

# **Explorative Windows towards Contemporary Nigerian City Form**

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## **Abstract**

At the centre of urban sustainability is city form which addresses the physical characteristics of human settlement including spatial configuration, shape, coverage and developmental density. The reality on ground is that the present chaotic urban sprawl cannot sustain Nigeria as an emerging economy. Historiography as an interpretive research strategy was considered in comprehending dynamic 150 years national urban morphological principles. The paper explored historic antecedence to arrive at developmental windows that should be manipulated in achieving contemporary city form.

The paper identified triple waves of developmental principles between 1861 and 2014 responsible for the current Nigerian urban form including the principle of urban centres as ‘produce marketing nodes’, ‘dual urbanism’ and ‘tropical architecture modernism’. Experience from history identified re-introduction of city wedge, vertical urbanism, culture driven public realm and low carbon technology as possible city form explorative windows. The use of natural edge and urban population ceiling influenced by ecological foot print were suggested for new cities. Exploration of pre colonial container features to redefine green belts around the component villages and townships that constituted sprawling metropolitan centres were considered as appropriate city wedge formulae. Planning policies that support intensification through vertical development on defined urban scale model are variants for built up areas. Public realm should be driven by architectural principles with inbuilt capability to narrate meaningful history, cultural affiliation and legible facades especially at the central business district. Since urban sprawl is automobile transportation dependent, the paper also recommended anti-sprawl principle that should emphasize clustering of low carbon public realm activities.

**Key Words:** City form, City Wedge, Public realm, Vertical urbanism, Compact City

## **1.0 Introduction**

Sustainability is the philosophical undercurrent driving United Nations Conference on human settlements. At the centre of this thinking process is city form which addresses the state of urban physical characteristics including spatial configuration, shape, coverage, density and economic productivity. Globally, metropolitan economy surpasses that of the rural settlements making effective entrepreneurship impossible without a close tie to the mega urban centres. This scenario is very important bearing mind the increasing demographic statistics on city growth. More than 50% of world's population live in cities and by 2030 it is projected that urban dwellers will outnumber rural settlements (UN-Habitat, 2013). National statistical shows sharp increase in urbanisation rate from 10.1% in 1960, to 45.9% in 2001 and a projection of 55.5% for year 2015 (Fadare, 2013). The observed rising urbanisation rate in Nigeria is responsible for the increase in large human settlements from 56 cities in 1953 to over 450 in 2000 using a threshold of 20,000 people (Kadiri 2009). The implication of this increase is that Nigeria of tomorrow will be influenced by how urban centres are conceptualised, built, managed and governed.

In the tradition of UN Conference on human settlements the ultimate goal of Habitat III is the generation of New Urban Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century cities (UN-Habitat, 2013). Aligning with this goal demands an understanding of sustainability on city scale with a solid foundation on equity, place making, inclusive prosperity and resiliency to both human and natural disasters. Different urban reform layers including city form should be influenced to achieve pragmatic sustainability in human settlements. Urban form addresses the physical characteristics that constitute human settlements including shape, size, density and spatial definition. Such ordered characteristics are not legible in sub Saharan African cities including Nigeria. The reality is that the present sprawling urban developmental processes cannot sustain Nigeria as an emerging economy. The aim of this paper is to explore diverse developmental windows towards contemporary National City form. The paper recognised urban morphogenesis defined as the study of city fabric based on assumption that dynamic cultural, economic, political, transportation and technological forces shape built environment on time scale. They constitute developmental strategies rooted in adopted driving philosophy. Sanders (2008) submission that urban morphogenesis is an analytical process for understanding specific 'place' form through evolutionary patterns justifies this approach.

