

Research Article

An Appraisal of Socio-Cultural Housing Features of Space Utilization  
in a Multi-Ethnic Setting in Nigeria

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Abstract

Objectives Housing growth beyond been a necessity to stressing culture content in activity spaces entails culture integration in housing delivery systems. Emphasis on culture attributes in Nigeria housing sector arouse due to conflict amid spatial provisions and indigenous social pattern of household activities. Remarkably, this study strives to unveil core cultural attributes of dwellings focusing on major ethnic communities and highlighting design factors and patterns exhibited by typical ethnic dwelling in the study area. Qualitative content analysis of an ethnographic account of dwellings' spatial layout of major ethnic groups in the region was applied for the research. The attributes identified were compared across ethnic groups, reduced to themes in developing activity with activity-space relationship and then analysed to discover common design patterns. Findings obtained revealed distinct arrangements with similar layout in activity spaces, which indicates a sense of semblance in core space use. This outcome suggests that sustainable housing policy and design can emanate from formal indigenously established core culture space utilization.

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1. Introduction

Advancement in housing needs has risen beyond its inevitability in developing nations, to searching for housing quality. Thus require the determination of a sustainable delivery process and pattern of housing choice by inhabitants. In effect, occupants' social activities and activity patterns are crucial elements to be discovered is attaining housing sustainability. Therefore, recognizing the culture of inhabitants becomes critical as occupants' assess housing performance based on family and cultural norms (Morris and Winter, 1975). Although, the reflection of traditional patterns of culture in urban housing was refuted by Ikejiofor, (1998) cultural principles kept on manifesting in self-built and transformed urban public housing in Nigeria, with compounds occasionally inhabiting residents of diverse ethnic background. Furthermore, in spite of the



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**1. Introduction**

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scarcity and non-affordability of housing due to urban population rise, cultural factors tend to influence the physical features of housing space use (Awotona, 1990). However, the impact of urbanization on housing scarcity contributed to cultural diffusion and acculturation of urban inhabitants in their quest for shelter and has critical influence on the nature and quality of housing in the country. For instance, in the past decades over 75% of Nigeria's urban houses were rated substandard by Jagun, (1983) with slow sign of improvement (Olotuah and Bobadoye, 2011). In their studies, (Awotona, 1990; Ibem, et al., 2011; Jiboye, 2009; Ilesanmi, 2010) avidly emphasized housing dissatisfaction due to cultural exclusion particularly among tenants and public housing owners. The situation has undermined the projection of housing delivery in urban settings. As a result, this study uncovers the cultural core attributes in dwellings of major ethnic groups in northern states of Nigeria using qualitative factor analysis to categorize findings from ethnographic participant observation into latent factors and themes. The result obtained from the study indicates similarity in core space use across the ethnic groups' in spite of the disparity in layout arrangement. This outcome is a useful guide to developers in the provision and re-positioning of housing in the study area where cultural factors are significant housing characteristics.

## **2. Background Studies**

Nations have had social histories that have shaped their housing needs before contact with civilization. In Australia for instance, the Aboriginal housing reform of 2001 witnessed stakeholders confronted with resisting acculturated civilization and pressure from indigenous Aboriginals demanding the consideration of socio-cultural spatial practice in housing design (Memmott and Chambers, 2003; Potter, 2012). Social factors influenced by climate, poverty and congestion were to be harmonized with ventilation standards; conventional living spaces; and western perception of domestic spaces. Thus, Porter, (2009) adopted the concept of aligning 'supply services' with 'demand services' conceptualized as space recognition by negotiating cultural values and existing standards in housing responsiveness. Also, future uncertainties, planning for next generations are echoed as the desire for more housing space by inhabitants (Khan, 2014), but culture actualization is significant in the lifespan of household interaction with their buildings. Against the backdrop this study builds a theoretical framework based on the concept of emic and etic cross cultural approach. Then, proceeded to relate housing and culture towards assessing multi-ethnic space use features.

