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# Urban landscape planning experience in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Nigeria, a nation with population of more than 88 million has about 30% of its population living in urban areas. This proportion of the population in urban settlements has great implication on land-use planning and environmental quality. This is where it is desirable to examine the level of urban landscape planning in the country as this can give us an insight into the degree of land-use co-ordination and environmental quality in different parts of the country. The execution of landscape planning is under physical planning sectors of the various government agencies. This makes it unclear to identify the agencies responsible for landscape planning. The consequence of this is that there is no comprehensive approach to landscape planning. What is now being experienced is a piece-meal approach, under the supervision of landscape-related professionals such as architects, town planners, horticulturists, and engineers, amongst others. Also, the existing situation leads to conflicting policies and implementation procedure. This paper discusses the conceptual framework for landscape studies, drawing conclusions to justify the method adopted in the study of urban landscape planning experience in Nigeria. There are also specific socio-economic, political, legal and administrative constraints facing landscape planning in the country. Nigerian landscape planning development history can be categorized into three periods, namely – pre-colonial period dating before 1854, colonial period from 1854 to 1960 and the post-colonial period, from 1960 to the present time. Each of these periods has its distinct features though the first two fused together to produce a newly emerging Nigerian landscape development even though with greater colonial influence. The paper also discusses the role of different levels of government, non-governmental organisations and individuals during these periods. It, however, makes suggestions on the need to encourage citizen participation, particularly the poor majority and the need for appropriate manpower. The problem of religion and culture are examined as these are major constraints outside the government machinery to formal landscape development in the country. © 1998 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

The process of urban development in Nigeria pre-dates colonization. Historically, it has been favored by rapid rate of migration from the rural areas to urban areas and natural increase through birth as well as an

ever-changing socio-political and economic structure of the country. For example, at around 1921, the country's population of about 18.63 million had about 1.35 million living in urban settlements whose population exceeded 20,000 people.

By 1963, the country had about 180 cities with about 19.1% of the total population living in these cities. This increased to about 35% of the population

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in the mid 1970s living in cities. This trend of population influx into urban areas is still a continuing process. The country now has a total population of about 88 million. However, this has great consequences on rapid physical growth of the cities in terms of land-use development and its adverse consequences on the environment.

Landscape planning in Nigeria like in other parts of the world has centuries of history. The Nigerian experience has shown that it is an art that has claim to the cultural, social and economic development of different parts of the country. Unfortunately, it is seen as one of the recent arts in the country. Perhaps this is due to the fact that modern landscape planning started emerging about two decades ago in Nigeria. The idea was started recently through deliberate landscape planning and implementation by public agencies and institutions and few wealthy individuals and corporate bodies. The Nigerian experience can be likened to the general phenomenon of landscape development which does not appear in any society until a period of stable peace, prosperity, wealth and affluence has been established (Tandy, 1978). All these prepare the people for the gentle but fragile pursuit of landscape planning.

Despite the need for landscape planning in Nigeria, the main impediment has been the low standard of living of the people due to a low level of income. This is complicated by continuous population growth of major urban areas at the expense of rural population with the attendant landscape planning problems which include the problems of destruction of natural landscape, inadequate open spaces, ecology, environmental management and lack of appropriate amenities.

The major obstacle to landscape planning development in Nigeria is largely economic, and public awareness about its importance and relevance is lacking. Therefore, to stress the need for landscape planning in Nigeria now, where the income is largely subsistence coupled with a low standard of living could lead to greater confrontation especially with the poor majority. Despite this there is need to be concerned with functional landscape improvement rather than mere aesthetic pursuit. For example, there is need for landscape planning to minimise the effect of environmental hazards such as pollution, radiation, erosion, desertification including the need for balanced land-use planning amongst others.

Towards achieving the above, past and present governments in Nigeria have made significant contribution towards achieving better environmental quality by embarking on such programmes as War Against Indiscipline (WAI), a programme which had two major objectives – environmental sanitation and waste management. Also, government has embarked on prompt responses to flooding, erosion, and desertification. Government has also embarked on National Tree Planting Days at the national, state and local government levels. Individuals and corporate bodies are also mobilized by government.

