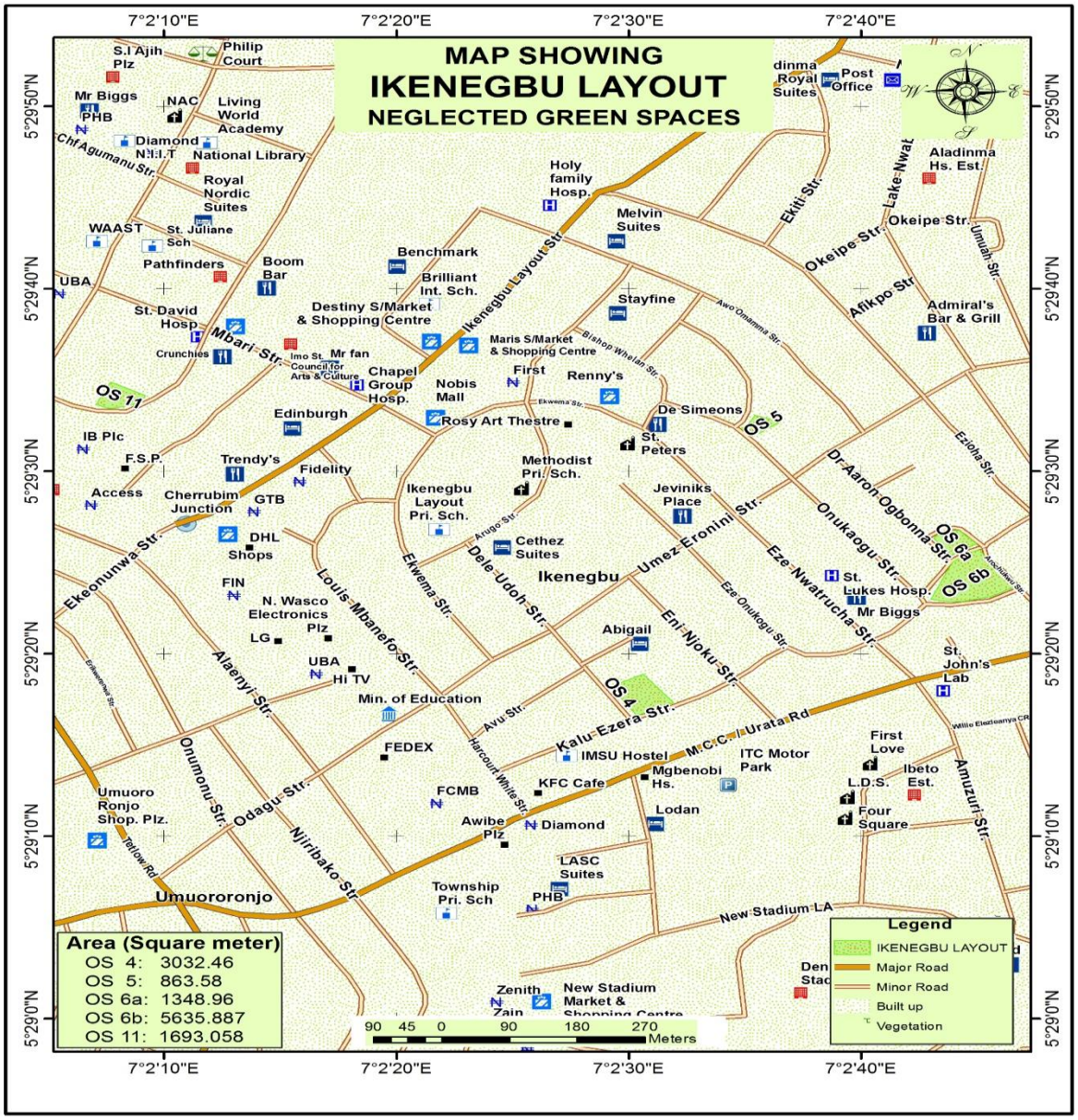

Figure 2: Ikenegbu Layout neglected green spaces

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data in this research was obtained through survey research design from primary and secondary sources. Secondary data was obtained from existing government records, books, published and unpublished related materials and maps. Population of study was the 7 randomly selected layouts out of which 2 layouts were extracted for this study. Field studies through questionnaire and interviews were administered on the residents in the 7 randomly selected settlements in Owerri urban. Data was collected from documented government

records on the neglected spaces in the settlements and the questionnaires and interviews administered on the residents in these settlements. The results of two layouts were extracted and studied.

The collection of data was to show the level of economic activities was done through questionnaires and interviews as well as case studies, observations, photographs, Satellite images and measurements of these neglected spaces. The formula for determining the sample size for a yet to be known population size was used to arrive at the 385 respondents for the 7 layouts. However, the extract of this study will focus on 2 layouts –Ikenegbu layout and Aladinma Northern Extension layout. Field work was carried out to assess the retail activities in the neglected spaces in Owerri urban. After the field work, particular attention was paid by this research to the findings in two layouts to assess and report the retail activities in their neglected green spaces. There are 4 neglected spaces in Ikenegbu layout and 2 of these spaces in Aladinma Northern Extension layout.

The research assumed a 95% confidence level, .5 standard deviation and a margin of error (confidence interval) of +/- 5% sample size expressed numerically for this study. The calculated respondent size was 385 respondents. For the 7 layouts that were studied, questionnaire were administered on these respondents. Questions were administered on 385 respondents in the 7 randomly selected settlements. Out of this number, questionnaires were administered on 60 respondents in Ikenegbu layouts and 72 respondents in Aladinma Northern extension layouts.

