



FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE OF NEGLECTED GREEN SPACES FOR COMMUNAL ACTIVITIES IN OWERRI URBAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Community interactions among urban residents in Owerri is an integral part of the socio-cultural existence of their lives. The urge for community interactions is reminiscent of the relationships and rural linkages from their communities of origin. Places for community meetings in rural communities are largely outdoors. There is therefore the attraction towards outdoor spaces such as the neglected green spaces in Owerri for community meetings and interactions. However there are factors that have affected the proper use of these spaces for communal meetings. This paper examines these factors that influence the use of these spaces in order to generate policy decisions for the improvement of these green spaces. The research method used was survey research with questionnaire administered on residents of selected layouts in Owerri. The data obtained was analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis tools. Findings revealed that if these factors are taken into consideration, there will be proper improvement of the neglected green spaces, thus making them more suitable for community activities in Owerri urban.

Keywords: Community, Green, Factors, Interactions, spaces

Introduction

Urban residents in Owerri mainly come from different communities in Nigeria but largely from the southern part of Nigeria. There is a minority population of migrants from the northern regions of Nigeria. Owerri is the capital city of Imo state in the Southern part of Nigeria in West Africa. Consequently, communal linkages exist within different groups of urban residents. There are therefore both homogenous and heterogeneous socio-cultural affiliations among the urban residents. Sociologists have shown that the term community represents the fact that there is a quality of relationship among persons in a fixed geographical area. This relationship produces a strong sense of shared identity (Mundal, 2021).. Characteristics listed as part of urban community are: Heterogeneity, Anonymity, large size and high density of population, mobility and transiency, social distance, regimentation, segmentation of personality as well as formality

of relations (Mondal, 2021). These factors affect life in urban areas and create challenges in urban relationship and cohesion among residents.

It has been observed that green spaces structured into the planning schemes of neighbourhoods have been neglected. Some undesirable activities take place in and around these spaces. This makes these spaces not to fulfill their functions. Furthermore, many communal meetings in the respective layouts in the Owerri urban take place in some open school fields, open courtyards in private residencies as well as on the streets. Some also take place in and around the neglected green spaces. If the facilities for community and cultural activities are not properly developed in the respective layouts, benefits of communal life and relationship which characterized the lives of the urban residents where they came from are lost. In Nigeria, these benefits include concern for one another's welfare, commitment to shared goals and responsibilities, sense of identity and value as a member of the community (Agulanna, 2010).

Consequently, community life is very important in Owerri, Nigeria. Urban residents desire facilities that make it possible to have these relationships and linkages. This paper will examine the factors that affect the use of the neglected green spaces for communal facilities. This study was part of a wider research on the integration of the neglected green areas into the built environment in Owerri urban, Nigeria. The aim of the paper is to find ways neglected green spaces could be improved for communal activities. The specific objective of this research is to discover the factors that can affect the use of the neglected green spaces for communal activities. These factors were represented as variables in this research. The hypothesis chosen to guide this work is that these variables have no significant relationship with the frequency of community and cultural activities which is represented as a dependent variable. These variables are as follows: Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhood, level of use of neglected spaces for activities, Occupation, availability of alternative power sources, any visual impact of properties from the neglected spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community linkages and interactions in Nigeria are valued as part of the socio-cultural lives of the people. In urban areas, it is observed that people with homogenous backgrounds form associations and come together by holding community and cultural meetings. These meetings are sometimes held in outdoor spaces in members' homes, outdoor areas of school compounds, on the streets in and around the neglected green spaces. They particularly enjoy outdoor spaces. Furthermore, people from heterogeneous backgrounds living in the same neighborhoods also form neighbourhood associations and hold meetings on the streets, under shades and partially enclosed spaces and sometimes in and around the neglected green spaces where they occur.