### **2.1 Emic and Etic Principle in Housing Delivery Mechanism**

The Emic and Etic approach has been adapted in harmonizing conflicting universal views and concepts with cultural peculiarities in cross cultural research (Patton, 2002). It is conceptually adopted in valuing diverging opinions on indigenous housing perception across cultural boundaries Sofield, (2010) particularly in culture sensitive communities. In the context of this study, interpreting the meaning of cultural attributes



of space use by the ethnic communities constitute the emic paradigm, while the conservative etic paradigm resides in provision of housing based on universal standards and national building regulations. The existing conflict between these perspectives creates unintended gap in housing delivery systems in culture sensitive communities. Therefore studies have identified culture responsive space recognition as a way out. However, articulating the meaning in space use by the core ethnic groups towards identifying core appropriate values in order to establish thresholds appears uncommon. As it is a necessary foundation for actualizing the process. Thus, this study attempts to fill this gap in the context under study. Moreover, Ayoola and Amole (2014) have asserted that history, culture, economics, and social traits of people are constituents for better housing.

## **2.2 Housing and Inhabitants' Cultural Norms**

Although, Olotuah (2009) argues that new house forms have evolved with old forms fast disappearing, these new forms are not devoid of the influence of inhabitants' cultural values on spatial configurations. Certainly, Africa's long history in establishing underlying principles and meaning, coherency and symbolism in space recognition and interaction (Prussin, (1974), is reflected in cultural attributes of space use and should not be undermined. Besides, social analysts have focused on discovering recognized patterns that manifests overtime in different settings (Zerubavel, 2007). In this regard, Ozaki, (2002) opined that the core determinants of spatial composition of a house are its cultural matrix, then modified by the non-cultural factors. As in cultural sensible buildings that echoes potentials and value such as in traditional environments established for sightseeing (Dincyurek and Turker, 2007). Beyond that is the self-esteem users derive while interacting with the spatial network which remains intangible yet crucial. Arguably, emotional comfort is therefore linked to housing arrangement with a natural instinct of spatial satisfaction (Khan, 2014). In addition space use manifests social activities which in turn are develop from culture inclination of households (Rapoport, 1998).

On the overall, this literature analysis focuses on the significance of inhabitants' cultural norms in shaping the configuration of housing designs. Considering the context of urban environment where standards are highly recommended, housing delivery systems can rely on the recognition space generated from the emic and etic principles.

## **2.3 The Multi- Ethnic Settings and Their Bonding Attributes**

Six major ethnic groups of Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe and Gwari are found to be dominant within the central and northern states of Nigeria (Mustapha, 2006). Typical households in each ethnic group in



selected states of Niger, Sokoto, Katsina, Benue, Adamawa and Borno were studied. They were examined in order to establish the major attributes of their housing layout, towards highlighting the similarities in their spatial arrangement. Although, each of these ethnic communities differ in cultural traits and also ethnic norms which depicts cultural identity (Igwara, 2001) their intertwined language families (Mustapha, 2006) is a basis for their commonality and enable their integration. For instance, Temple and Temple (Temple and Temple, 1967) asserts that only a dialectical difference exists between Nupe and Gwari. Also, Nupe, Fulani of Adamawa (Yola) and Borno where the Kanuri predominates have had their social and physical layout influenced by the Fulani emirs in the eighteenth century (Boyowa, 2005). Similarly, the Hausa ethnic group had the domination of the Fulani kingdom between 1804 and 1810 (Nwanodi, 1989). Moreover, there exist semblance and uniformity in housing patterns across the major regions in the country (Olotuah and Bobadoye, 2011). In addition, these groups have lived mutually as communal neighbours adopting each other's languages and cultures with socio-economic and socio-political benefits (Otite, 1990). This justifies the possible existence of commonalities in their space use. In a heterogeneous urban housing Olowoyo and Khan (2012), suggested the consideration and reflection of core cultural intangibles towards sustainability rather than kindle user dissatisfaction by ignoring their cultural factors. Thus, necessitates the need to identify core attributes of culture related to space use that can be adapted in urban housing delivery.

#### **2.4 Spatial Configuration of House Form of Major Ethnic Communities**

Although, it is argued that ethnic groups in Nigeria have cultural contrast in their social content, they shares some similarities in social activities and space use which appears in the configuration of their layouts. Thus, meaning of spaces is significantly defined by the activity around it in justifying its spatial nature. This can be critically attributed to their key occupation such as farming and the regional geography.

Scholars in the last two decades have advocated for socio-culture inclusion in Nigerian housing schemes despite the dynamic process of housing and steadiness in the production process (Daramola, 2006). This is evident from the morphology of the initial house form transformed by including basic household socio-cultural activities.