## **2. National Urbanism in History**

Nigerian environmental critics often paint the gory tales of urban chaos typified by traffic congestions, drifting unemployed population, infrastructural breakdown, large slum concentration and unabated sprawl. Fadare (2013), resonating the worries of built environment professionals, desires to identify the root cause of disorderliness, failure and meaningless city form. If economic globalization and architectural internationalisation dominate the form of 20th century human settlements, why are these cities the way they are?. As noted by Ashimolowo (2007) ‘unless we have a good grasp of the past, we will not be able to understand the future’. Understanding the principles that generated the present city form and its shortcomings demands a closer look at past. National urban developmental process on time and space identified triple waves of developmental principles between 1861 and 2014 that influenced Nigerian urban landscape (Adejumo, 2012). The applied planning ideologies corresponded with Colonial Preparatory Period for the annexation of Nigeria as a geographic entity (1861–1914); Nigeria as British Colony (1914–1960); and Independent Nigeria (1960 – 2014). Colonial Preparatory Period halted local worldview urbanism that established ethnic nationalities diverse human settlements. It was a transitional period from globally condemned slave trade dominated landscapes to the quest for alternative profitable natural resources to meet economic development of home country. Colonial Preparatory Period laid a foundation for rural Nigeria as natural produce sources and urban centres as produce marketing nodes.

Urban landscape policy for Nigeria as British Colony is traceable to a fragmentary developmental philosophy. Smith, *et al.* (2011) referred to this dualistic thinking as Cartesian paradigm that separates human system from natural systems in its *modus operandi*. The duality posture never sees man as equal. Cartesian paradigm is held accountable for human alienation, class differences and social injustice (Smith, *et al.* 2011). It drove the 3-dimensional implementation of British colonial ‘divide and rule’ philosophy. ‘Dual City’ urbanism was composed of European Reservation Areas (ERA) and native quarters (Immerwahr, 2007; UN Habitat, 2009). While ERA was planned on British Garden City model, the native areas maintained pre-colonial organic urban landscape with a wide green buffer not only as a developmental wedge but as a natural partition. The architecture of buildings was equally reflective of the planning principle. Detached dwelling units with

abundant verandas on generous residential gardens were typical of housing estates. Public buildings and churches adopted gothic art and architecture philosophy in the new Central Business District (CBD). The 1917 Town Improvement Ordinance legalised Cartesian philosophy that bred ERA, the green buffer and the organic native areas of the city. As noted by Fadare (2013) it evolved a new urban form that classifies her residents by their colour, race, and socio-economic class into high, medium and low densities. Dual urbanism never allowed for equity; use of revenues from resources was skewed towards provision of infrastructure for ERA; and prosperity shifted from the city state paramount rulers to the British Crown. It marked the end of City governance in Nigeria, eradication of indigenous city chamber of commerce in urbanised regions of the newly amalgamated nation. A decade before independence colonial era quietly introduced “tropical architecture modernism” as a morphological modifier of urban dualism.

‘Tropical architecture modernism’ was an applied Le Corbusier architectural modernism to tropical buildings and human settlements introduced by his associates in Chandigarh city building project - Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew (Immerwahr, 2007). By 1960 it had matured as a State developmental strategy. It did not tamper with colonial era urban values but simply renamed ERA as Government Reservation Area (GRA). It was a period of introduction of new neighbourhoods and towns at the city and metropolitan periphery in the mode of ERA. This era permits architecture of diverse foreign styles introduced by hordes of contractors and consultants who wrongly interpret mimesis in architectural art to mean transplanting buildings from Mediterranean coastlines, Dubai, London and American cities to hot and humid Nigeria without consideration for culture and climatic differences. The new urban actors including the political class, proponents, regulators and their consultants did not fully understand garden city philosophy that drove ERA. The results are developed housing estates and satellite towns that manifested advance symptoms of urban decay before completion. Adoption of ‘tropical modernism’ as an urban design style for post independent Nigerian settlements finally erode the role of culture in Nigerian human settlements. Profile of typical Nigerian urban form depicts cities framed by two types of slums. The first is the central slum which corresponds to the poorly improved organic native areas. Post-colonial military administrations then encouraged sub urban slum of immense proportion on flood plains and city fringes (Fadare 2014). UN-Habitat (2013) submission is that the scenario was created by weak urban planning principles, poor city management process, land regulation crisis,

speculative developers and total absence of city delimitation instruments. The glaring failure is inability to effectively unite the old native areas with GRA built on some form of Ebenezer Howard's garden city philosophy and post-independence poorly executed gridded new towns and neighbourhoods. Gyuse (2013) observation that urbanisation in Nigeria has grown without a conscious intention illuminates lack of urban philosophical foundation. He summed up characteristics of urbanization in Nigeria to include demographic and spatial growth without conscious planning; spatial expansion that did not accommodate adequate infrastructural provision; and urban centres without boundaries except the arbitrary 15 kilometres circular limit for state capitals and 5 kilometres for local government headquarters.