In Nigeria and in Africa, it is generally observed that it is within the community that the individual has the true meaning of life. This was widely discussed in (Agulanna, 2010). The

research compares the community life in Western countries as generally different from the community life of the African and the ‘Igbo’ speaking area of Nigeria in particular. Owerri urban, Nigeria is located in the Igbo-speaking area of Nigeria. The research states that community is an essential way by which the human beings can achieve their social aspirations and a sense of security. It also shows that a strong relationship exists between the individual and his community. This strong affinity to community life makes it important to have facilities for communal and cultural activities that are reminiscent of the background of these urban residents.

Community is central to life in Africa (Hailes, 2017). This research shows that in African communities there are defined ways of doing things, defined land boundaries and leaders. The rules that guide rural community life are also observed in urban settings where people closely work together according to their nationalities and groups. The research states that the structure in the rural setting affects the way of life in the urban setting. This is different from the comprehension of urban residents in countries outside Africa such as the United States of America. This research further explains that Africans enjoy being together and have a deeper sense of responsibility to each other. They respect and honor the community as a major part of their survival and belonging.

The community confers a sense of peace and ease to the African and it offers them a space, place and a voice. These defined ways of community life have largely remained the same over time. In another research ‘Ubuntu’ as a philosophy of life describes the importance of community in the African setting (Venter, 2004). It states that the individual is born into the community and grows up with a sense of communalism, interdependence and commitment to the needs of other people and caring for them. These are seen as aspects of the ‘Ubuntu’ philosophy. It observed that being a part of the community is a very important part of African traditional life.

There is the need for communal facilities in Owerri urban and these neglected green spaces can act as community green spaces with community facilities where residents interact with nature and share safe and common green spaces (Cityblossoms, 2021). Consequently, community and cultural activities are very important to making the life of the urban resident in Owerri complete. Owerri is an African city in Nigeria and facilities for communal activities are very important in the urban setting and spaces for these activities should be made available in layouts in Owerri.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey research method was used for this research. Data obtained reveals that improvement of certain factors can enhance the use of these spaces for communal activities. Primary and secondary data were used in this research. Primary data revealed information obtained through questionnaires and interviews administered on the urban residents. Observations, photographs, case studies, satellite images and measurements of the neglected green spaces were also obtained. Secondary data was obtained from existing government records on the neglected green spaces in Owerri urban.

The location of the study was Owerri , the capital of Imo state,Nigeria. . Owerri urban consists of old and new Owerri .The research population was 13 layouts in the Old Owerri because of the high occurrence of these neglected spaces.(see Table 1). Simple random sampling technique was applied in the research.7 layouts were randomly selected out of the 13 layouts, for field work. The layouts are as follows: Orlu Road Secretariat Layout, Aladinma Housing Estate, Otamiri South Layout, Aladinma Northern Extension, Ikenegbu Extension Layout, Ikenegbu Layout, and Emmanuel College Layout. All the existing neglected spaces were studied in each layout. Questionnaires were also administered on the respondents. 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 questionnaires (Qualtrics.com, 2013) as follows:

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{(Z\text{-score})^2 \times \text{StdDev} \times (1\text{-StdDev})}{(\text{Margin error})^2}$$

Table 1: selected neglected green spaces in 1987 Owerri layout plan (Old Owerri)

S/N	Layout	No of Designated Green spaces by the Planning Authorities
1	Emmanuel College Layout	1
2	Orlu Road Secretariat	1
3	Ikenegbu Layout	4
4	Ikenegbu Extension Layout	1
5	Aladinma Housing Estate	3
6	Aladinma Northern Extension	2
7	Otamiri South Layout	1

Source: (Ministry of Lands, Survey and Urban development, 2014)

The numbers of neglected green spaces in the 7 selected residential layouts in Owerri are shown in Table 1. The neglected green spaces are shown in the map of one of the 7 selected layouts – Ikenegbu layout as an example:

