



## **URBAN GOVERNANCE; THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNITY SQUARES IN EMERGING OWERRI CAPITAL TERRITORY OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In traditional Igbo settlement, community squares over the years have been used as meeting places for all sorts of public community gatherings and decisions on governance but the decimation of these facilities in emerging cities is closing up this avenue and may lead to increased agitation and discontentment as cities grow. The research sought to develop a framework for the integration of community squares in the emerging capital territory to improve urban governance. Owerri Capital Territory has 7 Local Government Areas and 49 community squares out of which 4 and 13 respectively were randomly selected. The research collected data on indicators of public meetings provided by the selected community squares in Owerri Capital Territory using questionnaires, maps, Geographic Information System, (GIS) and Geographic Positioning Systems, (GPS) and interviews. The data were analysed with Analysis of Variance, (ANOVA) and Pearson statistical tools and it was found that the integration of community squares into the emerging Owerri Capital Territory would provide avenues for meetings, formal and informal consultations, advocacy, decision-making and public opinion vent that could reduce agitation, discontent and provide avenues for feedback to improve urban governance in the emerging city of Owerri Capital Territory in particular and cities in developing countries in general.*

**Keyword:** *Community squares, feedback system, heritage, public opinion, Urban governance.*

### **1. Introduction**

Although governance involves government it is not government but defines how government interacts with other institutions and stakeholders to improve the wellbeing of the people and give proper public account, (UNDP, 2003). The ingredients of good governance are; legitimacy and voice of the people to improve participation and consensus building, clear direction on strategic vision for development, performance that leads to responsiveness, effectiveness and

efficiency in governance, accountability through transparency and fairness which improves equity and rule of law,(Graham, Amos and Plumtre,2003).

At the grass root level, community squares provide an informal meeting point for all stakeholders to actualize the above issues in good governance. This is so because as informal public open spaces which evolved with the people from generation to generation over the years, as they transform, they transmit democratic principles, culture, tradition and philosophy of the people,(Farmer and Gibb,1979). As squares exist at family, kindred, village and community levels as public good and environmental resources, these virtues also exist at these levels to varying degrees. Traditionally, the squares provide conducive environment for interaction. This is why without the integration of the squares therefore, not only that the egalitarian and democratic nature, design and development are gradually lost but encouraging egalitarian and democratic values many a time are disrupted by urbanisation. Hence the growth and development of cities especially in developing countries stir up struggles and agitations for the control of power and resources by stakeholders and government thus leading to protests, disagreements and conflicts. As cities grow in emerging democracies, there is the need to provide avenues for a broad and effective participation of the people in governance, as feedback system from elected representative especially in developing countries has not been good enough to warrant good governance. This is important to reduce the perception by the ruled of high handedness, dictatorship and tenure elongation with accompanying lawlessness. The concept of town union, neighbourhood associations and recently town hall meetings as a feedback mechanism done in formal settings have not been effective hence the growing rate of agitation for power control in urban areas. An informal and natural outdoor setting provided by the community squares therefore may be of great improvement in the march for the growth of democratic principles and institutions.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **i). Philosophical Framework**

Community squares are not only outdoor environmental elements interpreting the philosophy and life of the people but a symbol of the egalitarian and democratic life of the people,(Oguejiofor and Onah,2005). That is why community squares are found at different levels of family, kindred, village and community strata where the principles idealism, realism, existentialism, phenomenology and pragmatism in the life of the people are expressed. Dialogue, dialectics of life, socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural questions are raised, debated and resolved. It is here the religious, legal, public opinion and resolutions are taken for the progress of the traditional society. As philosophical approach simplifies complex ideas and statements about our experiences, through rational approach and guiding principles to solving problems the community square platform for philosophical expression, since it is a critical and systematic study of general and fundamental problems concerning matters on existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language, through rational argument (Teichmann and Evans,1999). As the study of problems which are ultimate, abstract and very general, it requires an environment of freedom of expression which

community squares provide. These problems concerned with the nature of existence, knowledge, morality, reason and human purpose are not only discussed but are expressed in artistic form in the community squares and transmitted from generation to generation. This helps not only philosophical inquiry in and insight as to questions about knowledge, truth, reason, reality, meaning, mind, and value, but are artistically found in the community squares, (Grayling,1998, Camillo,). Community squares therefore provide sustainable opportunity for intercultural and multidisciplinary study of philosophy to advance knowledge

#### ii). Empirical Framework

In its simple form community squares are similar to the Greek Agora and Roman fora as they evolved traditionally with the people. As public open spaces they exist at kindred, village and community level as squares and are the main organising element and centre of traditional activities and settlements as in ancient Babylon, Assyria, Africa and some parts of Nigeria, (Anthony and James, 1979;Urguhart,1977). In Igboland the Ugwuele settlement in Uturu was prominent in the history of traditional settlement.