##### **2.4.1 Hausa Compound**

The Hausas have had influence on other ethnic neighbours within the region. A typical Hausa compound comprises of an outside open space, an entrance hall which opens into an outer courtyard where senior males of the compound are living. The inner section is accessed through a transition which leads to the central courtyard where the women live and carry out domestic life (Boyowa, 2005; Muhammad-Oumar,



2008). Home, (sometimes a group of buildings) reflects kingship structure configured to suit social associations of its inhabitants as an expression of their cultural perception of man's relationship with fellow man and the world (Nwanodi, 1989). Even though same concept is repeated in other compounds, they vary in sizes, patterns and arrangement. Flexibility in function, changes the pattern of space use sometimes across seasons in most compounds. For instance, rooms are used for sleeping during cold and rainy seasons while the courtyards accommodate same function during the heat period.

#### **2.4.2 Fulani Compound Layout**

Fulani ethnic can be categorized into the nomads who move across state boundaries living in makeshift shelters and those in settled communities. While the settled Fulani adopted the similitude of Hausa spatial concepts as a result of interactions and social contacts, the nomads use temporary structures with scattered huts accessed from various routes in the absence of a defined entrance. The settled Fulani on the other hand live in compounds with define entrance hut, fore and inner courtyards, with rooms around the courtyards.

#### **2.4.3 Tiv Housing Layout**

Typical Tiv compound is curvilinear with sleeping and grain storage huts arranged around a central hut which functions as living room, similar to the entrance hall of the Hausas (Philips, 2010). The oval compound concept allows for social equality with equal visual and physical proximity to the courtyard, a cultural attribute associated with the Tiv culture (Ikejiofor, (1998). Between the central hut (Ate) and the room lies the courtyard for domestic activities. Although the huts are not attached to one another they form the boundary of the compounds. In complex compounds with multiple nucleus families, dumb-bell arrangement is adopted by brethren of same mother; while multiple signifies siblings from a polygamous family background (Osasona, 2007).

#### **2.4.4 Kanuri Compound Layout**

The Kanuri major settlements have mainly round huts in circular layouts fenced with matting and few rectangular mud structures which are surrounded by mud walls (Temple and Temple, 1967). Each hut is secluded with a mat fence around the entrance creating a private activity area at the entrance into the huts. Women carry out private domestic activities in these spaces while major domestic chores are done within the larger courtyard.



#### 2.4.5 Nupe Compound Layout

Nupe compounds consist of huts usually surrounded by thick wall fence; series of clusters of round, later rectangular huts are grouped for a kingship of brothers from the same paternal descendants. Each cluster is linked with a smaller entrance hall beside the main entrance hall which is usually distinguished by size. Rooms open to a central courtyard where domestic activities are carried out. Larger families separate female section by using huts to demarcate additional courtyards leaving an entry path into the women section.

#### 2.4.6 Gwari Compound

Typical Gwari compound accommodates multi-family units each with a cluster of huts around a courtyard similar to the Nupe. These huts provide shelter for inhabitants, chickens, stables, guests and corn storage. Although the compounds usually have a central entrance hall, each cluster has an exit leading outside (Temple and Temple, 1967).

In summary, these characterize the distinct activity spaces of the ethnic groups. Typical layout configurations of the various ethnic communities are illustrated in figures 2 and 3 respectively.

### 3. Methodology

In the first instance, dominant ethnic groups were established for ethnographic study of households' spatial configuration. The study operationalized factors based on the theory of Man Environment Relations (MER) by relating culture components with space configuration (Rapoport, 2000). As a result, factors of social values, family lifestyle, social activities, family structure and social identity were considered and related with spatial layout of the ethnic dwellings. Conditional survey method was adopted to purposively study 15 household in each ethnic domain. Focused participant observation was adopted in deriving the emic perception of ethnics' socio-cultural activities and space use pattern (Patton, 2002). Hence, the consideration of salient issues of dissimilar and minority space use which guided the adoption of qualitative analytic technique. Surely, salient issues are better magnified through qualitative techniques (Creswell, 2015; Brewer, 2000; Blommaert and Jie, 2010). Thus, exploring the data from field observation via qualitative factor analysis, the study identified 20 item variables through constant comparison analysis strategy as underlying themes use to assess the spatial configurations of the ethnic groups in order to determine similarities in their core space use. Although, constant comparison analysis is ideal for developing codes and going back to field, it has been modified for analysing data collected on one time



field engagement research study (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Next, qualitative comparative analysis with domain analysis technique was used to develop semantic functional relationship (Spradley, 1979), between the themes and activity space use, compared between the six ethnic groups via focused inquiry by participant observation.