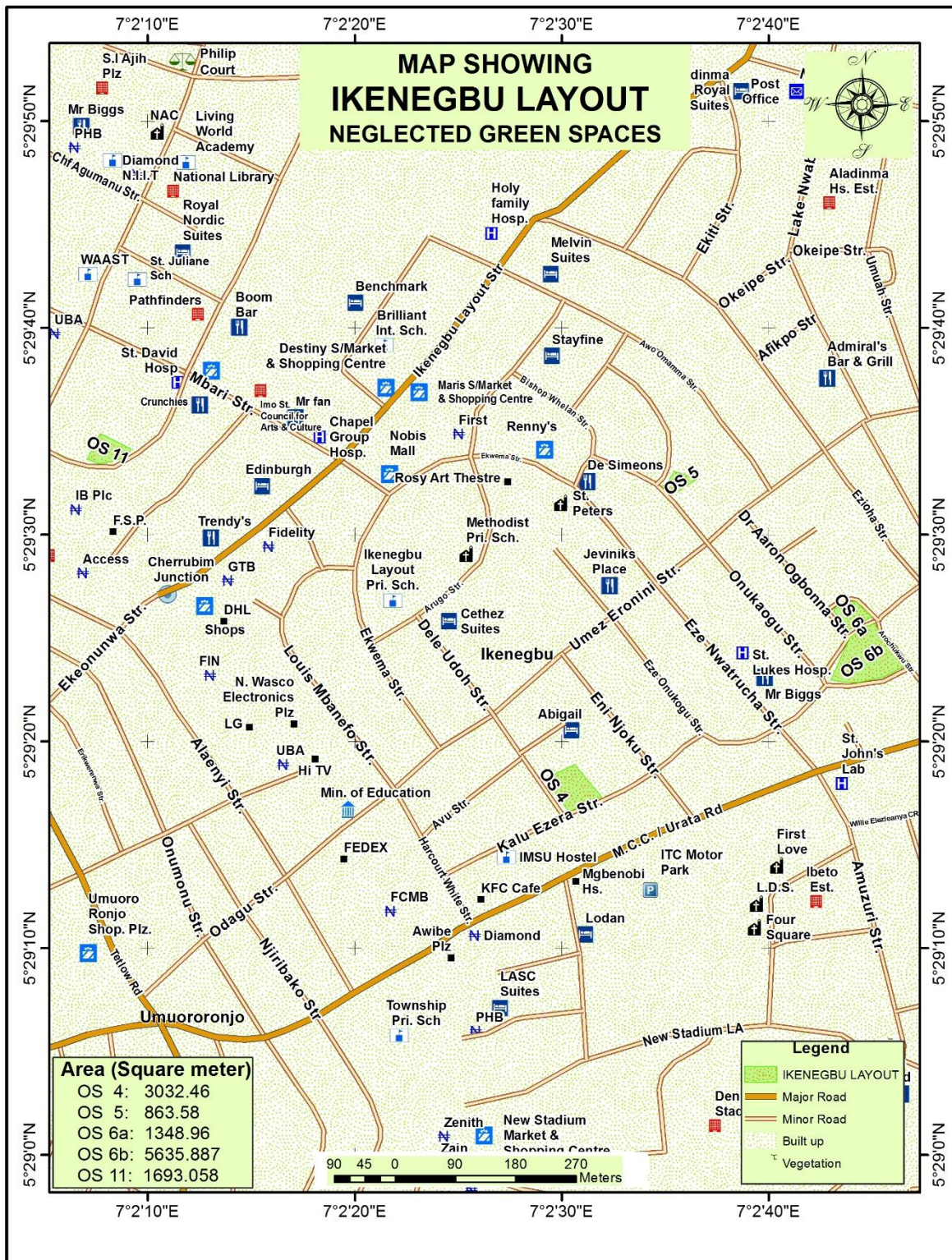


Figure 1: Map showing Ikenegbu Layout neglected green spaces

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Data was analysed through Univariate and multivariate analysis. The univariate analysis was conducted to see the behavior and characteristics of the highlighted variables. The multiple regression analysis was used to characterize the relationships between the independent and the dependent variables individually and collectively. 45 variables which were identified in the wider research were obtained through literature and previous researches and were entered into the regression model by forced entry. The research assumed a 95% confidence level. This was to determine the independent variables that significantly influence the dependent variable (*the frequency of community and cultural activities in the neglected green spaces*).