The main aim of this paper is to discuss the historical and present state of landscape planning in Nigeria. In an attempt to achieve this the paper examines the conceptual framework for landscape studies with a view to adopting them in the case study. The paper appraises the state of urban landscape planning in Nigeria through the classification of the country landscape development period into three, namely – pre-colonial, colonial and post-independent periods. It later examines the constraints and makes suggestions on how landscape planning in the country can be improved.

## **2. Conceptual framework for landscape study**

In the examination of the landscape various methods can be adopted, either in isolation or in combination. However, it is better to combine some of these methods. Hoodway and Davidson (1970), stated that some identification of the most valuable areas must be made and adequate provision ensured for their protection or re-creation. The method of study of the landscape should give a perception that is sharper than that of the casual observer and a clear understanding of the general response is likely to be aroused by the landscape qualities. The values that people attach to the landscape must be sampled in an attempt to arrive at the mean of people's comparative reactions for a given area. Landscape evaluation is basically subjective; this makes it differ from one person to another. It could be purely philosophical, aesthetic, qualitative or a combination of the above.

However, whichever way it is looked at, the landscape can be studied from a human as well as a purely factual perspective. This is where the real complica-

tions are encountered since each individual has his own perception and appraisal of different landscapes. The interpretation an individual gives the landscape is influenced by his personal history, mood, purpose and attentiveness. What we see, study, and the way we shape and build on the landscape is selected and structured for each of us by education, custom, culture, desire and faith.

Weedle (1979), identified two approaches to landscape planning, namely, territorial approach and problem-solving approach. The latter relates to landscape planning for a small area, while the former applies to very large areas, usually of regional scale. Examples of problem-solving landscape planning include accommodating industry, oil refinery, extractive industry and selection of route for a new motorway and a new town.

Clerk (1968) suggested the following method of landscape classification: landscape with special characteristics to be preserved in existing conditions at all cost; beautiful areas where development should be carefully controlled; monotonous agricultural areas and other areas with no special landscape interest. The market research techniques, in which individuals are requested to identify and rank photographs or slides of the landscape with preferences on the specific area of study, could also be adopted.

### 3. Landscape planning problems in Nigeria

Landscape planning and management is now a basic requirement for human survival (Lovejoy, 1969) Pollution knows no natural boundaries; therefore, there is need for co-operation at all levels of government in order to avert the adverse effect. As man advances technologically so does his ability to destroy his environment increase. The destruction of the environment can only be arrested and the ill-effects reversed through sound land-use and landscape planning. No responsible member of the society would advocate total absence of landscape planning. The question is – How much? (Lovejoy, 1970).

The complexity of the nature of the urban landscape is now recognized. There is continuous impact of man activities on the natural and man-made landscape in different parts of the country. These problems have physical, socio-economic, cultural, legal and admin-

istrative dimensions. Physically, such problem includes ecological, lack of infrastructure and lack of adequate open-space management dimensions. In terms of socio-economic and cultural dimensions they include low income, illiteracy, myth and superstition, lack of public enlightenment and citizen participation in the physical planning process. Legal and administrative problems include general absence of specific laws on landscape planning requirements, lack of political will on the part of government, lack of appropriate manpower, coordination and absence of a multi-disciplinary approach to physical planning administration. There also exist areas of conflicts and overlaps in the administrative framework of planning, especially on the roles of different levels of government.

Despite all the problems highlighted above, little attention has been given to deliberate landscape planning and implementation policy at all levels of physical planning administration in Nigeria. Recent effort of the government has been on city beautification and an environmental sanitation campaign which is also a piece-meal approach. Past government effort had been on development control and planning scheme approval by planning authorities and urban development boards.

Falade (1985) lamented the on-going neglect of landscape consideration in physical planning in the promotion of city development in Nigeria. He stated that we have not appreciated landscape degradation as problems such as unemployment, poverty, congestion, poor housing, transportation, raising gross national product and general lack infrastructural facilities.

### 4. Landscape planning in Nigeria

Despite the fact that landscape planning efforts in Nigeria pre-date the colonial period and can be classified into the following periods:

1. pre-colonial period (before 1854),
2. colonial period (1854–1960),
3. post-colonial period (1960 – to date).

