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Bolanle Wahab

University of Ibadan, Nigeria, b.wahab@mail.ui.edu.ng

Waheed Kadiri

Kadiri Associates Limited, Ota, Nigeria, planningneighbourhoods@gmail.com

Ayobami Popoola

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, planningneighbourhood@gmail.com

Bamiji Adeleye

Makarere University Kampala, Uganda, planningneighbourhoodss@gmail.com

Robert A. Dwamena

Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa, robertdwamena@yahoo.co.uk

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NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING: REMINISCENCE TOWARDS LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES

Bolanle Wahab¹, Waheed Kadiri², Ayobami Popoola³, Bamiji Adeleye⁴, Robert Dwamena⁵

¹ *Department of Urban & Regional Planning, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

² *Principal Partner, Kadiri Associates Limited, Ota, Nigeria*

³ *SARChI Chair for Inclusive Cities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

⁴ *Department of Architecture and Planning, Makerere University Kampala, Uganda*

⁵ *Department of Architecture, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa*

Background

Urbanisation remains a topical discussion across the globe. According to the United Nations (2022), 68% of the world's population will be absorbed in urban areas by 2050. The envisaged rapid urbanisation in cities by 2050 is believed to be accompanied by various planning problems, which include accelerated climate change, urban slums, urban sprawl, poor sanitation, inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, housing deficiency and transportation issues. To mitigate these planning problems, the role of effective urban planning cannot be overemphasised. Urban planning provides a pathway for overcoming the various challenges posed by urbanisation both in the present and in the future.

Urban planning is the process of guiding and directing land use for physical development to ensure a high quality of life and well-being of residents through the improvement of infrastructures and facilities, optimal economic development, and efficient operations and services (Bibri, 2018). Also, urban planning plays a significant role in actualising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11, which seeks to make human settlement inclusive and sustainable (RELX, 2024). This implies that with efficient urban planning, access to a high quality of life for all city dwellers can be ensured amidst the present and forecast rapid urbanisation that would be experienced by cities of the world.

Planning as an ancient, multi-sectoral, and multidisciplinary discipline that is focused on the sustainable functioning and arrangement of space cannot be over-emphasized. As a discipline that is influenced by human habits, actions, policies and professional practices, planning (whether traditional or modern) is perceptual and suggests the role of humans in shaping settlements. Recognising this, the writing of Jagannath (2019) drawing on Clarence Perry neighbourhood ideology suggests that the need for planning is to be considered along a micro-level.

The liveability of workplace and place of resident emerged from the view that NP was both a response to placelessness (along the micro planning unit of space) and response to the degenerated social and environmental conditions that emerged out of the industrial revolution. Neighbourhood planning according to Parker (2012) allows for a community based radical strategy to emerging spatial problem. The writer documented that neighbourhood planning provides a room for the merging of formal (government and agencies) ideas with the local or informal (community resident), such that a cooperation is able to achieve an inclusive neighbourhood defined solution to identified problems. Recognising this, Bradley (2018) wrote that where development policy may privilege the supposed objectivity of technocratic rationalism, participation brings other ways of knowing and different types of evidence and methods of evidence gathering to the understanding of place (p.2). He further wrote that participatory planning practice has been seen as a touchstone for the ability of technocratic knowledge to accommodate lay perspectives of lived space. The incorporation of place-based

knowledge in development planning becomes integral to the epistemology through which abstract space is produced (p.24).

In this special issue, the diverse nature of planning (with focus on urban and neighbourhoods) and environmental problems were addressed. The authors in the special issue provided a multi- and interdisciplinary approach to understanding planning and in fact neighbourhood planning as a tool to managing and achieving liveability amidst rapid urbanisation.