Then, semantic relationship ascertain the relationship between the concept of activities with spaces; and where such activities take place in the dwellings for each ethnic group. The relationship patterns developed are represented with gamma diagrams and correlated to discover the similarities and common pattern (Figure 1).

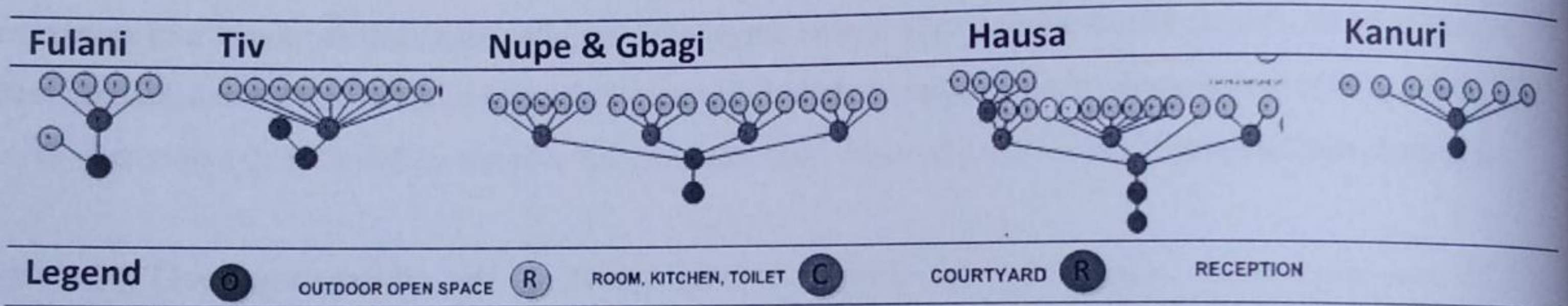


Figure 1 Showing the flow similarities in layout pattern arrangement across ethnic communities.