PRESENTATION OF DATA, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The research reveals that many communal meetings take place in some open school fields, open courtyards, private residencies as well as on the streets and around the neglected green spaces. It also shows that the urban residents have a preference for outdoor meetings in open places and under tree shades. The physical conditions of these spaces also affect the frequency of community and cultural activities held in the neglected spaces. Sense of community and cultural identity is very crucial in the community lives of these residents in the layouts and there is an ardent desire for the residents of these layouts to have communal spaces for their various neighbourhood meetings and other activities. This will enhance social cohesion with the attendant advantages. Results of the multiple regression analysis show that 5 independent variables have significant relationship with the dependent variable. Variables that significantly influence the dependent variable (*the frequency of community and cultural activities in the neglected green spaces*) were Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhood, level of use of neglected spaces for activities, Occupation, availability of alternative power sources, any visual impact of properties from the neglected spaces.

i. Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhood

Data reveals that there were refuse dumps within some of these spaces. Wastes such as old tyres, furniture and abandoned house items were within these spaces. Some were partially overgrown with weeds leaving little spaces for proper activities. Some activities held on the open streets next to these spaces while some held in some parts of the spaces where residents could put some plastic chairs and hold their meetings. This is shown in Table 2

Table 2: Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhood

	%
Gutters	4.265
Refuse dumps on the streets	11.053
Refuse dumps in the green spaces	40.003
Refuse collectors	44.679
total	100.000

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

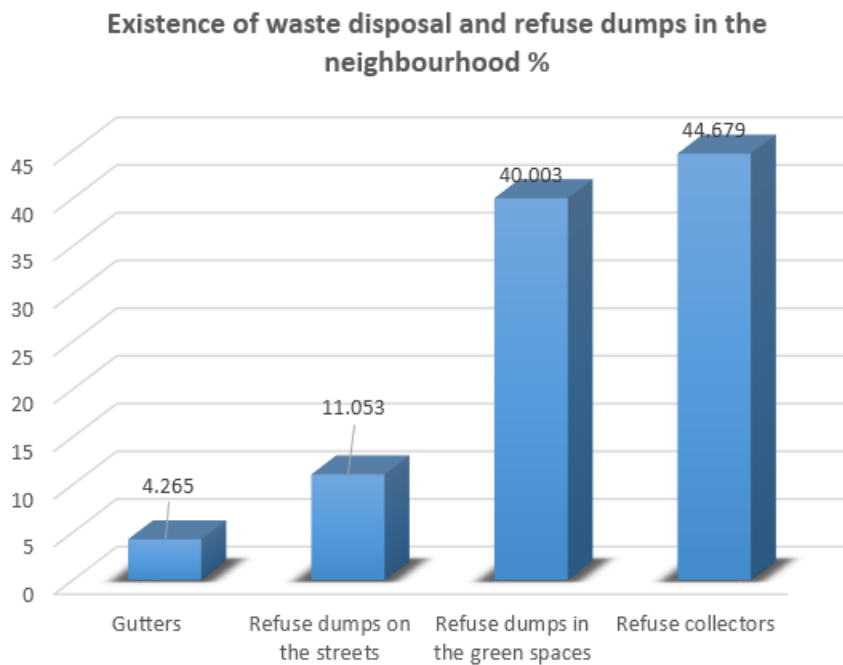


Figure 2: Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhoods

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

ii. Level of use of stranded spaces for activities

The level of activities varies in and around these spaces. In some layouts a small number of activities take place in the neglected spaces while some have fairly large and others a large number of activities. These activities include social, economic, communal, and recreational and some less than desirable activities such as refuse dumps, impromptu mechanic workshops and motor parks. Community squares, green spaces open spaces within communities are like the living rooms of these communities (Lennard, 2016) and the activities either by the residents or needed by the residents are bound to show up in these places. A lot of information about the lifestyles, culture, aspirations of a neighbourhood or community could be obtained by observing the activities in a given community square.