In this special issue, from the twenty-one submissions and proposals, only thirteen were considered for publication. All the manuscript underwent a two expert blind review, plagiarism check and editorial reviews. The focus on the articles accepted for publication drew on local context to planning and responding wicked problems within local areas and the process of adopting immediate built-environment principles as captured in neighbourhood planning to managing these challenges that limits communal liveability. The importance of local context and 'neighbourhood-ness' of research draws on the position of Lee et al. (2022), that neighbourhood planning remains an under-utilised ideology, approach, and process of achieving community liveability.

This issue, as presented in the section below, provides a critical eye and/or perception on the inter- and multidisciplinary prisms of neighbourhood planning as a sustainable approach to achieving liveable communities.

Knowledge Offered and Contribution

In assessing floods in the coastal neighbourhood of Kosofe, Local Government Area of Lagos, Nigeria, Ajijola et al. (2023) examined the dimensions of neighbourhood characteristics that influence flood susceptibility. Spatial configuration and amenities were the two dimensions of neighbourhood characteristics identified in Kosofe. The study highlighted spatial configurations were, natural recreational areas, stormwater drainage facilities, domestic waste disposal facilities, water supply, roads and streets networks, floodwall/ barrier, flood retention ponds/ gardens and flood warning systems. The amenities dimensions examined were health care facilities, educational facilities, adequate power supply, space for social and religious activities, shopping facilities, and pedestrian walkways. This study revealed that the factors that significantly influence flood susceptibility within Kosofe were embedded within its spatial configuration. Thus, they state the importance of having appropriate physical planning measures to minimise flood susceptibility and enhance resilience in coastal neighbourhoods.

In the study by Ngcobo et al. (2023) on the Partnership and coalition efforts for Community-Based Research Towards a Liveable Urban and Rural Settlement in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. The Authors investigated the role community partnerships and coalitions played in the complex and ever-changing dynamics of communities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The theory of Community Coalition Action was the basis for the study, which emphasises the need to integrate community voices in decision-making processes regarding issues affecting their lives. The different types of partnerships required for successful community planning and effective partnerships in urban and rural communities were highlighted in the study. Ngcobo et al. (2023) further give an insight into how partnership and coalition efforts are necessary in community-based research. The relevance of Ngcobo et al. (2023) submission is supported by position that planning should be an open-ended process guided by the citizen (Talen, 2019) that provides a sense of community where people could interact, contribute to solving problems, and socialize.

Using the remote Sensing and Geographical Information Systems tool, the depletion of the watershed of Eleyele Dam, Ibadan, Nigeria, was examined by Adejumo and Osunwale (2023). The study revealed that human activities such as fuelwood harvesting, indiscriminate waste dumping, sand excavation and housing construction accounted for the depletion of the watershed of Eleyele Dam.

The temporal analysis also shows that between 1987 and 2019, the water body of Eleyele Dam decreased from 1.6 km² in 1987 to 1.3 km² in 2019. The study further shows an inverse relationship between urban expansion and loss of vegetation cover within the watershed. The approaches suggested to check the depletion of the watershed include perimeter fencing around the watershed and reestablishing a buffer zone in areas yet to be developed around the watershed.

Studies have reported on the unfolding, evolution and dynamics of planning as both practice and discipline. This evolving planning ideals, process, learning process, and approach (Pickett et al., 2004; Mrduljaš & Kulić, 2012; Burayidi, 2015; Gurran & Bramley, 2017; Popoola et al., 2022) suggest that built-environment training and education must work side-by-side with practice. This the author mentioned that the neighbourhood planning alteration(s) has produced a range of neighbourhood planning forms that are reflected through the interplay of institutionalised agency, local conditions, policy iterations and varied community-local scale dynamics.