#### 4.1. Pre-colonial period landscape development

Ojo (1966) documented that in the pre-colonial period the Yoruba (South Western part of Nigeria)

classical town plans resembled a wheel, the Oba's Palace being the hub, the walls being the circumference and the spokes a series of roads radiating from the palace and linking the town to the centre. Beyond the wall, the landscape was made of farm-plots, first the *Oko-Etile* or farm of the outskirts, then *Oko-Egan* or bush farm merging with the *Oko-Egan* of the next town.

A housing unit was a compound build in the form of a rectangular enclosing an open courtyard, with trees usually planted in the courtyard. The central *Afin* or palace with its surrounding land was traditionally thickly walled around with only one main gate connecting the front or public courtyard with the market and other parts of the town.

Lloyd (1962) added to the morphology of Yoruba towns, that the walled grounds usually included a proportion of bushland which frequently contained shrines, sacred groves, squares and burial places. For the gods the main temples of the different *orisas* were traditionally distributed throughout the various quarters. Most worshippers set up small shrines in their own compounds.

The *Igbo Community* in the East is characterized by a series of autonomous villages. At the centre of each village was a public square or open space. The Igbo settlement pattern depicts an aggressive and highly individualistic form. The Igbo fortification system is very unusual. This is because while other tribes built walls or dug ditches around their settlements, each compound in Igboland was fenced with only one entrance or one exit.

The shrine '*Ngwuru-Aja*' where sacrifices are made is located very close to the entrance. The '*Obi*' or reception area is foremost in the compound complex, behind which there may be an impluvium or just a courtyard. A well is located very close to the wives' rooms within the female courtyard for domestic purposes.

In the North, in the Islamic community's domestic privacy was an important aspect in the land-use system. The Islamic influence, for example, allows for more than one wife; therefore, the need to house one's wives, concubines and children in conformity with the *purdah* laws led to the acceptance of the courtyard-type of housing as this provides for adequate space for the women to perform their daily chores without violating *purdah* requirements.

Two types of indigenous landscape could be found in the coastal areas. Construction in these lowland areas before the lagoons and deltas are of load-bearing forked mangrove timber. Poles are driven into the ground at suitable distances along a rectangular or square plan. Buildings are usually raised on platforms to lift the houses out of tidal or flood reach. Gangways made of wood are used to link one part of the compound to another.

Prior to colonial administration land-use administration was vested in natural rulers or community heads. The *Obis*, *Obas* and *Emirs* in the east, west and northern parts of the country, respectively, had the legal status of trustee beneficiary on land. They had the power to allocate, re-allocate and supervise land use.

#### 4.2. Colonial period (1954–1960)

With the arrival of colonial government in 1854, Nigeria experienced tremendous changes in her landscape styles. Though there had always been European influence on the towns of the West African sub-region garden prior to this period, such gardens in West Africa including Nigeria were the gardens and plantations developed around the trading forts built by the European merchants mainly from Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany and England dating from the 15th century.

They were mainly utilitarian gardens, being devoted mainly to the cultivation of exotic food crops and fruit trees. They were developed as ornamental gardens built for the resident governors and occasionally used for garden parties.

During this time, the forces and tastes influential in the development of the Renaissance garden in Europe were already at work. As such, some of these early gardens had traits of the garden styles peculiar to the countries of the European merchants who pioneered them.

Therefore the development of the modern landscape in Nigeria can be attributed to the efforts of the colonial administration even though this might have been motivated by their own selfish desires.

Following the ceding of Lagos in 1881, the British colonial government took over the affairs of Lagos. Mr. McKoskry, an English merchant and the first British consul for Lagos colony, was the first to have

opened up the prospect of the Lagos Marina towards the lagoon and turned the area into a pleasant and attractive walk.

Other prominent landscape features of colonial administration include many European residential estates built for government officials. They were the European government version of the garden city in Nigeria. The product of this are houses to be seen in the older Government Residential Areas (GRA) surrounded by attractive gardens. They were built in remote areas of towns with a low occupancy ratio.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the colonial administrators devoted more efforts to the development of private and institutional gardens than public gardens. However, social clubs recreational grounds such as race courses, golf courses and polo grounds were developed in urban centres. The Government Garden at Sokoto built in 1918; Lauzu Park, Bida developed in 1950 are examples of some early contributions to public park and landscape development in Nigeria (Falade, 1985).