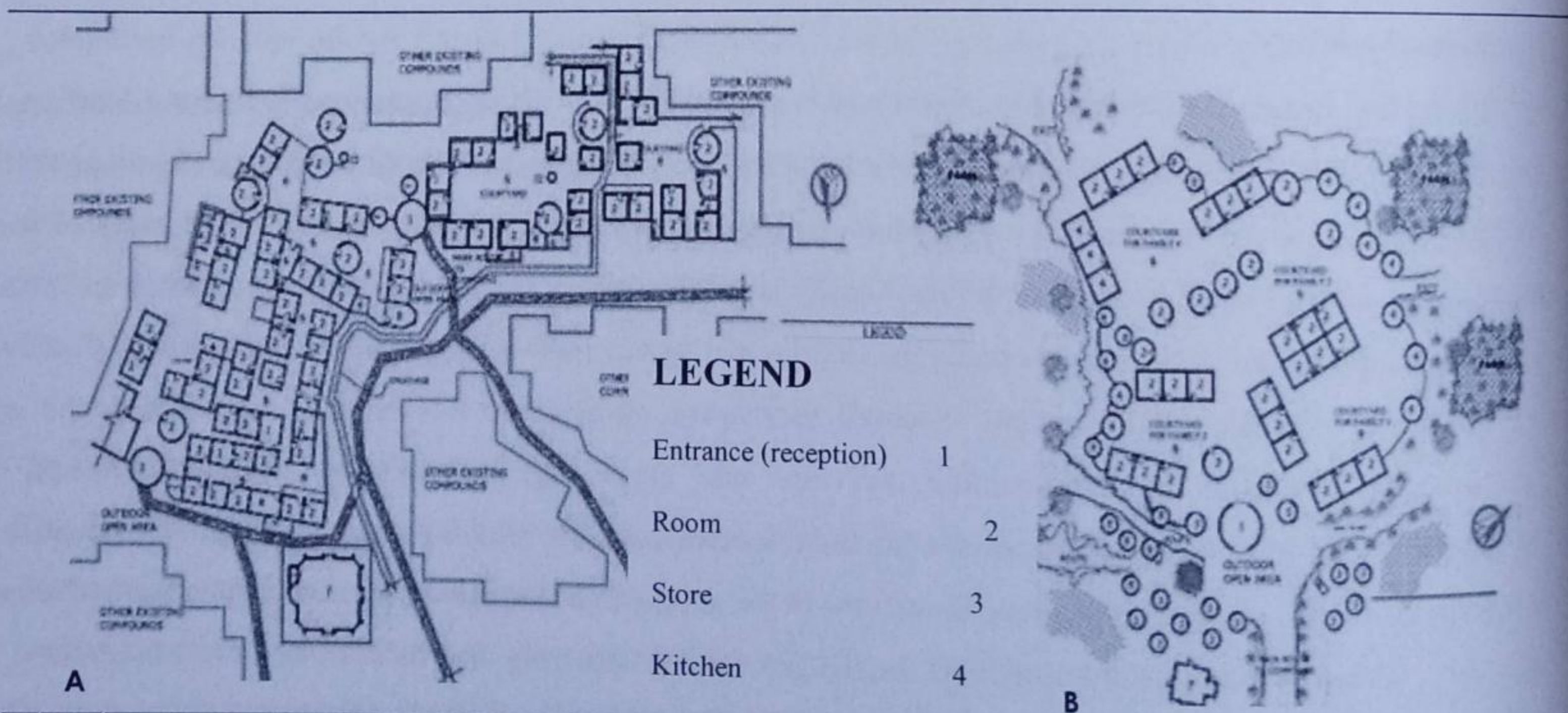


Figure 2. Typical Nupe (A) and Gwari (B) compound layouts respectively.