The hypothesis that nations with high rate of urbanization are nations with highest levels of GDP; and that as nations urbanize the contribution to GDP from agricultural sector declines is not totally tenable in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that there is no city state and necessary governing apparatus on ground. Much more, growth in urbanization rate experienced in Nigeria is driven by the politics of State and Local Government creation with a high reliance on resources outside the bioregion. In spite of political forces that shape post independent Nigerian cities, it is a global consensus that cities will remain the hubs of world financial, industrial and communication development on one hand and cultural nodes that celebrates political dynamism, improve productivity and engine room for human creativity. The 2012 National Urban Development Policy recognised city's prime position and advocated for a new "philosophy of urban planning, design, planning laws, regulations and standards to reflect the peculiarities and priorities of Nigerians" (NTWG, 2009). This gives credence to the submission that urban morphology should be nested on the philosophy of the people for economic, ecological and social sustainability. The call is connected to the established fact that the current planning system in Nigeria is traceable to colonial administration. More worrisome is the inability of agencies saddled with the responsibility of city spatial management to comprehend even inherited ordered planning apparatus. Spatial planning is in a state of culture shock. This is better understood from Manz (2003) explanation of culture shock as feelings of confusion, distress, mental agony, dual personality syndrome emanating from psychological strain of coping with values of dualism compounded by tropical architectural modernism that stigmatize anything traditional and vernacular. Fifty years after

independence city managers, policy makers and built environment professionals have no clue on what urban form will herald Nigeria as an emerging economy. Such national urban morphology transformation agenda should glean from history of urbanism with respect to city form evolution.

### **3. City Form in History**

The form of the city is a measure of human civilization. It is a product of many interacting forces emanating from diverse decisions taken by city people. The call for a new urban form equipped to meet human needs in a particular era is really not new. Peter Kropotkin prophetically saw the influence of electric power, intensive agricultural mechanisation and modern communication decades before their arrival in human developmental stage (Mumford, 1961). He envisaged a futuristic city form that would accommodate these variables. Ebenezer Howard's suggestion for a new urban form at the very beginning of twentieth century is hinged on shortcoming of city processes and the generated urban centres (Mumford, 1961). Ebenezer Howard for saw a urban form that would be equipped with adequate modern infrastructure; shrink the gap between the city and region; shrink the gap between economy and social infrastructure; and a city that consumes its natural land area. He then conceptualised Garden City to address these short comings and as framework for a humane city form. Garden city rejected suburbia, decentralised city functions to control congestion through the introduction of urban wedge as natural limit. His city delimitation is not only real but also influenced by demography and density. Howard ideal city was a city that met essential urban functions; a city of low ecological footprint; abundant public and private spaces; and a city that addressed food security for defined population.

As good as Garden City philosophy was, Mumford (1961) analysis revealed gross underestimation of gravitational pool of metropolitan economy and inbuilt capacity to break suggested city container. Unnecessary rooms were given to speculative developers especially industrialists and desperate individuals in need of shelters to violate the process of city growth in developing nations. The result is the present chaotic sprawl that overwhelms the developmental capacity of the landscapes. Definition of sprawl varies and it is better understood from observed characteristics. Gillham (2002) classified sprawl in to 4 groups