Towards recognising and understanding the fluidity and adaptability of achieving liveable communities, built-environment education remains imperative. Govender and Cloete (2023) article which is titled: Towards a Sustainable Urban Community at the Point of Development in Durban, explored the symbiotic relationship between architectural education and urban design of The Point Precinct in Durban, eThekweni, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The benefits of adopting a bottom-up approach toward creating sustainable urban neighbourhoods were also emphasised in the study. The combined theories of sustainability, urban resilience, and the "Right to the City" were the basis for this study. Data for this study was collected using a combination of spatial mapping at various levels, observations, and transect walks. The study by Govender and Cloete (2023) provides urban planning and architectural students with the necessary skills to create a bottom-up approach to sustainable urban design reflecting the neighbourhood's needs of the community.

Other studies titled Liveable Communities: A Case Study of Availability, Proximity, and the Quality of Critical Infrastructure in Colombo, Sri Lanka (Tennakoon & Kulatunga, 2023) and assessment of educational facilities in Osogbo metropolis, Nigeria (Ogundahunsi et al., 2023), both studies examined how critical infrastructure contributes to the liveability of Colombo, Sri Lanka and Osogbo, Nigeria. The study explained that the availability of important services, such as education, healthcare, transportation, energy, and communication, is significant in building a liveable community. Tennakoon & Kulatunga (2023) opined that the little consideration given to quality (reliability, timeliness, safety and security, accessibility, efficiency, effectiveness, and customer satisfaction) and proximity (residential, workplace, transportation, and emergency services) was consequential to the failure of achieving liveability goals in developing countries. Ogundahunsi et al. (2023) evidence suggests that location of neighbourhood to reside is influenced by availability and access to educational facilities. The view was that distance to a facility within the context of neighbourhood planning contribute to livability and support in managing infrastructure exclusion among some residents and neighbourhood.

The studies further explains that there is little or no consideration of the community's perception of providing critical infrastructure in developing countries. The inability of stakeholders to consider the community's perception of providing infrastructure is believed to hinder the liveability measures of urban development in developing countries. This position aligns with Yuille (2020) view that neighbourhood planning is performative: it does not merely give powers to an already-existing community, but produces new actors, new collective identities, which are constituted both materially and socially (p.1382). This explains that neighbourhood planning over the years continues to change in response to expected project or planning outcomes. This is because planning as a discipline and practice is not static and continues to change based on places, time, and scenario/circumstances. Thus, communities must be involved in the making and reshaping of planning elements in their space.

Using the quantitative research design, Ajayi et al. (2023) examined the impacts of drainage infrastructure conditions on the residents of Mowe in Ogun State, Nigeria. Based on the study's findings, drainage infrastructure was believed to have a significant impact on the living conditions of the residents of Mowe. The primary drainage examined in this study was the surface drainage system, mainly constructed with the sandcrete blocks. The study emphasises the need for policy planning geared at mitigating flooding to improve the quality of the environment in Mowe.

Govender and Shaikjee (2023) stated categorically that top-down development approaches often fail to promote sustainable urban development. In their study on an architectural approach to neighbourhood Design in the informal settlement in Durban, the role of architecture in responding to the needs of informal dwellers was explored as a tool to empower slum dwellers. The study revealed the dynamics of informal settlement can only be understood by having a firsthand experience of walking around the community and learning from the informal dwellers. Walking around the informal community and learning from its dwellers will help map the community's needs and give more insights into the threats inherent in informal settlements (Govender and Shaikjee, 2023). The study expressed that understanding the needs and threats in informal settlements is a strategy to achieve a sustainable neighbourhood design. The combined theories of culture, insurgency, and the "Right to the City" served as the basis for this study.

Owoeye et al. (2023) employed the quantitative method to evaluate the impact of service delivery on the welfare of IDPs residing in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The evaluation of the service delivery on the well-being of the IDPs in the FCT was carried out by assessing the socio-economic attributes of the IDPs, scrutinising the types and efficacy of service delivery within the IDP camps, and appraising the consequences of service delivery on the well-being of the IDPs in the FCT. The study revealed the extent of deprivation endured in terms of essential amenities such as shelter, proper sanitation, reliable electricity, potable water, and adequate healthcare provisions within the IDPs in the FCT. The study by Owoeye et al. thus recommends comprehensive planning measures intending to enhance the well-being and overall quality of life of IDPs in the FCT.