The following variables were also studied for Ikenegbu layout:

a. Presence of Retail activities in the neglected green areas
b. Availability of Spaces for different types of activities in the neglected green areas

The following variables were also studied for Aladinma Northern extension Layout:

a .Presence of Retail activities in the neglected green areas
b. Availability of Spaces for different types of activities in the neglected green areas

Univariate and Bivariate analysis were conducted on the results. The univariate analysis used was the frequency distribution for the 2 variables in the respective layouts while the bivariate was the pair-wise analysis using the chi square statistical tool to test the null hypotheses Ho1 and to determine the significant relationship between the variables.

The hypothesis that guided the study was: *there is no significant relationship between the presence of retail activities in the neglected green spaces and availability of the neglected green spaces for different types of activities.* This was tested with chi-square tool.

PRESENTATION OF DATA, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Ikenegbu Layout

The frequency distribution tables for the 2 variables examined under Ikenegbu Layout are shown below in Tables 1-2. Table 1 shows that there were retail activities in the green spaces (45.8%) within the layouts. This was made possible by the presence of the open spaces created by the neglected green spaces. Table 2 shows there were different kinds of some activities within these neglected spaces (25%). Retail activities are present in these neglected

green spaces (45%).The research was to find out whether there is any significant relationship between the retail activities in the neglected green spaces and the different activities in these spaces. These spaces are open spaces near the houses in the layouts and the presence of these spaces as discussed in the Central place theory created the pull for the economic activities in these spaces. The residents found it easier to trade in these spaces than going out of the settlement to the market for their basic household needs. If these facilities for economic activities are located in theses green spaces they will not only be for economic activities but also for relaxation within a natural environment.

Table 1: Presence of Retail activities in the neglected green spaces

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	27	45.0	45.8	45.8
	No	32	53.3	54.2	100.0
	Total	59	98.3	100.0	
Null	Value	1	1.7		
Total		60	100.0		

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 2: Availability of Spaces for different types of activities in the neglected green spaces

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	15	25.0	25.0	25.0
	No	45	75.0	75.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Aladinma Northern Extension:

The frequency distribution tables for the 2 variables examined under Aladinma Northern extension are shown below in Tables 3-4. Table 3 shows that there were retail activities (30%) in the neglected green spaces. Table 4 shows there were different kinds of some activities within these neglected green spaces (59.7%). Retail activities are present in the neglected green spaces (21%). The research was to find out whether there is any significant relationship between the retail activities in the neglected green spaces and the different activities in these spaces. The research found that these spaces are open spaces near the houses in the layouts and the presence of these spaces as discussed in the Central place theory created the pull for the economic activities in these spaces. The residents found it easier to trade in these spaces than going out of the settlement to the market for their basic household needs. The green spaces where these facilities are located will also create spaces for relaxation and comfort.

Table 3: Presence of Retail activities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	21	29.2	30.0	30.0
	No	49	68.1	70.0	100.0
	Total	70	97.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.8		
Total		72	100.0		

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 4: Availability of Spaces for different types of activities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	43	59.7	59.7	59.7
	No	29	40.3	40.3	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Ikenegbu Layout

The Hypothesis for the study was 'there is no significant relationship between the presence of retail activities in the neglected green spaces and availability of the neglected green spaces for different types of activities'.Thwas tested with chi-square.

The following variables were also studied for Ikenegbu layout:

a. Presence of retail activities in the neglected green spaces
b. Availability of spaces for different types of activities in the neglected green spaces

The Chi-square analysis shows that there is significant relationship between the Presence of retail activities in the neglected green spaces and availability of these spaces for different types of activities. The statistics obtained for the pair of variables a/b is significant at 95percent confidence level (= .027). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Table 7: The results of Chi square test of independence

Variable			Chi square	D.F.	Significance	Remarks on hypothesis
Ho1	V1	V2	4.872	1.00	0.027	Rejected

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Aladinma Northern extension Layout
Ho-there is no significant relationship between the presence of retail activities in the neglected green spaces and availability of the neglected green spaces for different types of activities. Hypothesis was tested with chi-square.

The following variables were also studied for Ikenegbu layout:

a. Presence of Retail activities in the neglected green spaces
b. Availability of Spaces for different types of activities in the neglected green spaces

The Chi-square analysis shows there is significant relationship between the presence of retail activities and availability of spaces for different types of activities.

The statistics obtained for the pair of variables a/b is significant at 95percent confidence level (= .019). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Table 7: The results of Chi square test of independence

Variable			Chi square	D.F.	Significance	Remarks on hypothesis
Ho1	V1	V2	5.488	1.00	0.019	Rejected

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

CONCLUSION

The research into the retail activities in Ikenegbu layout and Aladinma Northern extension shows that there are retail activities that take place in the neglected spaces in these layouts. Different types of small scale trading takes place in and around these spaces. These include some roadside tradesmen, food sellers and kiosks. Some provision shops exist in very close proximity to these spaces. The pressure of urbanization and economic forces have led to the existence of these small scale businesses. This confirms that the demand for these goods and services created these pull for economic activities in these neglected open green paces. The residents patronise the retail outlets because of their proximity. This research concludes that the location of organized neighbourhood shops within these neglected green spaces within these layouts would serve the residents of these respective layouts by offering them the relevant goods and services. This would create relevance for these neglected spaces and in turn also enhance the quality of urban life of the residents in these layouts. These retail outlets if further integrated with nature in these spaces would create relaxation areas for the residents. The green areas will create attraction, improve environmental quality and boost retail activities.

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