namely leapfrog (scattered), commercial strip, low density and large expanse of single use developments. Newman & Kenworthy (1999) identified automobile based transportation technological breakthrough, economic priorities that drove infrastructure and cultural forces as developmental processes that trigger sprawl. Urban sprawl in our case has nothing to do economic priorities. Neither is it a cultural trait because indigenous settlements are compact agrarian settlements contained by bioregional ecosystem. Urban sprawl in this nation is traceable to over 60 years of automobile transportation mode policy; abandonment of regional planning that once drove the economy of the nation for temporal crude oil economy; failed and myopic housing policies that satisfy the needs of less than 10% of the population forcing a greater majority to migrate to agricultural fringes in search of cheaper plots of land. Urban sprawl is a product of deliberate change from organic city system which allows purposeful and manageable growth to mechanical city developmental system. Mechanical growth process completely deletes living forms and encourages human needs and desires that generate profitability. The fall out of mechanical city development process is high ecological foot print. This is because megalopolis eats up productive agricultural land at the expense of the region. While organic cities are sustained by ecological economy modern metropolis is based on profit driven productive industrial economy and highly commercial consumptive economy. Mumford (1961) was an advocate of reintroduction of organic city limitation in a new dimension to halt the complete eradication of agriculturally productive urban fringes and peri urban rural lands. This is particularly necessary in Nigeria with technological limitation, financial incapacitation and dearth of proactive people based policies to drive regional crusade against food insecurity

Mechanical city developmental process was the hall mark of urban modernism and the principal actor is Le Corbusier- an architect, planner and artist (Mumford, 1961). Le Corbusier's architectural philosophy saw houses and cities as machines. He theorised urban form, within the greater concept of urban modernism, driven by concern for aesthetics, efficiency and accommodation of bulging population with abundant non-traditional western urban open space system. Core of this urbanism is the perception of space as a set of destinations where man commutes relying on automobile transportation mode (*Essential Architecture*, 2010). This encouraged a high interest in the construction of highways. Le Corbusier planning philosophy recognized the place of automobile to redefine urban morphology of the future; skyscrapers and CBD to transform urban landscape; and vertical buildings to accommodate bulging city population. Vertical city urbanism was displayed in

his Contemporary City scheme for three million people (*Essential Architecture*, 2010). The physical plan of Contemporary City was composed of group of sixty-story cruciform skyscrapers nested in rectangular park-like green infrastructures blocks with central transportation concourse. While the CBD skyscrapers were designed for the higher economic class other multi-storey buildings located in similar gardens away from the down town accommodated the working class. Economic class became a design tool in his contemporary vertical green city. The economic class stratification was later substituted for household size in the much improved Radiant City concept.

Radiant city vertical model manifested in Le Corbusier 1951 urban design works in Chandigarh the capital of Indian Punjab (Bremen, 2006). Major shortcoming of the city was inability to accommodate indigenous Indian culture in the conceptualisation of the three level metropolitan open space system namely leisure valley as a central park; sector parks; and individual green spaces around residential areas (Brolin, 1976). On a national scale the adoption of “tropical modernism” as an architectural style and urbanism for post independent offices and settlements truncated the agitation of very few Nigerian architects in nineteen sixties, especially Oluwole Olumuyiwa and Vaughan-Richards to accommodate indigenous culture as a modifier of dualism planning philosophy (Immerwahr, 2007). Influencing urban morphology for a people should delve into understanding architecture of prevailing buildings, group of buildings and schematic urban pattern. Such comprehension should focus on internal spatial organisation of traditional neighbourhood emphasising sense of purpose and environmental harmony (Architecture of Delhi, 2013).

#### **4. New City Form Explorative Windows**

The organizational sequence in built environment is culture bound and subject to change on three levels. First, culture itself is very dynamic. Secondly, change is often driven by the needs for better alternatives. Finally change is influenced by people’s aspiration (Architecture of Delhi, 2013). These changes may be unconscious and unnoticed in everyday life activities. They may also be conscious and collective meaningful environmental planning and design goals. Generated meanings by the pattern of building form are influenced by the link to some referent. Building form in itself is a symbol rooted in the referent to which the idea is associated. Variables of built form that express meaning are numerous. They are value based and interact with one another in the process of city building (Architecture of Delhi, 2013).



