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DRAWBACKS FACING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF OPEN RECREATIONAL SPACES IN OWERRI, NIGERIA

Officha, M. C¹

¹Faculty of Environmental Sciences,
Nnamdi Azikwe University, (NAU),
Awka, Anambra State,
Nigeria

Onwuemesi, F.E²

²Faculty of Environmental Sciences,
Nnamdi Azikwe University, (NAU),
Awka, Anambra State,
Nigeria

Akanwa, A.O³

³Faculty of Environmental Sciences,
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu
University(COOU),
Uli, Anambra State,
Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the drawbacks facing sustainable development and management of open spaces in Owerri, Nigeria. Open spaces and green areas such as parks, green corridors, urban parks, urban zoos and street greeneries are sustainable means of invigorating urban life. Increasing populations and rapid urbanization have great impacts on the spatial pattern and distribution of urban land use. This has resulted in the loss of open spaces and alteration of urban ecosystems. It is the need to identify the challenges facing development and management of open spaces Owerri, Nigeria that prompted this study. A survey design was employed in the study and four hundred (400) copies of designed questionnaire were distributed to randomly in selected respondents in the city to gather data. Analyses were made using descriptive statistics and one way analysis of Variance to test the hypotheses. Findings from the study showed that the drawbacks in Owerri include inadequate number of available open spaces vis-à-vis rate of urbanization, natural population growth; poor spatial planning and land development control mechanism, lack of coherent approach to management; poor site planning and building designs. The study then recommend (i) Formulation of effective policy for recreation development in the State; (ii) Effective enforcement of extant physical planning laws, spatial standards and regulations as it affects open space/recreation development; (iii) embarking on public awareness/sensitization on need for recreational development in rural and urban areas.

KEYWORDS: Open spaces, recreation, development, sustainable Parks, management

INTRODUCTION

In urban planning and design projects around the world, the quality of urban life is given much attention than ever. It is understood that the health of a city, its economy and environment is improved more by a properly designed and implemented master plan

incorporating environmental issues (Mensah, 2014). One of the ways to increase the quality of urban life is the introduction of urban open spaces and green areas in cities. These include parks, green corridors, urban parks, urban zoos and street greeneries. Studies show that cities which are designed with the above elements

in consideration have improved health status in the public, low stress level in the society, decrease pollution and generally enhanced quality of life (Giorghis and Gerard, 2007).

As various human activities are geared towards achieving a higher level of development, it has led to the misuse of the urban open spaces in Nigeria. With the natural areas constantly being destroyed by man's activities through construction, refuse dumping, slums among others (Mensah, 2014 and, Akamani, 2006). Little is being done about conservation and beautification through landscaping. The apparent lack of coordination of physical planning activities especially in developing countries like Nigeria has resulted in degradation and unpleasant quality of the environment (Vijaya and Iniyanb, 2012).

Owerri is a densely and sparsely populated city. Its land uses are dominated mainly by housing units mostly medium and high density areas. Land use activities in Owerri and covers agricultural uses, natural vegetation, water reservations, mining and industrial workshops. Commercial activities are dominant in the city, however, there are recreational centers that compliment other land uses making the area more beautiful (Akamani, 2006). A clear and meaningful zoning of the activities in Owerri land uses is necessary, one that would not destroy the character and function of the city, in order, to achieve an amenable and functional city is the main planning challenge facing the city. Owerri has well-planned recreation centers more than other cities in southeastern Nigeria.

However, owing to poor management and lack of continuity in government administration and projects, most of the parks are dilapidated and

abandoned. Some have being leased out for different purposes either for business, religious activities or dumpsite. For instance, Amajeke Recreation Park was built in 1999 by Achike Udenwa the then governor of Imo state, the park stopped functioning because of poor management and it was later leased out. Some of the parks have been demolished and converted and used for religious activities, shopping malls and Motor Parks.

The F.S.P Park was established on 10th April, 1995 and has stopped functioning in 2009. This was due to lack of management and it was lease out by the government. The park has now been converted to rental house for ceremonies and commercial use.

Most of the parks and recreational areas in Owerri are besieged by many problems and huge setbacks. It is these drawbacks that this study predominantly focuses on and also recommends better management options that are sustainable.

