

Integration of Cultural Values in the Design of Event Centre in Minna Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Events in urban settings serve as a place of convergence of people for economic, educational religious and cultural activities. The most uniquely characterized spatial transactions are those that are cultural thus, it is expected that such unique spatial needs are integrated in the design of event centers. Contrastingly, most public spaces in Nigerian are devoid of indigenous people's spatial needs and cultural values. This more profound with minority ethnic group. Consequently, this research qualitatively explored the cultural perception and values of public spaces of the Gbagyi and Nupe ethnic group in central Nigeria. The content analysis of information elicited showed the convergence of three key spatial attributes that are required towards the fulfilment of spatial needs of the Gbagyi and Nupe ethnic groups. Most importantly, its possibility to integrate cultural values and perception of people in the design of urban public spaces such as event centers.

Keywords; *Architecture, Cultural Values, Gbagyi, Nupe, Heritage, Space.*

Introduction

Cultural values are constituted in indigenous people's world view and what they hold in high esteem (Türkyilmaz, 2016). These values are manifested in different forms and that is what differentiates one community from another (Longley & Duxbury, 2016; Woodside, Hsu, & Marshall, 2011). Accordingly, cultural values are established in community's traditional ways of living which get passed down from one generation to another (Price, Walker, & Boschetti, 2014). As such cultural values form the basis of identity for a given group of people either in the belief system or ways of doing things (Brown & Weber, 2012).

It therefore means that such common values within a given group of people can also be established on their interaction with space (Parsaee, Parva, & Karimi, 2014). This uniqueness in spatial transactions of each community therefore contributes to the spatial character of vernacular architecture, maintained for a very long period (Muhammad & Said, 2015b). However, it was a general norm across Africa in the early 1960s when new states in Africa began the process of nation building and commissioned foreign Architects for large building projects. The consequence of this

was influence of foreign culture in such designs (Beeckmans, 2017). Ironically, integration of native functions and cultural practices in architecture does help to support a country's identity (Ibrahim, 2016). More so, the public spaces such as event centers serve as points of congregation for cultural activities or traditional rituals. Undoubtedly, the livelihood in communities or cities is enhanced by the availability of social amenities including planned public spaces (Bishop & Marshall, 2017; Kayode, Mohd Hisyam, & Ismail, 2013). The ability of these public spaces to accommodate people's feelings distinguishes them as important factor for measuring quality of urban life.

Sometimes, religious places in the cities are used in place of event centers; although the space and comfort required during worship differ from that for entertainment or other non-religious functions (Maahsen-Milan & Simonetti, 2011). Spatial transactions are culture specific, so is the space required for their performance (Berker, 2011; Isah, 2016; Muhammad & Said, 2015b). Social gatherings such as wedding, naming ceremonies among others are a central feature in each culture. However, there is little or no apathy in Nigeria towards the incorporation of cultural norms of the

people and their perception about public spaces (Okanlawon, Ayorinde, Odunjo & Omolola, 2016). Minority ethnic groups in some communities are the most vulnerable to the loss of cultural values and their integration in government policies (Adegbija, 2004). Contextually, the Gbagyi and Nupe ethnic groups belong to the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. Interestingly, the Gbagyi and the Nupe Ethnic groups are found to constitute the major population of Niger State. However, only few studies (Ayuba, 2016 and Muhammad, 2017) exist on the cultural transactions of these ethnic groups. Against this background is the necessity to investigate appropriate integration of spatial and cultural perception of indigenous people in the development of event centres in Minna, Niger State.

Cultural Values and Public Spaces

Public spaces add physical value to cities as they offer arenas for discourse and relaxation to the people (van Melik & van der Krabben, 2016). Spaces such as parks, theatres and like event centers are conceptualized in different forms. The point of convergence of both the built and unbuilt spaces is congregation of people in the city; in contrast with the people's private abodes (van Melik & van der Krabben, 2016).

However, the proper functioning of these spaces requires incorporation of cultural perception and values of the people especially in a multicultural environment (Saulton, Bülthoff, de la Rosa & Dodds, 2017). More often, the integration of culture in the planning of the urban environment has a trickle-down effect because it enhances the quality of life of a large community. Similarly, people are able to establish their ownership of space and their sense of history (Colomb, 2011). The sense of place contributes an important cultural value to the society.