Table 3: Level of use of stranded spaces for activities

	%
Small	43.482
Fairly large	29.091
Large	27.427
total	100.000

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

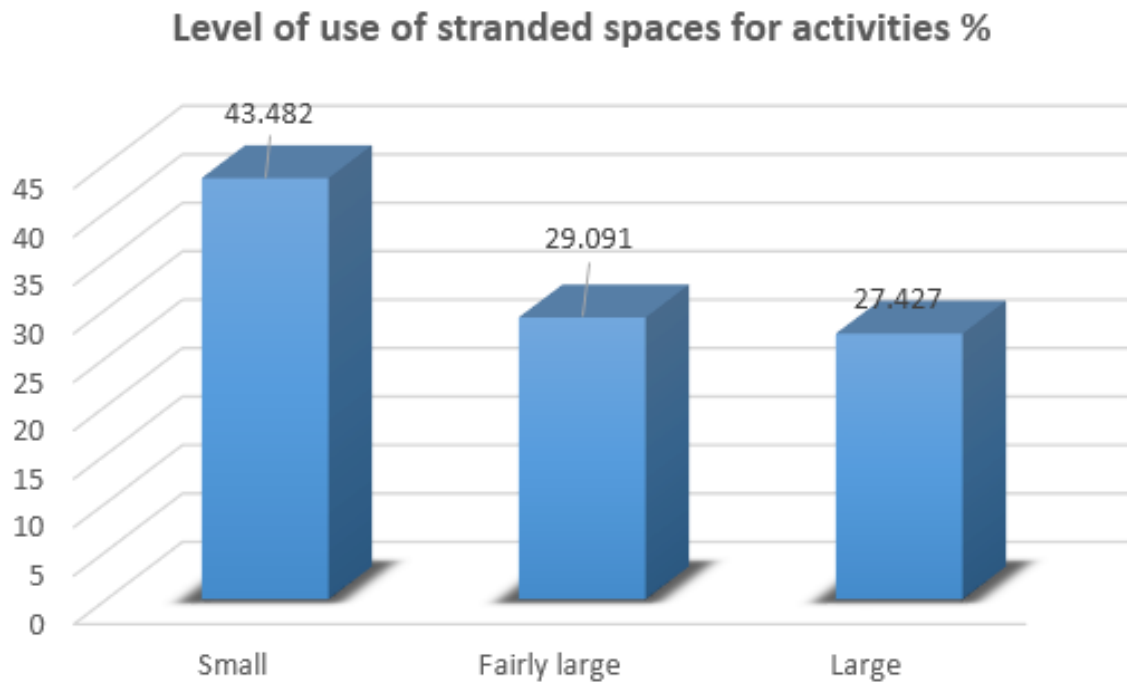


Figure 3: Level of stranded spaces for activities

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

iii. *Occupation*

Urban residents in Owerri urban consist mainly businessmen and civil servants (people who work in government offices). There are also others involved in other types of works. The civil servants come back by 4pm in the evening while the businessmen have flexible hours of work. Many of them are members of neighbourhood associations, community development associations and town unions. These associations hold meetings mainly during weekends and need spaces for their communal activities.

