



**The Struggle For The Soul Of The City; Whose City? A Study Of Owerri Capital Territory, Imo State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

The masterplan for the comprehensive development of Owerri Capital Territory did not sufficiently carry the residents along in the planning and design of the emerging capital territory. The stage therefore was set for the struggle for the soul of the city and whose city it was? The struggle encompassed environmental, physical, socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects and more importantly that of heritage and identity. This is so because the cultural identity expresses the philosophy of life, the passion, history and heritage of the people. The paper examines these dimensions of this struggle for the soul of Owerri Capital Territory. It develops a framework for the integration of the community squares in Owerri capital territory so as to improve the quality of life in the city. It identifies differences in conditions and socio-economic indicators in the community squares in Owerri capital territory. It therefore answers the questions on the differences in conditions and relevant socio-economic indicators of the community squares in Owerri capital territory?. Data were collected using Geographic Information Systems, GIS, Geographic Positioning System, GPS, questionnaires, interviews and visits. Analysis of variance and Spearman rank correlation were used to analyse the data. It was discovered that the struggle is not only real but needs an inclusive multidisciplinary and multidimensional intervention to integrate the community squares, create order and harmony in the midst of this struggle and confusion so as to improve the quality of life in the emerging Owerri Capital Territory.

**Keywords;** City, multidimensional, people, soul, struggle

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## **Introduction**

Community squares are informal traditional public open spaces transmitted from generation to generation as a heritage. Previous research, Agoha (2016), showed that, the design and evolution reflects the needs, perception and prompting of the people in response to perceived environmental, socio-cultural and socio-economic demands of the time. The people imputed their soul, feelings and perception artistically into physical forms of the community squares. These manifest in hierarchy of open spaces, junctions which adorn the community squares as symbols, meanings, languages and concepts that mean much to the people. These features are not only transmitted but are read and interpreted as part of the informally recorded history in environmental language. They therefore ‘speak, smile, cry’ in the languages the people hear and interpret, thus reflecting emotions, responses and solutions to the environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural challenges that confront them from time to time and transmitted to future generations. They are therefore, perpetuated through various cycles that make them live for a long time and almost ‘immortal’ like a human soul,(wiki/Christian-mortality,2017). This makes the community squares responsive, and adaptable to the demands of the moments they pass through as they reflect the very life of the people. The decimation or disuse the squares through formal planning evokes emotions and generates conflict. This paper therefore not only seeks the framework for the integration of community squares in formal planning but the preservation of the very values imprinted in the artistic patterns in the community squares. The community squares are identified with the elements that create the values using questionnaires, geographic information system, GIS, geographic positioning system,GPS, visits and observations.

## **Background**

Community squares provide communal spaces for recreation, environmental control, socio-economic, socio-cultural activities and therefore not only a symbol of the artistic ingenuity of the people but the source of the activities that sustain the life of all in the area. At the creation of Imo State in 1976, the government in order to improve the quality of life in the city, developed a masterplan with changes without identifying and integrating the community squares so as to carry the people along. This stirred the struggle for the control of the ‘soul’ of the urban environment. Within the formal groups are informal organisations with different identities, passions and aspirations to be met by the socio-economic conditions of the city. The indigenous people felt alienated from their culture not only eroded but the socio-economic life embedded and in-printed in the community squares were being encroached

upon. Thus touching the very life and soul symbolised in the urban fabric. This therefore led to identity crisis and unending struggle for the control of the city by the formal and informal groups resulting to the question, of whose city?

### **Problem statement**

At the creation of Imo state in 1976, the Owerri masterplan did not identify and integrate the informal traditional community squares. They were decimated with the creation of new public open spaces not in line with the socio-economic and socio-cultural aspirations of the indigenous people. Hence in the core Owerri urban, the formal public open spaces were converted to other uses. The very locations of the informal community squares are still being used for communal activities and private functions leading to street trades, blockades of streets and abuse of the formal open spaces. This results to disenchantment and at times conflicts amongst the people and development control authorities. Since the capital territory has urban, semi-urban/sub-urban and rural components, conflicts in the emerging Owerri capital territory can be reduced if these are identified, integrated and developed formally into public open spaces and parks in the emerging Owerri Capital Territory. This will not only preserve the environmental heritage of the people but lead to inclusiveness and reduce identity crises. This therefore is what the research sets out to address.

### **Scope of the study and study area**

Owerri Capital territory covers seven,(7) local government areas of Owerri Municipal, Owerri West, Owerri North, and parts of AbohMbaise, Ngor Okpuala, Mbaitoli, Ohaji/Egbema with thirty nine,(39) community squares. The community squares where socio-economic indicators were studied were AforEnyiogugu, Ugwuekwema, Nkwo-UkwuOrodo, OriMbieri, Idem Ogwa, NkwoUbomiri, AforIrete, Eke Amakohia-Ubi, Amaocha shed, AmaochaAfara, Umuokpo and Okolochi. The indicators studied were; sizes, locations, and mixed use residential buildings.

### **Research methodology**

Survey questionnaire, Geographic Information System, (GIS), Geographic Positioning System, (GPS), visits and interviews were used in data collection. Since the community squares were relatively homogeneous, random sampling was used to reduce the local government areas from seven (7) to four (4) while the community squares were reduced from thirty nine, (39) to thirteen,(13). Out of the three hundred and ninety (390) copies of questionnaires administered, 350 were retrieved. Geographic information system, GIS, Geo-eye satellite images 2015 and Garmin V72 hand held GPS, spot 2.5 instrument were used to

determine the exact locations, sizes of the community squares. The analysis of data was done with analysis of variance, ANOVA for nominal, ordinal, interval and Spearman rank correlation for the ordinal data using the Statistical Programme for Social Sciences, SPSS.

