

Urban Environmental Landscaping: A Strategy for Improving the Environmental Quality of Nigerian Cities

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Abstract

The objective of physical planning is to transform the developable and developed surfaces of a settlement into a healthy and functional environment for its residents. Landscaping is the tool for urban improvement which aims at enhancing the beauty and aesthetic quality of the environment, for the use of man. This paper focuses on the importance of landscaping for an improved urban environmental quality in an era of rapid urbanization in Nigeria. While acknowledging the fact that a greater percentage of the Nigerian urban environment is in very deplorable conditions the writer highlights the advantages of landscaping as a strategy for improving the environmental quality of our cities. The study revealed a gross neglect of urban landscaping in Nigeria. Policy recommendations geared towards effective landscaping of the urban environment for improved physical development were made.

Keywords: Urban Environmental Landscaping, Strategy for Improving the Environmental Quality, Nigerian Cities

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The objective of physical planning is to transform the developable and developed surfaces of a settlement into an aesthetically beautiful, healthy and functional environment for its residents. According to Adoniyi (1984), it is the design, growth and management of the physical environment in accordance with pre-determined policies. Physical planning is viewed as a very costly enterprise but the benefits greatly outweigh the costs. In this period of rapid urbanization of Nigerian cities; there is need for a readjustment in policies and use of natural endowments to ensure aesthetic beauty and improvement of the quality of our environment through landscaping. Landscaping aims at shaping the environment, for the comfort of man. Igbozurike (1986) saw it as the art and science of restructuring the man-made environment in order to bring it into closer harmony with nature. It helps restore the immense ecological imbalances brought about by the activities of man on the environment.

At the moment, several urban centers in Nigeria are in deplorable conditions and many of them are recovering from the grievous socioeconomic blow of the defunct Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) as viewed by Alao, (1989) and Urua (1989). This paper aims at highlighting the importance of landscaping as a way of improving the Nigerian urban environment especially in this era of rapid urbanization.

2.0 The Importance of Landscaping the Urban Environment

The industrial revolution of the 18th century and the consequent enhanced urbanization processes in the western countries helped to create an artificial environment which at a point became very uncomfortable for many city dwellers. According to Igbozurike (1986) the industrialized west has now realized the inhuman effects of urban life. They have discovered to their dismay that the man-made environment is not the paradise they originally envisaged instead, the new habitat of glitter and glamour is harsh, oppressive and brutal to the human soul.

In the same vein, many Nigerian urban areas are in this type of condition. In order to make way for industries and dwelling units, people have plundered the environment by destroying natural landforms and vegetations. According to Igbozurike (1986), Hills are bulldozed, forests are torn apart, rivers, oceans and lakes are sometimes drained or even polluted killing the fishes and other wild lives therein. People have built their homes, schools industries and offices with little or no regard for aesthetic beauty or clean air. In Enugu for instance, Obiagu and Asata areas are typical examples. New developments have upset the natural ecological balance of the environment with the result that environmental crisis like flooding, soil erosion and desert encroachment among others are now the bane of the environment.

In this period of rapid urbanization in Nigeria, landscaping is one of the cheapest ways of cushioning the harsh effects on the urban environment; improve the micro-climate and the aesthetic quality of our urban areas. Ofomata (1981) is also of the same view. According to him the losses due to erosion and increasing demand made on the land by agriculture, urban growth, industrial expansion and socio-economic activities make the need for an integrated landscape planning very urgent for a sustainable environment in Nigeria.

3.0 Landscaping as a Strategy for Improving the Nigerian Urban Environment

Various landscape elements can be used to landscape and improve the quality of the urban environment. These

include vegetation or plants, water bodies, landscape features (natural and man-made) and landforms. The value of an urban area depends on how these elements are explored and effectively manipulated by designers. Aldous, 1979; Flening, 1979; Griswold et al, 1970; UCD, 2008; Greg et al, 2004).

Landscape elements sometime exhibit seasonal variations. For example, erosion can change the character of a mountain or hill, plants bear fruits and have other similar variations while the flow and color of water changes especially during the rainy season. Landscape is full of life, if architecture is described as a frozen music, then the landscape can be described as a growing, living music. The following can be harnessed for effective and sustainable landscape elements in order to enhance our urban environment and ensure a conducive atmosphere.

3.1 Water bodies.

Planners can integrate water bodies in their design to create a comfortable environment. Water bodies can either be natural like oceans, lakes etc or man-made; like fountains and pools. Because of its sparkling color, its musical and cooling effects, water bodies improve the aesthetic value of an the environment. As a result, they normally attract relaxation centers like hotels and tourist centers among others.

3.2 Vegetation

Vegetation like trees, grasses and shrubs can change even the most hostile, bare and oppressive environment into a comfortable and pleasant area for its residents. Among other advantages, vegetation helps to link buildings to each other and to external spaces thereby integrating the entire urban landscape into one. They also help to separate incompatible land uses from one another for example, industries from residential areas.

Plants can guide and direct pedestrians and vehicular circulation within the urban areas especially when planted along the highways or in the central divide. In addition, trees with good shade can provide resting places for road users. They can also be used to demarcate houses, for screening and visual barrier, thereby concealing undesirable sights.

The choice of any type of plant should not only please the eyes and suit the soil and clients but if skillfully contrived, it can make a meaningless urban area rich and unique.

3.3 Landscape features

Landscape features can either be natural like rock outcrops or man-made like bridges, works of sculpture and other street or urban furniture. They help to enliven and give prominence or distinctiveness to an urban area. They also form points of focus especially when they are used to commemorate important events in history for instance, the Michael Okpara Square, the Murtala Mohammed Park, and many round-about in Enugu urban area. The exploitation and integration of three of the above landscape features in the urban environment is a very important aspect of landscape design which will greatly help to improve the quality of our urban environment.

3.4 Landforms

Landform is one of the basic elements of landscaping. It is the configuration of landmasses and may include vegetation covers as long as the vegetation appears to blend with the land. Some of these landforms such as mountains, plateau, plains and valleys can be integrated into the urban environment to improve the quality of the area.

On the whole, the aesthetic value of our urban areas can be greatly, improved when two or all of these landscape elements are efficiently manipulated and integrated into the urban environment.

4.0 Recommendations and conclusion

Landscaping has a role to play in the improvement of our urban environment in this period of rapid urbanization in the country. It is not only less costly since all the landscape elements proposed in this study are either part of our natural endowments or things that can be easily produced locally at very minimal costs. But when these landscape elements are properly integrated into an urban area, there is no doubt that the quality of our urban environment will be greatly improved.

For better results therefore, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) The government should review relevant policies and schemes to ensure that urban design proposals are made to include landscape elements and open spaces.
- 2) Where they are already available in the urban environment, efforts should be made to develop an efficient maintenance culture which is geared towards the up-keep of landscape elements so that they do not loose their value.
- 3) Development projects in urban areas should be planned and designed to conform with existing landforms instead of bulldozing to bring the topography of an area to the same level. This will help reduce the initial costs of construction as well as help check drainage problems.
- 4) The government should mount a campaign to educate the masses on the importance of landscaping the urban environment especially in this period of rapid urbanization.

Finally, the high cost of development projects which is one of the effects of urbanization in Nigeria now calls for a readjustment in the use of our natural resources in every aspect of our national aspirations. Landscaping is not

only less costly but will also help improve the aesthetic quality of our urban environment.

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