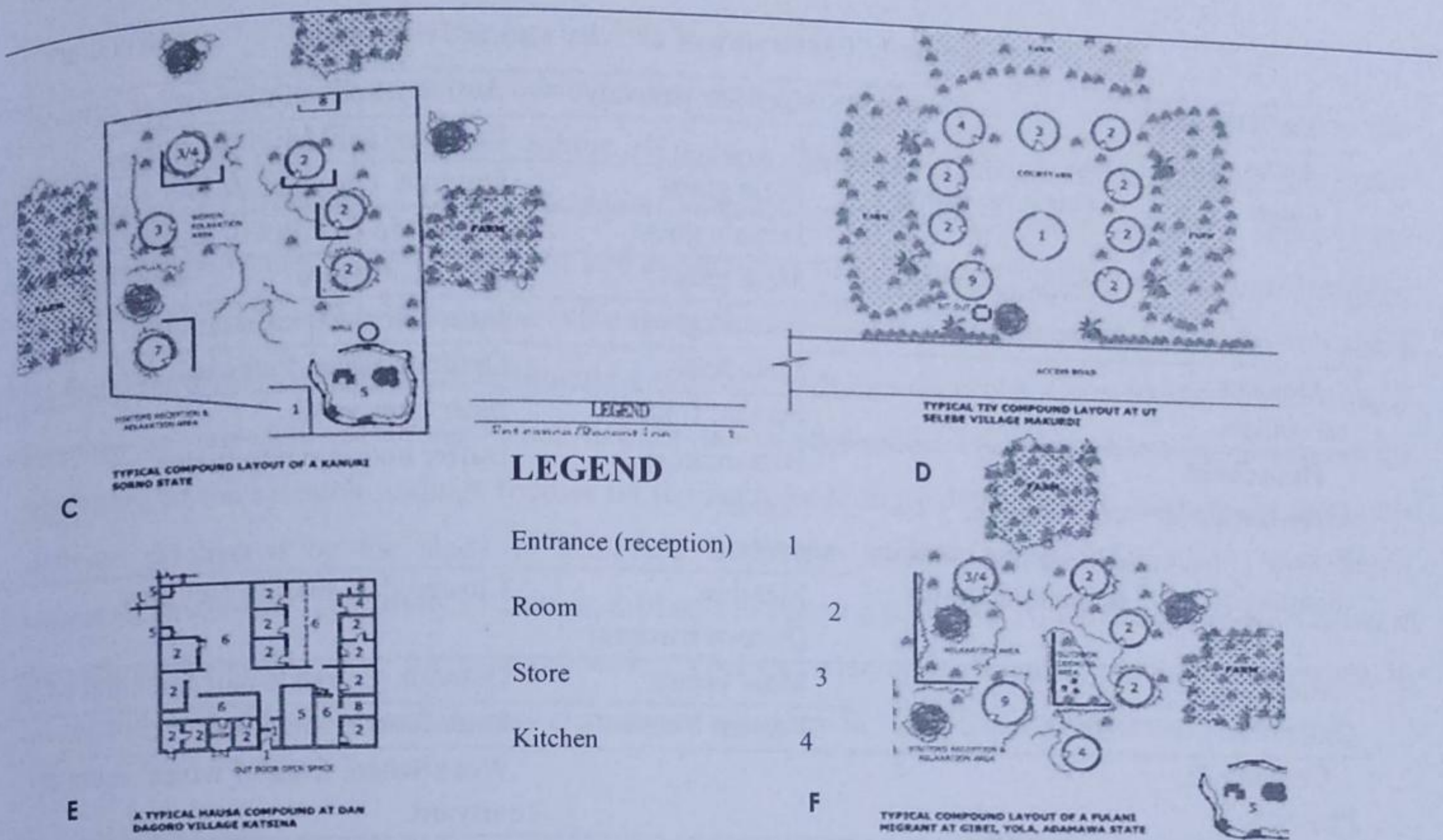


Figure 3. Typical Kanuri (C), Tiv (D), Hausa (E) and Fulani (F) compound layouts respectively

#### 4. Outcome and Findings

##### 4.1 Taxonomy of activities and activity spaces

Qualitatively, variables identified were subjected to factor analysis (reducing the chunk of variables by grouping related tangible elements) through taxonomic representation. This was adopted to determine the latent variables in the relationship. A taxonomic representation with XY relationship where Y= Activity; X= Activity spaces, and function as the relationship between X and Y was therefore developed to pictorially view varying space uses. Table 1 shows the taxonomic presentation of accessibility; guest reception and overnight accommodation; outdoor relaxation; household distribution; social gathering spaces; cooking space; and gender restrictions and connections pattern. These formed the core space use attributes across the diverse ethnic communities.



**Table 1. Taxonomy of activity and activity space**

Activity (X)		Gender privacy	Activity Space (Y)
Accessibility			Entrance hall, Multiple exits
Guest	Guest reception	Male guest	Outdoor, entry hall & house heads' room
		Female guest	Courtyard & Front of female rooms
Outdoor relaxation	Overnight Guest accommodation	Male guest	Outer courtyard
		Female guest	Inner female apartment
		Male folks	Outdoor space, Entry hall & Outer yards
		Female folks	Inner courtyards
Household organization & Family distribution	Social connections, Adolescent children & ethnic identity	Hierarchical & Gender separated	Buffer huts and courtyards
		Flexible (Screen barriers)	Clustered & sharing facilities
Social Gatherings		Male venue	Outdoor, Entrance hall & central court.
		Female Venue	Inner female courtyard
Cooking & Pantry			Wet kitchen, front of wives' room & courtyard.

Multi-functionality associated to some activity spaces revealed the social meaning in space use. Such spaces are recognised by terms not usually derived from the function(s) it hosts. Also, activity tools are impermanent due to the multi-functionality of the space. Rather they are arranged as the activities are set to be performed. Courtyard is identified as the core activity space as it accommodates domestic activities extending from enclosed spaces. For example, cooking activities combines kitchen and inner courtyard spaces as activity space. Most compounds visited had more than one courtyard with multiple accesses into the compounds, habitually gender influenced or public-private defined. Outdoor areas are multi-functional open spaces functionally linked with the entrance hall. The study identified layout patterns among the ethnic groups with the discovery of a key pattern that include defined outdoor activity areas intangibly fused to the building through the entrance hall. Male dominated living areas; fore courtyard; transitional spaces; and female dominated inner courtyard. Enclosed spaces such as rooms are usually linked to the courtyards. Space use tends to exhibit sensitivity to gender dominance. Although this arrangement can be in clusters depending on the household size and the ratio of male to female members, the pattern remains consistent. The existing complexity that occurs while describing and relating space and function in traditional house over contemporary design, (Habraken, 1998) calls for consideration of minority space use.



## 5. Conclusion

Findings shows significant space use attributes and core spaces that are crucial in housing delivery in the region. Similarly, it has shown that culture responsive design is crucial because, it thrive the socio-economic drive of households as the nucleus of socialization and integration in the family unit and the society at large. It also appeases the need and requirement of inhabitants' housing satisfaction. Thus, the findings of this study clearly shows that cultural attributes in activities and space use are crucial to housing consumption within the region hence should be reflected in design decisions. Consideration of activities is therefore an essential requirement that defines the configuration of space. Most significantly, the implication of the research findings focuses on the need for housing developers to consider the space use attributes discovered by the study in achieving qualitative housing designs and sustain orderliness. Moreover, developers' sensitivity to culture attributes in housing provision will enhance the satisfaction of the occupants and the value for their properties. Thereby, overcoming housing provision challenges, by successfully and ably incorporating core elements of space use in both policy and execution.

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