Accordingly, architecture has important role to play in the society's social function, economy, technology and shelter. As such architecture is expected to serve in the development of spaces as well as reflect the society's cultural values (Dijokiene, Navickiene & Riaubiene, 2016); and, in evolving vernacular-inspired design solutions (Xiaoyu & Beisi, 2015). This is because each culture is characterised by its unique solution to spatial needs, sometime even adoptable by other people outside the cultural community.

Cultural landscape of Niger State

Niger State is situated in central Nigeria with two major ethnic groups of Nupe, and

Gbagyi (Nasarafu, 2011). The Nupe call themselves *Nupeci* and allude to their dialect as Nupe. Even though the Nupe settlements are mostly found in Niger state, they could also be found in the neighboring states of Kwara, and Kogi states (Blench, 2010). The Gbagyi are found widespread in Niger State as well as other neighbouring states of Kaduna, Plateau and the Federal Capital Territory. The Gbagyi worldview is concretized in the Gbagyi way of life, rites of passage, rituals, religion. And notable among Gbagyi ceremonial activities is the *Knunu* (Ayuba, 2016).

Research Methodology

The understanding of cultural perception of people about their space requires a qualitative system inquiry (Creswell, 2012; Galvin, 2015; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013; Shopes, 2011). As such for this study, two methods of data elicitation; i.e. interviews and participants observations were employed. This is because of the inherent advantages of complimentary role of the dual methods of data elicitation. The interviews conducted offered more insight into the phenomena observed as well as the feelings, thoughts, and what goes on in the natural world of those being studied (Forsey, 2010).

Conduct of Interviews

The interviews were conducted on two categories of respondents. The first category were the professionals or the operators as well as managers of event centers in Minna. The second category were the natives, i. e. the Nupe and the Gbagyi. The interview questions for the professionals focused on the challenges faced in accommodating the cultural needs of the natives during ceremonies. The interview questions for the natives focused on the spatial needs in the performance of their ceremonies.

The conduct of 16 interviews on the natives showed the attainment of saturation point (Glaser & Strauss, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2011), while the saturation point for the professionals was reached after 7 interviews were conducted on the event managers. The early saturation of data for the professionals can be attributed to the homogeneity of the respondents in the type of services they offered and as such there was little or no variability in the nature of their responses (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). All the interviews were recorded with a tape recorder and transcribed into text for content analysis.

However, most of the interviews were

conducted in the native languages of the respondents which were translated into English at the point of transcription. The observed data were collected using sketches and drawings of three event centers. These are explained in the next section.

Participant Observation

Participant observations do offer a direct empirical evidence about the study phenomena and thus 10 event centers were purposely selected out of the twenty well established event centers found within the state capital, to ensure that capacity and locations of the event centers were fairly captured.

The observations revealed several types of spaces allocated for the performance of events in different forms, from permanent structures as shown in Figure 1 to smaller demountable makeshift temporary spaces as shown in Figure 2.

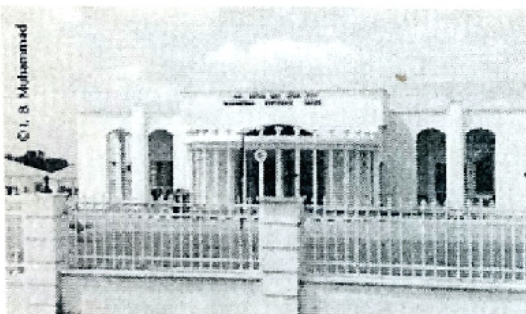


Figure 1: Justice Legbo Kutigi International Conference Centre Minna, Niger State