Later the influence of western industrialization, the need for warehouses, transportation networks for roads, railways, street lighting, religious buildings, and schools came at a tremendous rate and changed the landscape of the country.

With the advent of the colonial administration, the traditional land development systems declined drastically. The promulgation in Lagos in 1863 of the Town Improvement Ordinance to control development and urban sanitation further obscured the traditional land-use administration system especially in urban areas. Legal segregation of the European from the African residential areas emerged during this period with different planning and land-use standards in favour of the Europeans. Up to the end of Second World War, urban and development in Nigeria was carried out by senior civil servants under the health boards.

The 1946, the Nigeria Town and Country Planning Ordinance made provisions for the planning, improvement and development of different parts of the country through the use of planning schemes. The ordinance was based on the 1932 British Town and Country Planning Act. The 1946 ordinance remained the most comprehensive planning law for more than two decades after independence.

#### 4.3. Post-colonial period (1960–to date)

Most of the post-colonial landscape features are the reflection of British styles; many landmarks to commemorate the independence anniversary, particularly in the then regional capitals and divisional headquarters, were built. Most of them are in form of statues and gardens.

The early post-colonial landscape features include the Tinubu Square fountain, the remembrance arcade and, the Tafawa Balewa Square, formally the Race Course, all in Lagos.

The development of the institutions of higher learning offered some landscape architects, both indigenous and foreign, the opportunity to make positive contributions to urban landscape development in different parts of the country. Lancaster and Atkinson were involved in the development of the University of Ibadan campus, the former College of Arts and Science which now houses the North Campus of the Ibadan Polytechnic and the University College Hospital, Ibadan. They could be described as the pioneers of modern landscape design as an art in Nigeria (Falade, 1988).

The University of Ibadan permanent campus was designed as a broad ornamental lawn with an informal grouping of clumps of trees. Courtyard gardens, with herbaceous planting and paving shaded with shrubs, were provided. This design was greatly influenced by the humid climate which encourages rapid growth of plants.

The Obafemi Awolowo University (formerly University of Ife) campus could be regarded as one of the most beautiful campus landscape in Africa. The firm of A.M.Y. Architects and Engineers of Hanfa, Israel, prepared the master plan for the central area of the campus. The landscape plan was prepared by the landscape department of Wisconsin's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences under the guidance of Tishler and Niemann Jr. (1971).

The implementation of the landscape plan of the campus is under the skilful ingenuity of Horticulturist Bankole, the Head of the University Horticulture Unit. The main contribution of Bankole has been the bold approach he adopted to the planting of shrubs, flower beds and ground cover. The strength of the OAU Central campus plan is a series of quadrangles enclosed by roads along all sides.

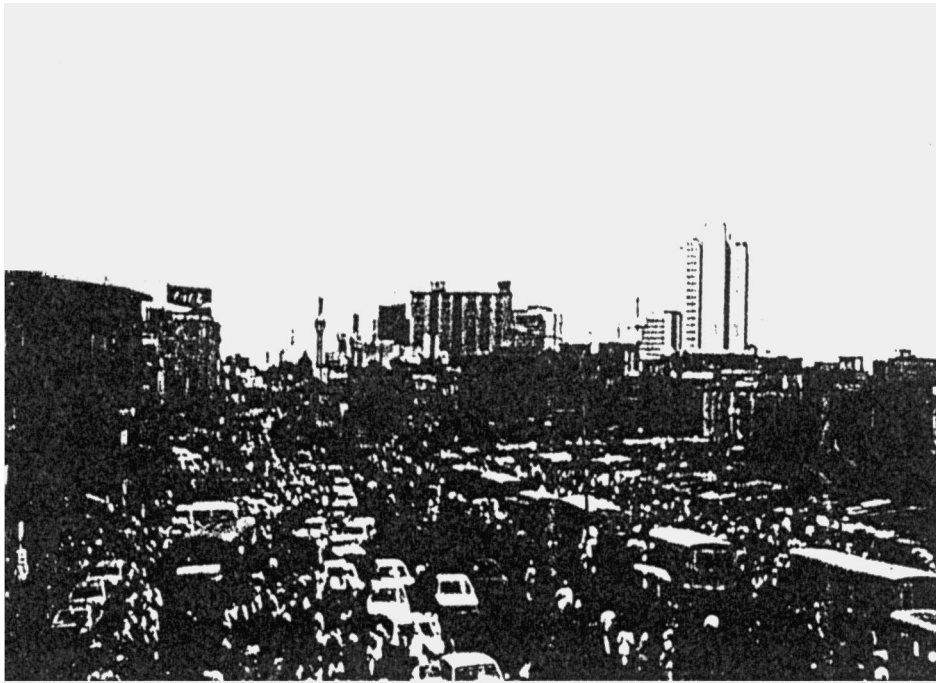


Fig. 1. A view of Lagos Island central business district, with the multi-storey building skyline background.

