

NIGERIAN HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION LANDUSES – CHALLENGES AND PROMISES

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at assessing the prospects of heritage land use and conservation of old, historic buildings in Nigerian cities. The objectives of this paper dwell on a detailed identification of historic buildings in a typical city - Calabar; an examination of their existing conditions and the way forward out of perceived problems of managing the old stock in Nigerian cities. To achieve the above, the study engages in a reconnaissance survey of all the 18th century housing stock in Calabar. Thereafter the stratification of this stock was done to identify the buildings of interest. Hereafter, using simple random sampling techniques the study administered its questionnaire on current users of selected historic buildings. Data collected were collated and analyzed descriptively. The study shows that given adequate maintenance culture, premised on sufficient funding and effective policy bedrock, the conservation of heritage wealth in our cities will go a long way in providing a sustainable housing environment for Nigerians. It will also sustain a veritable source of local economic industry.

Keywords: Heritage, Conservation, Preservation, Sustainable Development, maintenance, comodification.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is often seen as an important asset for the development of the local environment. It is also a crucial ingredient that enhances a city's impact upon quality of life, self identity and community integration. It also determines tourism and investment attractiveness of sites, thus forming a basis for products of the cultural industry and diverse economic activities. Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) describe the concept of heritage as the complex ways in which a contemporary society uses her past as a social, political or economic resource. This is a unique resource that can be interpreted in diverse ways by various users.

Calabar, an ancient city in South-South Nigeria was the seat of the former British colonial government of the Southern protectorate of Nigeria. The Consul-General administered the protectorate from Calabar between 1884 to 1914 (Ajah, 2005). During this period, administrative structures and private residential structures were put in place to facilitate governance of the protectorate.

Over time and just as observable every where, significant political, economic and of late demographic changes in Calabar Nigeria began to take its toll on the built environment. This is constantly manifesting in the on going dynamics within the built environment in the city. Calabar with her wealth of historic buildings typifies what obtains in most ancient towns in Nigeria and elsewhere. While a few of the old stock manifest gross neglect, change in use of some of the stock arising from the diversified economy become a dilemma to contend with. In some cases, the need for urban renewal and rehabilitation in the city heartland districts, provision of needed contemporary facilities such as roads, etc, make the call for heritage conservation needful if this stock is to be protected for its worth.

Given the above, there is therefore a need for conscious and guided interventions in city heritage protection as many of these structures are fast wasting away. The attrition rates of the structure are easily perceived from the ease with which such sites and structures are replaced with new projects. Some others are left neither unused nor integrated into the current urban fabric.

Architectural structures reflect time bound aesthetic values especially as seen in religious and recreational buildings (Ojeifo, 1993). The conservation of such sites makes for a conservation of cultural heritage and the urban evolution story. These historical building form vantage points from which we can peep into the past to guide physical development in the present and project also into the future (Ajah, 2005).

In Calabar - our study area - traditional buildings have continued to exist harmoniously with contemporary buildings. There is growing decimation of these old stocks however hence the paper is out to unravel the prospects of conservation of heritage structures in our cities.

This paper hereafter proceeds to a brief literature review and conceptual clarifications. The study methodology and field observations follow this section. The conclusion harps on the need for strong policy thrusts, embellished with maintenance schedules and other logistics aimed at heritage wealth preservation and maintenance in Nigerian cities.

Literature Review and Conceptual Clarifications

Cultural heritage and historical buildings constitute important assets for local development. Murzyn (2008) affirm that their resource values depend on how the contemporary society uses them as social, economic or political resources. Cullingworth and Nadin (2002) reveal that such assets especially in the developed nation have always enjoyed public concern such that they enjoy statutory protection. The Ancient Monuments Acts (1882) in England is a case in point. Given this Act (1882), even privately owned structures that are in beneficial use are protected. The statutory provisions influence their maintenance and minor adaptation works (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2002).

In the management of heritage structures, 'heritage' as a concept refers to components of the past – man made or naturally occurring that can be of use to the contemporary society. In Nigeria and in most cities of the developing world, increasing economic activities and heightening demand for prime land in the core areas of cities threaten the existence of aging stock of monument sites. It has also been noted that cultural and natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction by the traditional causes of decay as well as by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation of this stock with the phenomena of damage or destruction. (UNESCO, 1972). Owing to the gravity of the new dangers threatening them and their potential value in reducing the pressure on housing need in cities, it is incumbent on all to devise means of protection, preservation and conservation of these resources. There is therefore a need to intervene in the preservation and conservation of these resources.