Table 4: Occupation

	%
Businessman	42.780
Civil Servant	30.212
Others	27.008
total	100.000

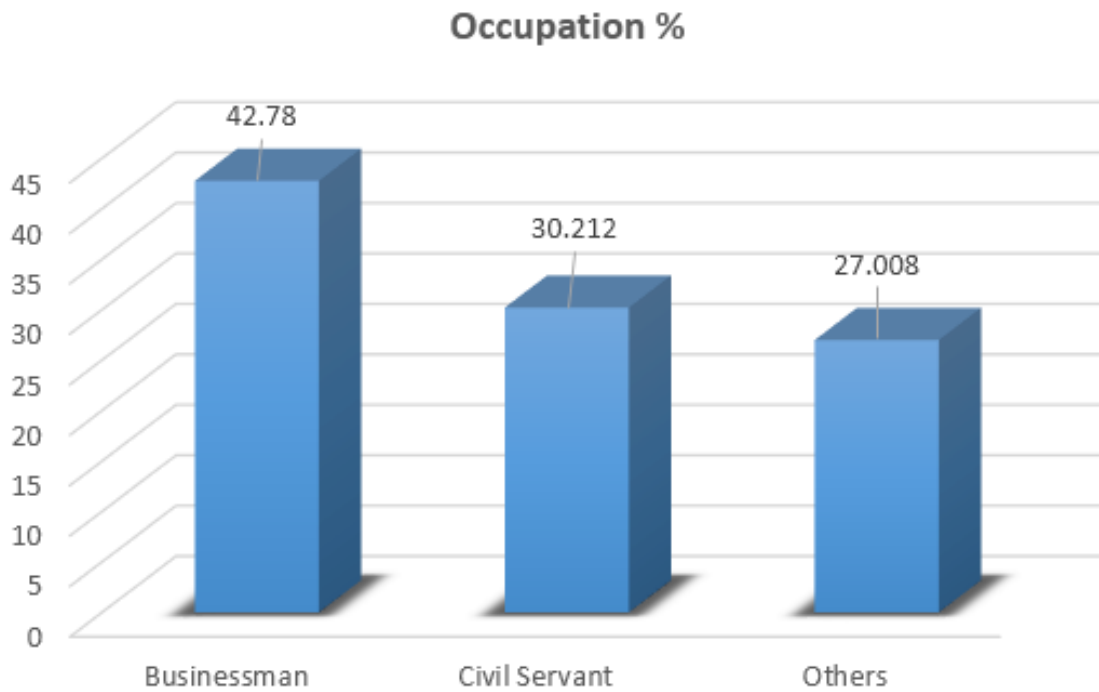


Figure 4: Occupation

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

iv. Availability of Alternative power sources

Power outages from the public power supply are very common in Owerri urban. This is the case in most parts of Nigeria. Research shows that many residents use alternative sources of power particularly the power generating sets. A few others use solar generated power. There are no sources of power within these neglected spaces, thus making it difficult for users to power their equipments and gadgets. There is the need to ensure constant power supply to these spaces through any of the sources of power supply in order to enhance the use of these spaces.