The land surface temperature (LST) of the Suburban settlements of Inisa and its environs in Osun State, Nigeria, was estimated by Ojelowo et al. (2023) using the archival data of Landsat satellite imageries. The study by Ojelowo et al. (2023) explains the efficacy of remotely sensing data in explaining the variability of LST and Land-use Land cover (LULC). The analysis shows that climatic phenomena can inform future urban planning and liveable urban areas amidst climate change.

Jimoh and Famewo (2023) examined the socio-economic effects of Orisumbare sawmill industry on the residents of Ikire, Irewole local government area of Osun state. In examining the socio-economic characteristics of the sawmill, the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the impact of the sawmill on the residents of Ikire Irewole were assessed. The sawmill activities in the study area had a significant effect on the residents' socio-economic lives, and the sawmills' impacts on the residents were perceived in terms of environmentally induced ailment.

Fitriyani et al. (2023) explain that the local wisdom that exists within a community plays a crucial role in influencing the thinking and conduct of the community. The Fitriyani et al. (2023) study assesses the components of water awareness within the Irung-Irung tradition practised by the people of Cihideung Village in the West Bandung Regency. Data was collected for the study using the qualitative research design. The findings of the study shows that element of water awareness in the Irung-Irung tradition hinges on gratitude to God for a spring that never subsides, respect for the spirits of the ancestors, and the strong bonds of brotherhood among the residents of Cihideung Village. The values in the Irung-Irung tradition are essential to actualising SDG 6 in Cihideung Village.

The exploratory research by Medayese et al. (2023) employed the partial least square using SmartPLS to evaluate the Evolving Hangwurian City Development model through the lens of the North-Central Nigeria. The position of Medayese et al. (2023) was the need for an ideological shift at understanding city development. The authors attempted to for constructs and better explains sustainable development with the local area. The constructs were the underlying principles that led to the emergence of Hangwurian city development model. The essentiality of this article buttress on the need for a sustainable and liveable approach that supports localism and regional public interest and indicators in planning process.

One key evidence from the special issue is the role of local people in managing and responding to local planning challenges. This special issue has succeeded in advocating for need to revisit neighbourhood planning process and procedure towards liveable communities.

Evidence and Commentary of Practice and Professional Experience to Neighbourhood Planning for Liveable Community: The Conclusion

All the articles presented in this Issue point towards one direction- it is the communities that make the city. The character identified with a city is the summation of the character of and experiences in the various neighbourhoods and communities. This is in tandem with the position of LaForest (2023) that it is worthwhile "...to remember that the building blocks of these metropolises were, and still are small communities..." It is therefore incontestable that efforts to plan or reinvigorate a city should start at the community level with due attention paid to the individuals especially what they think of their community. Planning or renewal should start with intervention at community levels.

The roles of communities in the attainment of SDG 11, especially Targets 11.1, 11.5 and 11.9 cannot be overlooked because the strength of the community help to define the level of success or decline in urban areas (Rudlin and Falk, 1999) The influence of and concern for governance had been a common thread in the various articles in this Issue of the journal. Lack of inclusivity in determining the intervention needed for communities by a lack of bottom-top approach could be isolated to explain the limited success of identifying the problems and priorities of the community. It is therefore not surprising that to physically and socially define their boundaries communities are being defined even within larger communities. Developers and investors have taken advantage of this urge to be in "control" through the development and acceptance of what had become known as "gated communities" where communal efforts are pulled together to provide infrastructural facilities especially security of lives and properties.

However, because of the various variables of culture and environment readers are urged to read of the articles for better grasp of the contributions and challenges of communities in achieving live able environment. However, the inclusion of the people is paramount as a Nigerian proverb says "You cannot shave a man's head in his absence."

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