Other institutions of notable landscape planning characters in Nigeria are The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, various government buildings and official residences of top government officials. Residential estates with commendable landscape treatment in Nigeria include the Agbara Estate, Bodija Estate, part of Festac Town, Ikoyi, the GRAs, etc. The development of commercial complexes is a prominent feature in Nigerian city setting. They include Lagos Island multi-storeys (Figs. 1 and 2), development of industrial and religious places, etc. Landscapes in many forms are prominent urban landscape features. Fig. 3 shows the Eyo Statute located in the heart of Lagos Island. Eyo is the traditional god of peace and prosperity worshipped by Lagos indigenes.

The recent trend in the environmental campaign by the government has encouraged many non-governmental organizations, social clubs and individuals to participate in the development of parks, gardens and the general city beautification exercise in various parts of the country.

The most recent large-scale application of landscape planning in Nigeria is at the New Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Here consideration has been given to the establishment of a landscape division in the department of planning and survey. This division is responsible for the implementation of the generous provision of open spaces, parks, gardens, game reserves and other landscape features of the master plan.

On land-use administration, after independence in 1960, various regional Governments retained the 1946 Town and Country Planning Ordinance as Town and Country Planning law: Chapter 123 of the Laws of Western Nigeria 1959, Chapter 130 of the Northern Nigeria and Chapter 155 of the Laws of Eastern Nigeria.

The recently promulgated 'The Nigeria Urban and Regional Planning Law Decree No. 88, 1992' is the only comprehensive planning law covering the whole country after the 1946 Ordinance. The 1992 Planning Law outlined the roles of different levels of government, types of physical development plans,



Fig. 2. A view of the Marina, Lagos Island with a row of multi-storey buildings. A post-colonial landscape development.



Fig. 3. Eyo Statute. A popular cultural landscape landmark in the heart of the Lagos Island. Eyo is the traditional god of peace and prosperity.

development control mechanisms, land acquisition, compensation, rehabilitation, renewal and up-grading among others. Unfortunately, its implementation has not commenced. At the federal level, the physical planning division of the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing plays a leading role in landscape development. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency also plays a prominent role in environmental matters at federal level. The Federal Ministry formulates broad national policies, identifies valuable lands such as forest areas, minerals, water bodies etc. It coordinates the activities of international development agencies such as United Nations Development Programme, Forest and Wildlife Conservation Agencies among others.

At the state level, since land is vested in the state Government courtesy the 1978 Land Use Decree, land-use administration is more pronounced. The state Government, through the various state ministries in charge of physical planning, is involved with detailed examination, evaluation and approval of planning and landscape proposals. The state also promotes and maintains data-banks, maps and statistics; manpower training, organisation of conferences, seminars, symposia and workshops to maintain dialogue and mutual understanding with individuals, communities, other states and others levels of government on land-use development matters.

At the local government level, the Town Planning Authorities or Boards are under the state ministries. The functions of the planning authorities include approval of development proposals, identification of areas of landscape resources and priorities, development of schemes such as city beautification, notary improvement, pedestrian side-walks, parks and gardens, public recreation centres, standardization of bill boards, street naming sign posts, among others. The local planning agencies embark on public enlightenment on environmental sanitation and beautification through the mass media, meetings with various economic and social groups. The local planning agencies collaborate with the local government authorities in the area of waste management, provision of public conveniences, markets and other land-use activities that are mandatory.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals are also involved in the direct implementation and financing of the development of landscape fea-

tures. Such organisations include the Rotary Club, Lions, Lioness, Horticultural Societies and Local Clubs and Societies. It is note-worthy to praise the efforts of the Nigerian Amateur Gardeners, Nigerian Field Society, Landscape Designers, Conservation Societies, Society of Landscape Architects, Nigerian Institute of Town Planners and the Nigerian Institute of Architects.