#### iii).Theoretical Framework

As organizing element, the central business district, where socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural activities take place in the community squares forming the nucleic area with the adjoining villages as multiple nucleic nodes aggregating around the nuclear central area,(Donald, Alan and Robert,2003). While the nucleic theory talks of a dominant centre of development, the multiple nucleic advocates several simultaneous centres of development which could merge into a megacity in the future. These generally follow the concentric circle theory which formed the basis of the development of the Owerri Capital Territory masterplan, (Imo State Government, 1977). Although each of these has its limitation, they find expression in traditional settlements of the communities in Owerri Capital Territory.

#### iv). Conceptual Framework

Community squares being informal public open spaces that evolved with the people over the years have been transferred from generation to generation and serving the people of all ages. This has been possible following the lifecycle that makes them sustainable,(Gunderson and Holling,2002). This however happens as the result of creation of new environmental equilibrium in the succeeding generation to adjust to the changing realities and hence making community squares resilient. Environmental sustainability and resilience nourish and perpetuate community life and transform the environment with the ability to adapt, (Engel,1990).

### **3. Aim**

The aim of the research was to develop a framework for the integration of community squares into the emerging Owerri Capital Territory so as to improve urban governance.

#### **4. Objectives**

- i). To identify indicators that favour urban governance in the community squares within Owerri Capital Territory
- ii). To establish the extent of differences in the conditions of the community squares in Owerri Capital Territory

#### **5. Problem Statement**

The location of community squares traditionally makes them accessible and usable by residents as meeting places for socio-political and socio-economic activities. At the creation of Imo State with Owerri as the state capital, the community squares in Owerri urban were not identified and integrated into the urban design of the city but decimated and new open spaces were created. While the new open spaces were abandoned by the residents, the old locations of the community squares were still used as meeting places leading to blocking of streets and conflict of use between the residents and the government. Since the capital territory has the core urban, the semi-urban/suburban and rural areas, there is still the opportunity to integrate the community squares in the rural and suburban/semi-urban segments of the emerging capital territory. As the community squares in core Owerri urban had been decimated, those in the semi-urban/sub-urban areas are endangered. With the community squares in the rural areas almost still intact, great opportunity for identification and integration therefore exists in the emerging Owerri capital territory. This is the problem the research sets to address.

#### **6. Research Questions**

- i). What indicators favour urban governance in the community squares within the Owerri Capital Territory?
- ii). To what extent are the differences in the conditions of the community squares in Owerri Capital Territory favour urban governance?

#### **7. Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>; There are no indicators that favour urban governance in the community squares within Owerri Capital Territory.

H<sub>02</sub>; There are no differences in the conditions of community squares in Owerri Capital Territory.

#### **8. Research scope, design and methods**

Owerri Capital territory covers 7 local government areas of Owerri Municipal, Owerri West, Owerri North, and parts of AbohMbaise, NgorOkpuala, Mbaitoli, Ohaji/Egbema with 47 community squares. With random sampling the number of local government areas and community squares were reduced to 4 and 13 respectively for the research. The local government areas studied were; AbohMbaise, Owerri Municipal, Mbaitoli and Owerri West while the community squares studied were AforEnyiogugu, Ugwuekwema, Nkwo-UkwuOrodo, OriMbieri, Idem Ogwa, NkwoUbomiri, AforIrete, Eke Amakohia-Ubi, Amaocha shed, AmaochaAfara, Umuokpo and Okolochi. Survey questionnaire,

Geographic Information System, (GIS), Geographic Positioning System, (GPS) and interviews were used in data collection. Variables collected for the socio-political and environmental indicators were; size, location, hierarchy of open spaces, reception for very important persons,(VIPs) and meeting places, in the community squares. Out of the 390 copies of questionnaires administered, 350 were retrieved, GIS, Geo-eye satellite images 2015 and Garmin V72 hand held GPS, spot 2.5 instrument were used to determine the exact locations, sizes and conditions of the community squares. The analysis of data was done with analysis of variance, ANOVA and Pearson correlation using the Statistical Programme for Social Sciences, SPSS.

## 9. Data Collection, Analysis and Results

### 9.1). Data Collection

The variables for which data was collected for the research were; location of community squares, size of community squares, hierarchy of open spaces, reception of very important persons, (VIPs) and community meetings.