## **Theoretical Framework**

With the Socratic belief in the immortality of the soul, Dennis, (2000), that the community square is rooted in the mind of the people explains its sustainability and why it has evolved over the years and is transmitted from generation to generation. While the community life concept of the African emphasises sharing, inclusiveness its offshoot; the extended family system is built on interaction and care. It is therefore superior to the concept of natural selection of evolution, Denis (2000) and the survival of the fittest of capitalism. This is therefore the bane of urbanism where everyone who comes to the city is not only looking for survival strategy but how to exclude and exploit both human and material resources as a means of survival. The community square is not only traditional and sustainable socially, economically and environmentally but provides a good alternative to the 'top to bottom' approach of formal planning which excludes traditional community square to trigger off exclusive and elitist planning. The inclusive nature and bottom to top approach of the African community square is therefore a good ingredient of inclusive and sustainable planning for emerging urban areas.

## **Literature Review**

Community squares as informal outdoor environmental elements shows the philosophy of open life style of the people symbolised in egalitarianism and democratic values, (Oguejiofor and Onah, 2005). The community square has the core nodes, with social, economic and environmental activities such as shops, arts and crafts, with churches, schools and green areas with trees, forest areas, heritage sites and farms. This is synonymous with the three levels of platonic soul; the mind (reason), emotion (spiritedness-masculine) and appetitive (desire-feminine), (wiki/plato, 2013). For Aristotle the levels of soul are associated as; vegetative for plants, movement (passionate) for animals and reason for humans, (wiki/faculties, 2016). These not only identify living things but as soul, transmitted and used to organise living things, activities of man and the built environment. Meetings, dialogue, dialectics of life, socio-political, socio-economic, religious, socio-cultural questions concerning social groups are raised, critically debated and resolved for the progress of the society. Community squares

therefore not only provide sustainable opportunity for intellectual,intercultural and multidisciplinary study of philosophy to advance knowledge but represent the life, beliefs, culture and tradition of the people in artistic forms.

As organizing elements in physical planning, the central business district, where socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural activities take place in the community squares form the nucleus with the adjoining villages as multiple nucleic nodes aggregating around the nuclear 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 classical 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 arrangements of community squares and settlements of the communities in Owerri Capital Territory.

### **Analysis and discussion**

The condition of the community squares as the soul and centre of activities is analysed and discussed as;

#### **i).Location of community squares**

Most of the community squares in Owerri capital territory were located in centre or heart of 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 10.1.

**Table 1: Aggregated Location of community squares**

<b>Value label</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative %frequency</b>
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: Agoha, 2015

Particularly of note was, Amaocha Afara 100% rural with junctions, forest and green areas.

## ii).Size of community squares

Cumulatively, 90.7% of the community squares in Owerri capital territory situated on more than 5 plots of land and only 9.3% in less than 5 plots of land, the combined 95.3 percent, (Table 10.2) rural, semi-urban and suburban as above, occupy the heart of the settlement and provided the impetus integration.

**Table 2: Size of community square Aggregation**

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

Source: Agoha, 2015

The large sizes of most of the community squares provided opportunity for robust integration of community squares as public open spaces in the emerging Owerri capital territory to accommodate and take care of various interest groups.

## iii). Mixed use residential buildings

With 41.4% of the community squares having 2 to 10 number mixed use residential buildings 32.4% having 11 to 20 mixed use residential buildings and 26.2% with more than 20 mixed use residential buildings, the community squares have substantial mixed use residential activities at the heart of settlements that encouraged robust socio-economic and socio-cultural activities.

**Table 3: Aggregated Mixed use residential buildings in the community squares**

Value	%	Cumulative% frequency
(2-10)	41.4	41.4
(11-20)	32.4	73.8
(>20)	26.2	100
Total	100.000	

Source: Agoha, 2015

Mixed use residential buildings with shops, restaurants, hairdressing, barbing salons, meeting places are part of the activities in the community squares as centre of life of the people.

**Table:4.ANOVA for condition against size, location and mixed use residential buildings.**

		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			
Rented residential Buildings	Between Groups	40.839	2	20.420	41.831	.000
	Within Groups	152.303	312	.488		
	Total	193.143	314			

Source; Generated from Agoha,2015

**Table;5.Result of Spearman rank correlation bivariate analysis of the relationship between location and mixed use residential buildings**

		Mixed use residential building	Remarks
Location of community squares	Spearman rank correlation coefficient	0.319	significant at 0.05 confidence level
	sig.(2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	311	

Source: Generated from Agoha, 2015

### Summary of Findings

Differences in the conditions of community squares exist within rural, semi-urban/suburban, and urban areas and between urban and semi-urban/sub-urban, urban and rural, semi-urban/semi-urban and rural areas at the centre of life of the people

ii). There is significant relationship between location and socio-economic activities in mixed use residential buildings.

## Conclusion

Being at the centre of activities, the differences in the green areas and sizes of the community squares provide opportunity for the accommodation of all interest groups to encourage inclusiveness, sustainability, communal and socio-economic mixed use activities in the emerging Owerri capital territory and indeed other emerging cities in Africa and the black world where blacks practice communal life style, planning and extended family system.

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