The initiation and implementation of landscape planning schemes at various levels of government in Nigeria is usually under the town planning division of the government agency of town planning. At the federal level, it is under the Federal Ministry of Works while at state level it is under ministries whose name varies from works, housing, transport, urban development, or a combination of these names. The planning authorities at local levels are usually under the direct supervision of the state ministry in charge of town planning. There is no specific government agency in charge of landscape planning and in a majority of cases there is no clearly defined department or division within the various levels of government agencies clearly assigned to landscape planning. Landscape planning is usually taken as part of town planning assignments. Some other government agencies whose function relates to landscape planning are federal and state Environmental Protection Agencies and Waste Management Boards. It is only at the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja that a section of the department of planning and survey has been named Landscape Planning Unit. This unit is in charge of the planning and supervision of landscape planning schemes within the FCT.

## **5. Suggestions**

The above analyses have shown that there has been appreciable progress in landscape planning efforts in the country from the pre-colonial period to the present time. It is envisaged that if these efforts are sustained, especially through encouragement from the Government and corporate bodies, there will be great hope for environmental improvement in different parts of the country. However, for this to be achieved there is need to overcome the present constraints. They include the issue of finance, social factors, manpower, cultural factors, geomorphic constraints and legal factors.



In the area of finance, the majority of urban dwellers in Nigeria are poor. To encourage the poor majority to embrace landscape planning, emphasis should be on functional landscape such as provision of parks and gardens, paved pedestrian walkways, and tree planting among others. The poor social class has to be mobilized to participate in its little ways rather than neglecting the landscape. This will provide them with a sense of citizen participation which is an important factor for any planning scheme to be successful. The bulk of the finance shall have to be provided by the small affluent class. Another important factor adversely affecting landscape planning in the country is the issue of appropriate manpower. There is no town planning authority which has a landscape planner among its staff. The activities of landscape planning are performed by town planners and architects. It will be appropriate for the state ministries in charge of the landscape to either employ or send some of their staff on specialist training in landscape planning.

The issue of the cultural factor is closely related to that of traditions and religion. Different ethnic groups in the country have different beliefs about the use of different plants, water bodies among others. These are elements which are essential for the development of the landscape. The core areas of the urban landscape are highly conservative. They usually resist changes and these are areas within the urban fabric requiring overhauling due to their lack of adequate physical planning consideration.

In riverine areas, the issue of geomorphic constraints is prominent. Here the extent to which physical development on land could be made is limited. Therefore, huge sums of money will often be required for the reclamation of swamps and water bodies for physical development.

Land ownership and tenure system in the country usually is the transfer from one successive generation to another. Such land, if required for use by persons or government agencies, will have to be purchased from the family. This usually involves some legal procedure of transfer of ownership. Where it is required by the government, adequate compensation shall be paid to such family. This often takes a long time. If land is to be used by individuals or corporate bodies such person or body is expected to acquire a Certificate of Occupancy from the state government in order to possess

the best secured title on such land. The acquisition of such Certificate of Occupancy takes a long time. This is a major constraint to land-use development which has to be simplified.

However, the need for integration of public participation is of paramount importance especially in landscape activities. It has been found that when people are given the opportunity to take part in plan-making through public meetings they contribute greatly to the implementation of such plans. The citizens when allowed to take part in the process, come to appreciate the aim and problems of landscape development. They also have the opportunity to make their views, aims, suggestions and objectives known right from the conception stages, which automatically leads to people's choice plans.

## 6. Conclusion

The level of urban landscape planning in Nigeria is in its emerging stage. It is also clear that Nigerian landscape development is rooted in her tradition and European influence, the latter being the influence of colonization. However, the present economic downturn situation notwithstanding, there is urgent need for functional landscape planning in the urban areas. This will go a long way in the efforts of the government to improve the quality of the environment. It can also be concluded that landscape planning will be embraced in Nigeria, landscape arts being traditional to different tribes in Nigeria. However, appropriate socio-economic political will on the part of government, legal and administrative framework is essential if the general public is to be encouraged, though the response might be slow initially.

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