Larkham (1999) presents 'conservation' as a term that runs synonymously with 'preservation' however, while preservation entails maintaining the original in an unchanged state, conservation embraces elements of change and enhancement. In providing an economic relevance for an old building, new uses are often sought out for these buildings. Heritage and heritage

planning push the conservation idea further as these involve a consideration of the use of what is conserved hence it embraces land use change in historic sites (Larkham, 1999; Cullingworth and Nadin, 2002). Larkham (1999) added that ‘heritage’ a fashionable term; includes the process of evaluation, selection, interpretation and even exploitation of things of the past.

The optimistic school of resource utilization sees heritage commodities as resources which will mean different things to various users. Murzyn (2008) argues that from the many different types of remnants of the past, which can become heritage commodities, the contemporary society evaluates and uses what it finds symbolically or commercially appealing. The discovery of some type of heritage most often leads to its ‘commodification’- products and services derivable from such heritage goods are package and marketed. The success of a given product and demand for its values might lead to a reappraisal of the original resource for more utility value; - commodification process at times, being more stringent on authenticity and accuracy.

Current thinking however is that of “sustainable conservation” or conservation for sustainability. This is more so needful since the historic landscape is a finite resource that should not be depleted wantonly. Conservation being the hallmark of the heritage city, encourages recycling of existing buildings and materials, the use and reliability of local resources and diversity in the environment. On this note, Manley and Guise (1998) and Cullingworth and Nadin (2002) argued that the heritage city is indeed a model for a sustainable city.

Research Methodology

This research work thrived on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was obtained through participatory observation, interviews and the administration of structured questionnaire. The secondary data were obtained from journal articles, conference proceedings, published and unpublished works as well as documents from the National Commission for Museum and Monuments in Akure, Nigeria.

A comprehensive field recognisance of old buildings in Calabar was done. This led to an inventory of structures built in the 18th century which have impacted the socio-cultural life of Calabar. From this universe came the sample which was obtained first by stratifying this 18th century stock into structure in current but private use and structures in current but public / institutional use. The focus of this study is structures in current but public / institutional use.

Research Findings / Inventory

Description of surveyed historic buildings

The National Museum building

This building was formerly the Government house. It was erected in 1884 by the colonial government to accommodate the early British Administration of the Niger Coast Territories before the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. Over time, it has served as the house for the residents of old Calabar province till 1914 and later served as a ministerial guest house in 1950. It was finally used as secretariat of the then South Eastern State of Nigeria.

The walls and the entire top floors are made of Scandinavian red pinewood which is considered to have high resistance to termites attack. The wooden walls are made of overlapping boards. A framework of cast Iron columns and brass supported the structure. Efforts to preserve the buildings was made by the then Antiquities Department. It was finally declared a national monument by National Commission for Museum and Monuments.

The Theatre Block of St. Margaret Hospital

The building was built in 1887 as an extension of colonial administrative centre. It is made up of brick walls with prefabricated wooden top and cast iron decorative plates on the ceiling of the rooms. The building is presently used as the theatre department of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital.

Elder Dempster House

This building was the first police headquarters of the southern protectorate of Nigeria. The structure was built in 1849. It has a concrete ground floor and brick wall with prefabricated wooden top covered with corrugated iron sheet.

Aroline Police Barracks

This barracks is a single building built in 1887. It is an extension of Elder Dempster House which was the headquarters of the southern police. The building is made up of bricks and roofed with corrugated iron sheet. Facilities such as toilets are externally placed. The building is still functions as police barracks.

The Supreme Court Of Old Calabar

The building was built in 1887 as the court room of southern protectorate. The walls are made up of bricks with prefabricated wooded top floor. It is situated on Government Hill. The

ground floor and veranda are made up of hard concrete with external iron nail staircase. The building is still used as court room (administrative land use).

Duke Town Primary School

This school building was built in 1895 by the Presbyterian missionaries. Like other, it is made up of brick walls on a concrete foundation and roofed with corrugated iron sheet. It still maintains its use as a school.

Premier Block of Hope Waddel Training Institute

The structure was erected in 1894 by Rev. Hope Waddel - a Presbyterian missionary. Its wall and the entire floor are made up of Scandinavian red pinewood. The wooden walls are doubled over lapping boards. The roof is covered with corrugated iron sheet. It is a single story building. It has been listed for takeover by the National Commission for Museum and Monuments for preservation.

The Bocco House

This is also known as Ekpo Ekop Bassey house. It was built in 1885. It was the palace of late Obong of Calabar. The traditional activities of the Efiks took place there. The walls are made with wooden planks while columns made with bricks and iron support the structure. The building plays significant role in Efiks' traditional activities.