STUDY AREA

Owerri is located in south-eastern Nigeria, Owerri, set in the heart of the Igbo land, is the capital of Imo State. The population of Owerri city (within its municipal boundaries) has risen from 7,000 residents in 1921, to more than 800,000 in 2006 (NPC, 2006). The population growth rate is estimated at 3.05% in 1996. The population of Owerri is estimated at 1,620,214 (2007) with the Owerri urban area at 2.7 million in population. The current population of Owerri, Nigeria is 1148665 according to the Geonames geographical database and it occupies an area approximately 1340 square kilometers. It is bordered by the Otamiri River to the east and the Nworie River to the south, (Fig. 1.1).

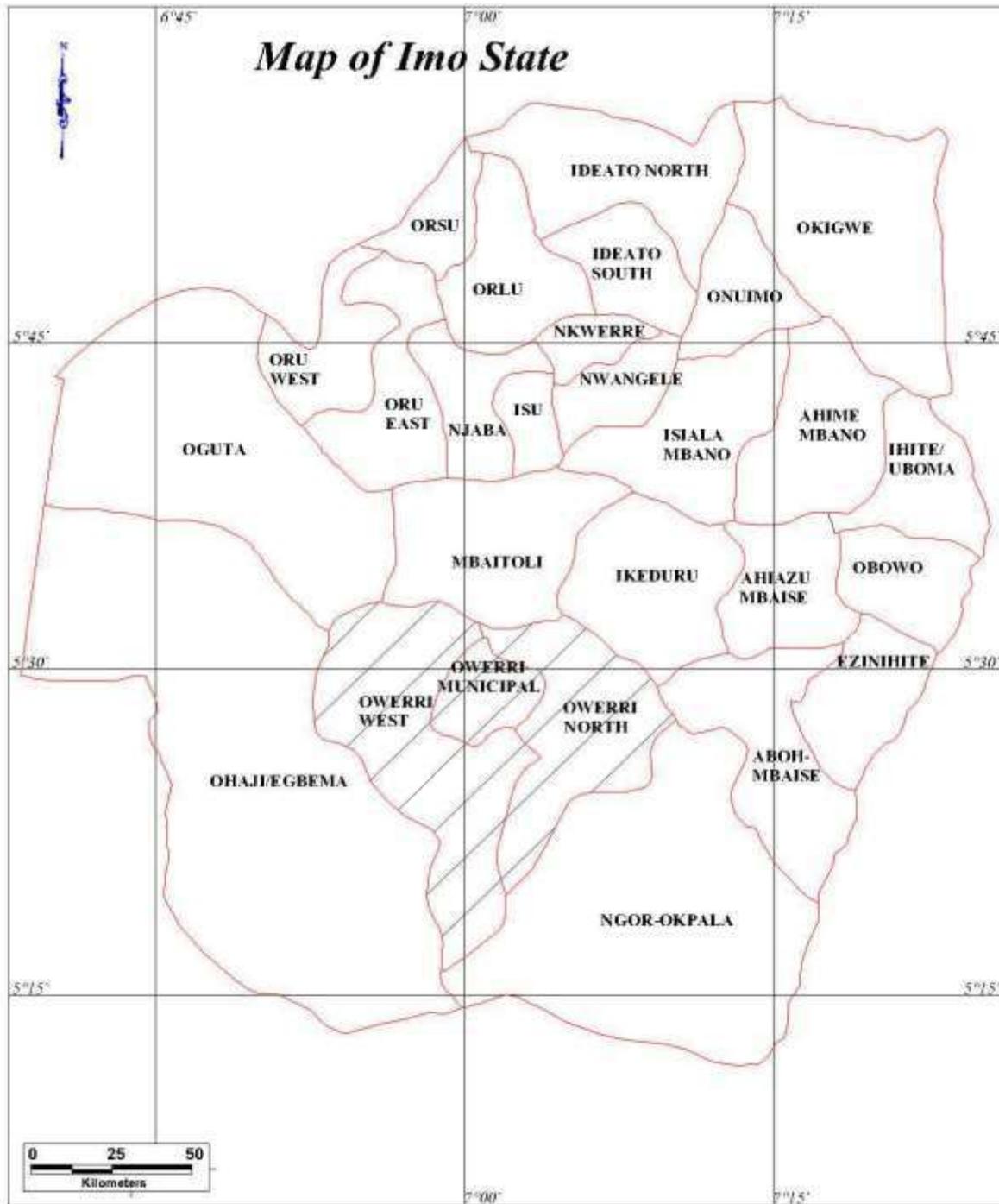


Fig. 1.1: Map of Imo State showing Owerri

Source: Survey and Geoinformatics Department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Owerri the ‘Eastern Heart-land’ lies between longitudes 6°55 'E to 7°15'E and latitudes 5°15'N to 5°35'N (Figure 1.1), covering an area of about 1340 km² and with population of 400,000 people. The area is generally flat with a good road network. The natural vegetation in greater part of the area had been replaced by derived savannah grassland interspersed with oil palm trees. Owerri is outcropped by the Oligocene Benin Formation. It consists mainly of sands, sandstone and gravel with clays occurring in lenses. The sands and sandstones ranges from fine to coarse grained and is largely unconfined, with thickness ranging from 2.0 m to 2100.0m (Avbovbo, 1978).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study primary and secondary sources of data were employed. The survey design which included observations, interview and the distribution of four hundred (400) questionnaires was used in gathering data. Purposive sampling was used in the