Table 5: Availability of Alternative power sources

	%
Generator	95.002
Others	4.998
total	100.000

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

Availability of Alternative power sources %

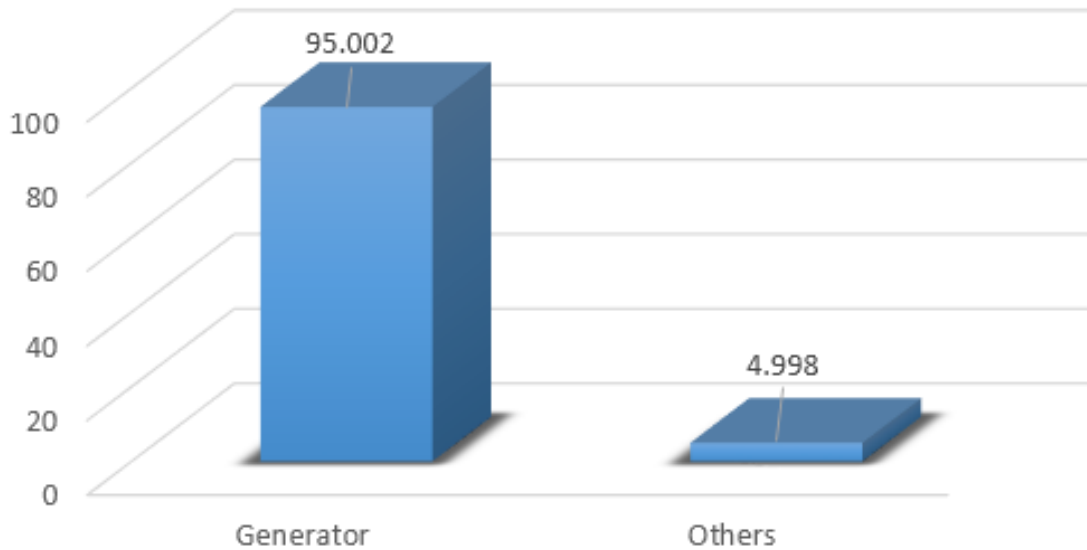


Figure 5: Availability of alternative power sources

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

v. Any visual impact of properties from the stranded spaces

It was observed in the research that some of these spaces did not have interesting views around them. Some were bordered by dustbin heaps, roads, streets and broken down cars and refrigerators. This made these spaces very unattractive. If buildings with good appearance are within these spaces and are surrounded with good landscape of flowers, trees with shades as well as shrubs, there ambience would be very convenient for communal activities.

Table 6: Any visual impact of properties from the stranded spaces

	%
Yes	37.457
No	62.543
total	100.000

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

Any visual impact of properties from the stranded spaces %

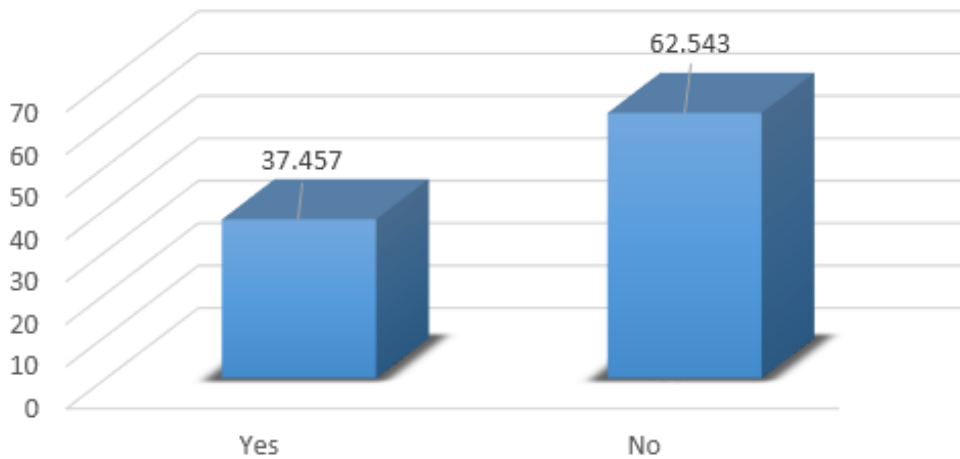


Figure 6: Any visual impact of properties from the stranded spaces

Source: Fieldwork; 2015

Multiple regression analysis

The study of the *frequency of community and cultural activities in the neglected green spaces* as a dependent variable was to highlight the influence of the independent variables on the neglected spaces in Owerri. 45 variables were obtained through literature and previous researches. These variables represented the main factors of the research. The multiple regression analysis (categorical regression) was carried out to characterize their relationship with the dependent variable both individually and collectively. These 45 variables were introduced by forced entry into the model to see the variables that impact and influence the dependent variable. The research revealed the 5 explanatory variables that could affect these playgrounds in the neglected spaces. The R^2 (coefficient of determination) value is 81.6% (Table 7). Thus the 5 variables collectively explain the amount of residual variation of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

The model summary results are as follows:

Table 7: Model Summary

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Apparent Prediction Error
.903	.816	.539	.184

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

The Analysis of Variance table obtained reveals a significance of .003. This shows that collectively, all the independent variable affect the dependent variable.