The Mary Slessor House

The building was built in 1897. It housed one of the early missionaries- Rev. Mary Slessor who played the role of discouraging the killing of twins among the Efiks. The wall is made up of planks with brick pillars to support the structure. It is a single story building with facilities located externally. It has been listed for preservation by National Commission for Museum and Monuments.

The Presbyterian Church Building

The church was built in 1884 by the early missionaries. The walls are made up of wood and a framework of cast iron columns and beams which support the structure. The ground floor and veranda are made of concrete slabs. It has been listed for preservation by the National Commission for Museum and Monuments.

Eyo Honesty House

The building was built in 1884 as the palace of the late King of Creek Town (Calabar was referred to as Creek town by the British in the 19th century). The foundation block wall was constructed with stabilized laterite. The walls and the entire top floor are made up of durable wood

of overlapping boards encasing the structure pillar from inside and outside corrugated iron sheet was used to cover the roof. It is a single storey building with wooden stair case fitted externally.

The building was the palace of the late King of Creek Town Ediden Eyo Honesty II who was given the staff of office by the then, acting British Consul of Southern Protectorate of Nigeria. The royal house was the nucleus of traditional activities in the area. The architectural fitness of the palace and the artistic design are quite impressive. It has been listed to be declared as national monuments by National Commission for Museum and Monuments.

The Prison's Building

The prison's building was built in 1887 and is located at Leopard Town in Calabar metropolis. It formerly served as prisons regional office. The foundation block wall were constructed with well compacted brick blocks produced from cement and stabilized soil laid with cement / sand mortar to a level of 150mm above the ground to remove the supper structure away from the flood. It is a single storey building whose raised walls are constructed with durable woods and with wooden staircase. The roof is covered with corrugated iron sheet.

Data Analysis

Apart from the descriptions above, the empirical details reveal that the buildings are structurally either single storey structures or bungalows. These are sufficiently raised above the natural ground level to ward off effects of the flood waters. Further analysis of field data revealed some attributes of the heritage stock in Calabar.

Essentially, the buildings are dominantly single storey buildings (83.3%) with a few being bungalows (16.7%). This structural disposition was informed by the need to survive the onslaught of ocean insurgence before the erosion control measures that curtailed ocean incursion in the town.

Apart from this, the use class was assessed. Granted that many of the buildings have been put into different uses over the ages, three dominant uses exist now; these are residential institutional use (41.7%) such as the Aroline police barracks. Besides this, twenty five percent of the buildings are used for public/ administrative use while 16.7% is devoted to educational use. Other minor uses discovered are ecclesiastical and health uses.

Physical assessment of these buildings was done. The research reveals that 66.7% of the stock can be rated 'above average' – needing little or no renovation works. Those requiring one form of serious attention or the other account for 33.7%. Given that all of these buildings are well

over 100 years old, the soundness of the buildings can only be adduced to the quality and suitability of the building materials.

Two major building materials were used for these buildings. While about 60% of the buildings are built of overlapping wooden walls made from termite resistant Scandinavian red pine wood; others are made of brick block walls.

The maintenance of these buildings rests with the Federal and State government organs. A few of them, such as the National Museum building Calabar have been declared as national monument and handed over to the National Commission for Museum and Monuments for preservation. Some are only listed, yet to be declared a National Monument and as such, are being maintained by the occupants.

This calls for review as maintenance is poor from either agent.

Prospects of Conservation – A Discussion

The core area of Calabar - as in many other towns, houses these old historic buildings. Such could therefore be designated by the local planning authority a conservation area. This more so the case, given that they have the authority to determine which parts of their areas constitute areas of historic or architectural interest, the character of which it desires to preserve or enhance. In such areas, land use changes as well as demolition are guided interventions. Conservation is being touted in this paper in that, given the soundness that we see in some of these physical structures and the ready availability of the materials used; such when preserved will easily be a pointer to the efficacy of our local building materials as reliable and affordable. The use of stabilized bricks and wooden walls as in the heritage buildings could be improved upon and mass produced for both rural and urban housing in Nigeria.

Apart from the above, conservation areas can enhance tourism development which will generate so many earnings for the host community. It will help preserve local and cultural legacies. It will also help the present and future generations have a feel of the past.

Conclusion

Deriving from the study of Calabar town, there is the need to identify and designate 'conservation areas' in the town. This when done, will go a long way in preserving the historic land use areas. It can also serve as a reference point in guiding and influencing physical development in the town. The heritage wealth of Calabar and as elsewhere in Nigeria calls for policy intervention. This shall specify in details the maintenance schedules and other logistics for the heritage wealth. Funds should be mobilized for the restoration of the failing structures while efforts should be made to declare more of the listed structures as National Monuments. When so declared, appropriate funding of such should be provided.

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