#### 9.1.1). Location of Community Squares

Most of the community squares in Owerri capital territory were located in suburban, rural and semi-urban areas of Owerri capital territory in the proportion of 39.8%, 29.5% and 26.1% respectively while core urban area was 4.6%. This is given in Table 9.1

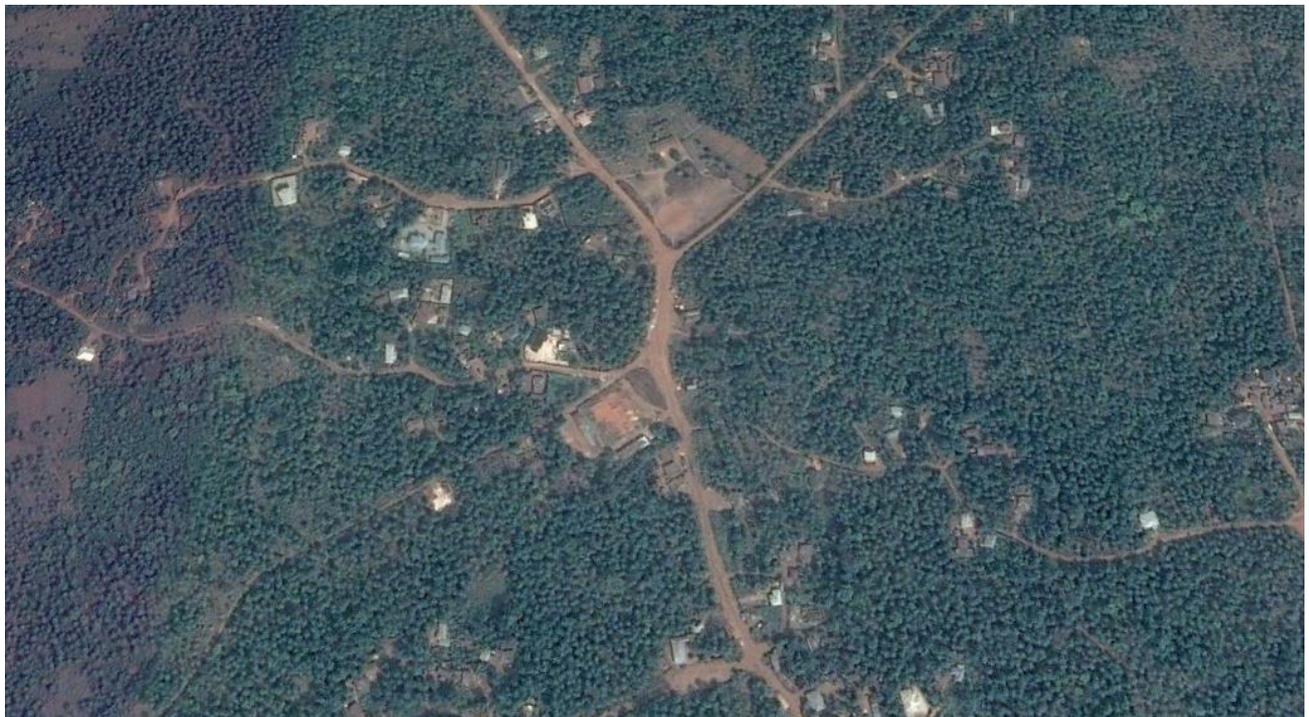
**Table 9.1: Aggregated Location of Community Squares**

Value label	%	Cumulative %frequency
Suburban	39.8	39.8
Semi-Urban	26.1	65.9
urban area	4.6	70.6
Rural areas	29.5	100
Total	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

The sizes of the community squares in the rural, semi-urban and suburban areas were large as most of them had not been adversely encroached upon.

While congestion and encroachment in the urban areas made it almost impossible for the development of the community squares into modern public open spaces, for urban governance. The aggregated 95.3% in the rural, semi-urban and suburban areas were available for integration into the urban milieu of the emerging Owerri capital territory. Particularly of note was, AmaochaAfara 100% rural with Y-junctions, its reach forest area and Y-junctions (Plate: 9.1).



**Plate 9.1: Amaocha Afara community square; a typical rural area**

Source: Fieldwork 2015

#### 9.1.2. Size of Community Squares:

Cumulatively, 90.7% of the community squares in Owerri capital territory were situated on more than five (5) plots of land and only 9.3% in less than five (5) plots of land, the combined 95.3 percent, size of rural, semi-urban and suburban areas provided great opportunity for integration and upgrade to public square and open spaces for urban governance.