selection of relevant respondents basically the open space users and the management of the spaces. Also, accidental sampling was used as the respondents were selected as met randomly during field survey at the locations (Oyeka, 2010). The study sought opinions and perception of the occupants, staff of urban and regional planning, town planners, private developers and the general public in Owerri on the drawbacks facing the development and management of open spaces in Owerri (specifically at Aladinma, Ikenegbu, Amakohia, Owerri Municipal and New Owerri areas). The parks and open spaces studied are Owerri Amusement Park at Ikemba Ojukwu center, Children Parks at Nekede, Nekede Zoo and Garden at Nekede, Concorde Park and Water View.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The greater proportions of the residents are within the working force age ranging from 20 to 59 years.

Table 1.1: Age Structure of the Respondents in Owerri

Options on age interval	Frequency
15-19	21
20-24	37
25-29	45
30-34	43
35-39	54
40-44	47
45-49	56
50-54	46
55-59	29
60 and above	21

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.2 shows the number of males and females in the areas. The percentage of male and female were also shown in the Table 1.2. The values showed high

number of females in Owerri among the sampled population.

Table 1.2: Gender Structure of the Respondents

S/N	Study Locations	Male	% Male	Female	% Female
	Owerri	157	39.72	226	60.75

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.3 shows the education level of residents’ surveyed in the study areas. The information in the

Table indicates that majority of the people are educated

Table 1.3: Literacy Status of the Respondents

S/No	Literacy Option	Owerri	
1	No formal education	4	1
2	FSLC	67	16.75
3	GCE/WAEC/WASSC	102	25.5
4	OND/NCE	95	23.75
5	HND/DEGREE	83	20.75
6	Higher Degree (M.Sc/Ph.D)	49	12.25
7	Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.4 shows the responses of the respondents on the knowledge of open spaces in their locations. From the table 1.4, the average response of the

respondents showed that most of the respondents agree to the fact that open spaces exist in their locations and that most of the open spaces are functional.

Table 1.4: Knowledge of the Open Spaces in Study Area

Option Investigated	Owerri
There are open spaces in my area	4.21
The open spaces are operational	4.01
The park has been tempered with	4.11

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.5 shows the responses on the usage of open spaces in the study area. From table 1.5, there are different views of the usage of the open spaces. It was observed that the average responses show that at Owerri most of the respondents agree that open spaces were used for recreation purposes, Therefore, it can be concluded that open spaces at Owerri are used for recreation purpose.

Also, the average response of the use of open spaces for pools shows that the spaces are used as pools at Owerri which recorded 3.41 which is significant. Table 1.5 also showed the responses on the use as for strolling. From Table 1.5, the average responses for the use as strolling shows that the spaces are not often used as strolling spaces since the average response is less than 3.0 for the study area.

Table 1.5: Usage of Open Spaces.

Option Investigated	Owerri
Recreation	4.38
Pools (gambling)	3.41
Strolling, Playing Games and Playing Football.	2.22

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data on perception of residents on utilization of open space is presented in Table 1.6. Table 1.6 was computed from the weighted-mean of the respondents in the study area. The response from the respondents in

Owerri indicated that the spaces were used for recreation, religious activities, marketing and natural conservation.

Table 1.6: Frequent Use of Open Space for the Purposes Listed

Activities	Owerri			
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly
Recreation	3.97	27.79	111.16	1333.92
Pools	3.07	21.49	85.96	1031.52
Strolling	3.91	27.37	109.48	1313.76
Playing Ground	8.81	26.67	106.68	1280.16
Religious Activities	0.70	4.9	19.6	235.2
City plaza	3.11	12.44	49.76	597.12
Marketing	4.93	34.51	138.08	1656.48
Natural Conservation	4.02	28.14	112.56	1350.72
Others	0.01	0.07	0.28	3.36
Total	32.53	183.38	733.56	8802.24

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data on perception of residents on the drawbacks militating against the development of open spaces are presented in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7: Drawbacks Facing the Development of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Owerri
Conflicting goals and objectives between government officials, recreation planners and influential members of the public	2.98
Inadequate resources utilization and provision including human, fiscal and natural types	3.16
High cost of acquiring land for development	4.03
Planning lapses by non-provision of open spaces in the master plans	2.16
Suitable site and location leading to demolition	4.21
Poor management of existing structures	4.37
Encroachment	4.07
Lack of Political will by government	17.3
Insufficient fund to implement plan	23.8
Lack of institutional framework	24.5

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.8 indicated the information on drawbacks which the users of the open spaces in the city.