This has to do with the fact that cities are not products but processes with value based forces capable of kick starting developmental reactions. Diverse forces operate simultaneously to generate unique city form at a point in history. In her study of forces that created Islamic cities, Abu-Lughod, (1987) identified religious belief, social organizational system, governance, prevailing technology and geomorphology. Reviewed literature identified city wedge, vertical urbanism, culture driven public realm urban architecture and low carbon technology as possible city form explorative windows.

#### *4.1 City Wedge*

Twenty first century Nigerian urban landscape is a mosaic of organic inner core native areas framed by disjointed gridiron planned satellite neighbourhoods that fades into blighted and sprawling peri urban low income settlements where development is ahead of physical planning. This is not particularly pleasant in a country with high population growth rate and massive migration of youthful rural poor to cities. If no deliberate effort is made, the blotting out of rural landscapes and colonisation of towns and villages will worsen the capacity of big cities to feed itself. Re introduction of effective organic city limitation is one of the numerous urban reform layers necessary to drive much need city form change. There should be a consensus for the definition of physical growth limit as against the military governance blanket application of 15 kilometres and 5 kilometres for State and Local Government capitals respectively. Possible options include the use of prominent natural edge and urban population ceiling influenced by ecological foot print. While green wedge is possible in new cities, a different approach is needed in existing large cities, metropolis and mega cities. Exploration of transformative process of primitive human settlement culture to redefine green belts around the component villages and townships that constitutes the metropolis may be useful. This demands understanding the boundaries defined by moats, walls or natural features and reliance on urban regeneration strategy sympathetic to long term green infrastructure principles.

#### *4.2 Vertical Urbanism*

Le Corbusier's vertical urbanism focused on absorbing high city population and the release of the landscape for urban open spaces development. Consideration of skyscrapers in major cities demands a redefinition of city block standards for clustering purposes. Adopted planning and design variables for his vertical urbanism were based on existing structural

standards. *Essential Architecture* (2010)) noted that his cruciform standard was derived from the height of 1913 Woolworth building in New York while the width resembled Eiffel Tower in Paris. The 400 meters distance between the towers coincided with the average distance between Metro stations in Paris. The same distance was used between streets. Recently, Salingaros (2006) questioned the reliance on high-rise apartments and office towers to achieve ultra-high density sustainability urbanism. His submission is that high –rise urbanism is dependent on availability of adequate energy with a high ecological footprint. There is a need to be conscious of what height should be adopted in the use of high rise structures and availability of power for functional purposes. High rise buildings allow contemporary compact city developmental principles. Quest for urban sustainability strategies encouraged the recent interest in compact city principles. Sustainability on urban compactness platform is driven by hydrocarbon resources conservation and desire for low carbon living conceptualised on local architectural design and planning acceptable globally (Burgess, 2004; and Jenks, 2004). This is in addition to inherent urban economic, social, cultural and political benefits.

Compact city stresses the importance of containment not only through green buffer but intensification and maximum use of already urbanised land. Intensification stresses the importance of increase in city density from the existing levels. Compact city is sympathetic to high rise structures for mopping up excess urban population and releasing ample land for metropolitan open space system. But city compactness depends on targeted density which varies from one city to another and from residential and industrial parks to central business districts. Planning policies and strategy that advocate for urban growth boundary complimented by urban intensification is considered to be potentially effective sustainable city development processes. Such compactness positively influences urban form. But at what scale should compactness be introduced? That is, should compactness be on regional, metropolitan, city, central business district or residential neighbourhood scales? (Burgess, 2004; and Jenks, 2004). This in addition to agreeing on appropriate spatial model to accommodate compactness. That is should it be applied to new towns or old city sections?