**Table 9.2: Size of community square Aggregation**

Value label	%	Cumulative % frequency
Less than 5 plots	9.3	9.3
More than 5 plots	90.7	100.0
	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

#### 9.1.3. Hierarchy of Open Spaces in the Community Squares:

Most of the community squares in Owerri capital territory had hierarchy of open spaces (79.8%) created organically over the years as a result of usage by the people as in Table 9.2, Plates;9.1,and 9.2. This provides opportunity for multiple outdoor meetings and gatherings needed for good consultation in urban governance

**Table 9.2: Aggregated Hierarchy of open spaces in the community squares**

Value Label	%	Cumulative % frequency
Disagree	13.1	13.1
Fairly agree	7.1	20.2
Agree	79.8	100
Total	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

### 9.1.3. VIPs Reception in the Community Squares:

In the use of community squares for VIP reception, only very few people (18.3%, Table 9.3) disagreed on the aggregate that the community squares were used for the reception of very important persons, (VIPs), while another negligible number of respondents, (26.6 percent) fairly agreed but just a little above average number (55.1%) respondents agreed fully authenticated that the community squares were used for such public functions as the reception of VIPs Table 9.3. This was made possible as a result of large, variety of hierarchy of open spaces where many sociocultural and socio-political functions such as consultations, meetings and dances could take place at the same time during such occasions.

**Table 9.3: Aggregated VIPs Reception in the Community Squares**

Value label	%	Cumulative % frequency
Disagree	18.3	18.3
Fairly agree	26.6	44.9
Agree	55.1	100
Total	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

### ii). Data Analysis

**Table 9.4: Result of Pearson correlation bivariate analysis of the relationship between Hierarchy of open spaces and VIPs receptions**

The relationship was significant and positive indicating that hierarchy of open spaces in the community squares encouraged meetings such as receptions for community interactions and urban governance

Hierarchy of open spaces in the community squares		VIPs reception	Remarks
	Karl Pearson correlation coefficient	0.452	Significant at 0.01 confidence level
	sig.(2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	322	

Source; (Fieldwork, 2015)

**ii).Table 9.5: Result of Pearson correlation bivariate analysis of the relationship between location and sizes of community squares**

Though the relationship was significant,the correlation was negativeindicating that location affects the sizes of community squares in Owerri Capital Territory. The larger sizes existed from urban, sub-urban, semi-urban and rural in increasing order.

Location of community squares		Sizes of community squares	Remarks
	Karl Pearson correlation coefficient	-0.236	Significant at 0.01 confidence level
	sig.(2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	319	

Source; (Fieldwork, 2015)

**Ho2: The extent of the differences in the conditions of community squares in the Owerri Capital Territory**

Condition was analysed against location, size of community squares, hierarchy of open spaces, reception and meetings in the community squares. The result was significant and showed that differences in the conditions of community squares existed both within urban, semi-urban/suburban and rural areas of Owerri Capital Territory, Table:9.6, Plates:9.1 and 9.2.

**Table 9.6: Posthoc result of ANOVA on the extent of differences in the conditions of community squares in Owerri Capital Territory**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Location of community squares	Between Groups	42.212	2	21.106	23.078	.000
	Within Groups	305.467	334	.915		
	Total	347.680	336			
Size of community squares	Between Groups	4.412	2	2.206	12.840	.000
	Within Groups	54.635	318	.172		
	Total	59.047	320			
Hierarchy of open spaces	Between Groups	12.918	2	6.459	9.525	.000
	Within Groups	221.058	326	.678		
	Total	233.976	328			
Reception for VIPs	Between Groups	7.131	2	3.565	5.365	.005
	Within Groups	217.321	327	.665		
	Total	224.452	329			
Meetings	Between Groups	10.030	2	5.015	11.210	.000
	Within Groups	139.132	311	.447		
	Total	149.162	313			

Source: Fieldwork 2015



**Plate: 9.2: NkwoukwuOrodo in a typical semi-urban area**

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The research found that there were significant differences in the sizes, location of the community squares, hierarchy of open spaces, very important persons receptions and meeting places in the community squares in Owerri Capital Territory. While those in the rural, suburban and semi-urban areas have sizes more than five (5) plots of land; from 79.1 plots of land in semi-urban to 612.3 plots of land in the rural area the core urban area at Ugwuekwema had less than five plots of land. This showed that the community square in Owerri Municipal Local Government area is almost decimated. Since most undeveloped areas of Owerri Capital Territory Is sub-urban, semi-urban and rural, there is therefore great potential in developing the community squares into gardens for public gatherings for urban governance in the emerging Owerri Capital Territory.

Since the indicators that favour meetings and urban governance in the community squares within Owerri Capital Territory such as location of the community squares, sizes of the community squares, presence of hierarchy of open spaces in the community squares, reception of very important persons are in the sub-urban, semi-urban and rural areas of the emerging capital territory, it is recommended that the government with the communities and stakeholders identify, designate and acquire these community squares with a view to developing them into public open spaces for the Capital territory to be used for public discusses and good urban governance.

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