Table 1.8: Challenges Facing the Management of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Owerri
Lack of Site Protection e.g. Lack of Provision of Adequate Facilities	4.21
Lack of Protection of User’s Health and Safety	3.95
Poor Site Rehabilitation	2.42
High Fee Collection	2.08
User’s Counts (Maintenance of Facilities and Usage)	1.43

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data on perception of residents on the factors inhibiting the government from realizing its full

potential in the provision of open recreational spaces in the area is presented in Tables 1.9.

Table 1.9: Factors Inhibiting the Government from Realizing its Full Potential of Provision of Open Recreational Space in the Study Area

Option Investigated	Owerri
Culture	4.43
Economic Activities	4.32
Urbanization	3.65
Help to Reduce Climate Change and Ozone Depletion and Lack of Plans for Development in Master Plan	3.76

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data of constraints and challenges of development of open space in the study area was presented in table 1.10, 1.11 and 1.12. Table 1.10 indicates that majority of the respondent in Owerri strongly agree that there are some constraints that prevent them from visiting open spaces and public parks in their localities. Their responses were shown above. From Table 1.10,

majority agree that the major reason why they did not usually visit open spaces include the following, poor equipment, crime, too crowded, limited working hours, lack of facilities in the open spaces, poor maintenance of the existing equipment and lack of information on the existing open recreational spaces

Table 1.10: Constraints that Prevent People from Using Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Owerri
Fear of Crime	47
Too Crowded	25
No one to go the Park With	21
Staff is Unfriendly	22
Poor Program	13
Poor Equipment/Facilities	18
Poor Health	12
Location Too Far	22
Working Hours are Limited	37
Lack of Activities and Program	14
Lack of Facilities and Equipment	21
Poor Maintenance of Equipment	21
Negative Perception of Other Users	14
No Way to go the Facilities	29
Lack of Time for Leisure	37
Lack of Information on Existing Open Space in my Area	32
Utilization Cost is too High	15

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.11 shows the response on effectiveness of the law guiding the use of open space in Owerri. From Table 1.11, respondents strongly agreed that the law guiding the use of open spaces in their locality was effective. This shows that there is

strong law guiding the use of open space for different activities and that the law is strong to guide the activities.

1.11: Law Guiding the Use of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Owerri
How Effective is the Law Guiding Open Space	4.04

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.12 shows the information on the Environmental Effects of Open Spaces in the area. From Table 1.12, there are so many environmental effects of open spaces identified from the study which

include damage and loss of ecosystem, loss of ecosystem services, loss of reserves, reduced photosynthesis, increases synthetic surface and traffic congestion.

Table 1.12: Environmental Effects of Open Recreational Spaces

Option Investigated	Owerri
High Biological Diversity	3.41
Damage and Loss of Ecosystem	3.87
Loss of Ecosystem Services	4.04
Loss of Reserves	3.86
Reduced Photosynthesis	4.31
Reduces the Risk of Flooding and Erosion	2.22
Increases Synthetic Surfaces	4.04
Traffic Congestion	3.91

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The above survey results showed that the gender and age distribution among respondents in the study areas revealed that 39.72% are male and 60.75% female in Owerri. The age bracket of 15-19%, 31% and 21% of the respondents while those in age group 40 and above constitutes more than 45%. Consequently, the literacy status of the respondents revealed that

majority of the respondents are educated and hence, knowledgeable enough to the concept of the study. This shows that there is no wide disparity in both gender and age representations of the sample used as such the entire scenario offers a good guide for the area recreational open space planning and development.

An evaluation of the knowledge of the existence of open space revealed that the city have some functional open recreational spaces while majority has been converted to other uses. An evaluation of the usage of open recreational spaces also revealed that 4.38% used open space for recreational purposes while, 2.07%, 1.24% and 3.41% used it for pools (gambling) and 1.39%, 1.04% and 2.22% uses recreational open space for strolling, playing games and playing football.