Table 8: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	49.760	36	1.382	2.951	.003
Residual	11.240	24	.468		
Total	61.000	60			

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

The variables that significantly influenced the dependent variable are: Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhood, level of use of neglected spaces for activities, Occupation, availability of alternative power sources, any visual impact of properties from the neglected spaces.

The influence of these variables is not due to chance or random error. The probability point of significance of : *Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhood* on the dependent variable *the frequency of community and cultural activities in the neglected green spaces* is .046; *the significance of level of use of neglected spaces for activities* on the dependent variable is .005; the significance of *occupation* on the dependent variable is .041, *the significance of availability of alternative power sources* on the dependent variable is .024 while the significance of *any visual impact of properties from the neglected spaces* on the dependent variable is .022 . These are seen in Table 9.

Table 9: Coefficient table for the Independent variables

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighborhood.- V26	.699	.373	2	3.504	.046
Level of use of neglected spaces for activities V38	-1.351	.579	3	5.439	.005
Occupation V2	.516	.270	2	3.659	0.041
Availability of Alternative power sources V12	.602	.288	2	4.360	.024
Any visual impact of properties from the neglected spaces V30	1.191	.487	1	5.970	0.022

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Policy Implications:

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 81.6%. The 5 variables collectively affect the dependent variable. The Beta weights arranged in descending order shows the order in which the independent variables contribute to the dependent variables as follows:

1. *Level of use of neglected spaces for activities (Beta value 1.351)*

This variable has the highest beta value among the variables. The level of activities in and around these neglected green spaces reveal great need for well designed communal facilities for the urban residents. These open spaces have a natural attraction for a people that enjoy outdoor environment. This is reminiscent of their traditional rural environment. Public private sector partnerships should be encouraged to develop communal facilities for the urban residents.

2. *Any visual impact of properties from the neglected spaces (Beta value 1.191)*

There should be proper landscaping of the neglected green spaces to create an environment for the urban residents to interact with nature. The communal facilities should be set within these well landscaped spaces with attractive building structures.

3. *Existence of waste disposal and refuse dumps in the neighbourhood(Beta value .699)*

The indiscriminate dumping of refuse in and around these neglected green spaces should be stopped and all refuse dumps removed. The continued existence of these less than desirable activities in the neglected green spaces make it difficult for communal activities to exist there. Steps should be taken to make such actions punishable by introducing and enforcing environmental laws in Owerri urban. Proper refuse disposal systems should be designed by government. This will also save the green spaces and improve the health of urban residents

4. *Availability of Alternative power sources(Beta value .602)*

Power supply should be made available in these neglected green spaces. This would increase and improve communal activities. The quality of these activities would also be increased.

5. *Occupation (Beta value .516)*

Communal facilities need to be developed for the urban residents (the businessmen, civil servants and others) for their regular neighbourhood and town hall associations. This will improve the community and cultural relationships among the people regardless of their backgrounds.

Conclusion

The frequency of cultural activities is affected by these variables at one time or the other. It is noticeable from the research that community and cultural activities take place in and from these spaces, hence projecting the need for community spaces within the green open spaces where these activities can be held. This is reminiscent of the traditional settlement environment where they come from. The existence of the waste disposal and refuse dumps in these spaces, the poor visual impact of properties around these spaces absence of power sources for the users of these spaces have made it difficult for the residents to currently use these spaces for community activities. It is important, therefore to improve on the waste disposal system, the sources of power, good visual impact from these spaces and create the community facilities for the high rate of communal activities within these neglected spaces, hence integrating them into these layouts. These can be achieved through a participatory enterprise of the residents and government.

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