#### *4.3 Culture Driven Public Realm Architecture*

Public realm is composed of civic buildings and different hierarchy of open spaces especially in Central Business District. Civic buildings including city hall, secretariat complexes,

schools, hospitals, courts, museums and green spaces hierarchy in CBD carry the image of the city. An important consideration for central business district conceptualisation is the art of “place making” which involves provision of distinctive, lively, appealing and memorable centres. This is currently missing in Nigerian cities. Place making influences incorporation of meaning generating values in public realm. As noted by Wortham-Galvin (2008), the focus of designers is that place attributes emanate from acceptable socio-cultural values. In recent years, landscape architects, urban designers and policy planners borrowed the term symbolic economy from urban sociologist to conceptualise meaningful down towns. Symbolic economy emphasizes the use of culture to create unique spaces, to brand human settlements and to provide creative advantages that enhance prosperity over and above other cities. Underpinning CBD planning and design with strong cultural expression through integrated artworks in civic buildings and public spaces project values to tourists and city people. This is about urban architectural principles with inbuilt ability to narrate meaningful history, cultural affiliation, legible and readable statements and supporting ceremonial activities. Achieving such design philosophy explores semiotics to understand cultural signs and symbolic values in the choices and specification of forms, materials, colours, sizes and landscape features. Dushkes (2012) quoting Samuel Mockbee believes that “best way to make real architecture is by letting a building evolve out of the culture and place”.

#### *4.4 Low Carbon Technology*

Sprawl is automobile transportation dependent and this is enhanced by a geometry that links man to road networks. Human beings are not connected to roads but are linked to public realm structures including churches, mosques, school, medical facilities and place of work. Anti-sprawl thinking then emphasizes clustering among the activities that man is naturally attracted to trigger low carbon planning. Low carbon developmental framework revolves around four sectors in its basic form namely “renewable energy; green building and energy efficiency technology; energy-efficient infrastructure and transportation; and recycling and waste-to-energy” (Chapple, 2008). Adopted low carbon technologies should be made compatible to the ways of life of local people through effective policy intervention rooted in local economic strengths. This provides ample opportunity for stakeholders to define policies that will mould urban landscapes towards improved liveability using compatible and economic low carbon technologies. Such low carbon development is greatly influenced by local planning and design philosophy that influences urban developmental framework.

## 5. Conclusion

Preparatory meeting towards Habitat III demanded new city form as one of the many urban reform layers for all countries. Suggestions that the conference and its participatory process should be nested on the principles and achievements of previous UN sustainability principles of low carbon conscious design and planning is informative. It resonated the core objective of Nigeria's Vision 2020 which is to "place Nigeria in the bracket of top 20 largest economies of the world by the year 2020" (NTWG, 2009). Such economic growth will be midwived by sustainable villages, towns and cities with consciously redefined city form. This demands understanding reform layers that will drive the much needed change. The layers include "sewerage coverage; urban public transport; parking policy; civic amenities; urban land ceiling legislation; water supply; of waste water; transfer city planning functions to the elected local bodies; unemployment, social and economic inequalities, unsustainable energy consumption patterns, urban sprawl, high percentages of people living in slums and high levels of vulnerability to natural disasters" (UN-Habitat, 2013).

Planning for urban morphological change requires detailed understanding of contextual city formative forces including economic magnetism, demographic rate, liveability and technological inputs (Mumford, 1961). Re introduction of city wedge based on robust stakeholders submission; meaningful vertical urbanism, culture driven public realm urban architecture and compatible low carbon technology are identified as possible windows that should be underpinn by a new city form philosophy. The new city form paradigm should enhance the derivation of localised urban regenerative model with a high capacity to transform the existing unproductive sprawling urban landscape into liveable, low carbon and defined density settlements. The new city form philosophy and derived regenerative model should be conscious of reverse culture shock phenomenon. This paper is in agreement with Kendeke (2007) submission that the "best way to beat reverse culture shock is to be aware of how it might strike". First many professionals and policy makers schooled in the current planning era will care less about the new thinking. This calls for patience and understanding to accommodate all urban stakeholders in the new futuristic thinking. Much more is the expectation of deliberate castigation by donor agencies, developers and governmental bodies that benefited immensely from statuesque. Planning and design solutions must them explore multicultural variables to cushion imagined fears and urban aspiration.

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