Also, results from the respondents' perception of the challenges facing the development of recreational open spaces revealed that seven perceived variables of conflicting goals, inadequate resources utilization, and high cost of acquiring lands, planning lapses, site location, encroachment and poor management were among the major drawbacks facing development of recreational open spaces .

Furthermore, the study identified the drawbacks facing the management of recreational open spaces. The study revealed that lack of site protection, user's safety, poor site rehabilitation, high fee collection and poor maintenance of facilities were among the factors that challenged the management of recreational open spaces. Percentage responses of the respondents showed that 3 3.27% were of the opinion that lack of site protection remained a setback to the management of recreational open spaces. While 4.06% of the respondents testified that lack of protection of the user's health and safety guide remains a challenge to the management of the recreational open spaces in the study area. The study also revealed that poor site rehabilitation presents a big challenge in the management of open recreational space. Moreover, 2.32% of the respondents were of the opinion that high fee collection and poor maintenance of the existing facilities constitute a setback to the management of open recreational spaces in the city.

It was further revealed by observation that the use of the existing open recreational facilities is not predicated on the individual desire but rather on the affordability and accessibility which are the most significant driving factors in the choice of recreational facilities among the respondents. From the above, there is need for provision of strong security in each open recreational space in the area to ensure adequate management. The user's health and safety should also be included in the management plan to ensure the safety of the workers and users of the open recreational spaces. In line with the above, regular check and maintenance of the existing structures should be encouraged as it will help to upgrade the open recreational space for the benefit of the users and the managers.

The study further revealed that in Owerri 4.43% of the respondents showed that culture is among the factors that inhibit the government from realizing

its full potential of provision of open recreational space in the city. This was in line with the findings of Simon (2012) at Ibadan. It was also revealed from the study that traditional and cultural affinity such as cultural dance show/party or entertainment dominated the life styles of an average Owerri indigene. This according to the respondents, the traditional recreational value and some cultural lifestyles are being threatened by the city high urbanization rate. It also showed that economic activities amongst other factors inhibit the government from the provision of adequate open recreational spaces.

The study further revealed some constraints and drawbacks prevent people from using open recreational spaces in the cities. The constraints amongst others were poor equipment, crime, too crowded, limited working hours, and lack of facilities in the open spaces, poor maintenance of the existing facilities and cost of utilization of the spaces. The low patronage or recreational usage observed showed that the open recreational system has not yet developed to entrepreneurship level.

The study also revealed some strategic measures to sustainable development and management of open recreational spaces in Owerri. The result showed that adequate provision of appropriate facilities would enhance the management of the space. It showed that maintenance of existing facilities, provision of qualified personnel for the management of the spaces, appropriate channeling of funds to its intension, reduction of the taxes and dues by the recreational providers and provision of open recreational spaces in the master plan of each state is vital. This will help in achieving the full potential of the goal of providing open recreation spaces in Nigeria. As demand for open recreational facilities continue to grow, choices of how to enjoy the spaces will expand, hence, recreation management budgets should be increased. There is need for budgets, personnel, programs, facilities, and public lands allocation to be within the reach of the general public for better services and certain recreation opportunities.

The need for public perception of the kind of enforcement action of the local council on the cities has proven extremely popular. From the results, the issue of poorly served environmental services such as high biological diversity, loss of ecosystem, loss of reserves, reduced photosynthesis, flooding and erosion, increased synthetic surfaces and traffic congestion are among the environmental factors confronting the problem head on using the physical development control tools for effective management of open recreational space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The State Local Planning Authority could combat the many poor infrastructural challenges with a

comprehensive remedial action including (i) Formulation of effective policy for recreation development in the State; (ii) Effective enforcement of extant physical planning laws, spatial standards and regulations as it affects open space/recreation development; (iii) embarking on public awareness/sensitization on need for recreational development in rural and urban areas; (iv) Involvement of the public, private and popular sectors in the development of open spaces and recreation on public-private partnership (PPP) arrangement and (v) promoting recreational tendencies among the youth, the adult and the aged, open recreational space development and management would be highly efficient.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it is very clear that, open recreational spaces are an essential part of any urban development and it serves server functions that are expedient for basic living. Continuous growth of urban areas without effective management and monitoring of open recreation spaces has led to many drawbacks such as dilapidated parks, illegal structures, lack of adequate recreation facilities, shortage of landscape and health challenges of not using recreational spaces. Based on the findings, recreation plan and other accompanying policies should be drafted in ways that encourage flexibility, innovation, and change within a framework

of high standards and compatibility with the best practice.

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