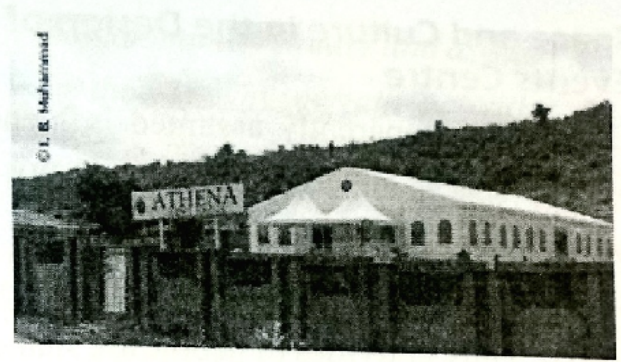


Figure 2: Athena Event Arena at Eastern Bye-pass Minna, Niger State

Results and Discussion

Physical Characteristics of Event Centres in Minna

What was observed with the Justice Legbo Kutigi Centre (Figure 1) is that even though it is so named as a conference centre, it also serves a place for weddings and other cultural activities thus suggesting a multi-functional space. The character of the interior is flat and therefore allows for different sitting arrangements.

This scenario of large spatial opening is also found in several other event centres, with notable differences in the construction materials (Figure 2 and 3). The common feature in most of the arenas is the provision of perimeter fence, said to be necessitated by the expectations of organisers for crowd control, guest protection, as well as burglary or vehicular security.

Space and Culture in the Design of Events Centre

Culture has apparently assumed influence on how spaces are constituted (Isah, 2016; Muhammad-Oumar, 1997; Muhammad & Said, 2015b; Rapoport, 1969; Stephenson, 2007). Thus, activities of people are shaped by their cultural values and therefore people's transactions are grounded in space and culture (Bishop & Marshall, 2017).

In furthering these assertions, a 47-year Gbagyi respondent said: "Cultural activities such as weddings need to take place in a setting that should allow for the performance of all the rituals of marriage". Another respondent similarly said: "there is need for the provision of open space to host carnival and cultural events for the Gbagyi people, we lack large secured open spaces here in the city". Also stressed by another native respondent is the fact that; "Gbagyi people engage in several types of entertainment such as masquerade dance, but this is not possible to perform in most of the event centers in Minna and that is why these activities are sometimes taken to the village squares".

As such the performance of cultural activities does not necessarily need to take place in a built-up space. What is most

important is the provision of a space that is large enough to accommodate large number of people. This spatial requirement is not limited to the Gbagyi ethnic group alone but also to the Nupe ethnic group, as corroborated by the revelation of a native Nupe respondent: "The provision of open Large spaces is required by the Nupes, this could be seen in *gani* festivals and *hawan bariki*, we prefer a large space in which all could see what is happening in the center".

Advancing cultural heritage through social interaction

A 49-year-old Gbagyi respondent revealed that:

"Gbagyi has a strong culture which is usually accompanied with several events and celebrations. The most important thing about event is that it revives our cultural practices and keep children in-tune with the culture and values of the community."

Cultural rituals are mostly poised towards the promotion and preservation of heritage. Similarly, the cultural practices such as the Gbagyi day carnivals,

madawa and new yam festival are all towards the preservation of Gbagyi cultural heritage (Ayuba, 2016).

Another native respondent said:

“Events such as gefu, kushi, Kunu, amadawa gbunu, and marriages are typical avenues for the display of some of our cultural values. Events in Gbagyi culture also helps to bring people together under one umbrella of unity”.

Deductively, Gbagyi people like most ethnic groups portray their cultural values through traditional rituals and ceremonies. Similarly, their neighbors, the Nupe ethnic group also have needs for similar ample spaces in the performance of their socio-cultural activities (Muhammad & Said, 2015a; Muhammad & Said, 2014).

The need for such large public spaces for marriage ceremonies for the Nupes is buttressed in the opinion of a 55-year old Nupe woman, that;

“Marriage ceremony is not completed without the performance of traditional dance at the

community square and as such that is why certain activities are performed at home first before they are taken to event centers”.

The performance of some marriage rites at home is because of the inability of some of the event centers to cater for the spatial needs of the Nupes. Summarily, it can be inferred the ethnic groups (Nupe and gbagyi) require an open space that can accommodate the different cultural, social and religious events such as weddings, naming ceremonies, yam festivals, sugar cane festivals, wrestling contest, turbanding ceremonies and a host of other ceremonies.

Unveiling the symbols of cultural values

Traditional forms and cultural symbols must be widely used in architectural and urban designs in order to achieve a sense of belonging as well as social cohesion within a community (Chen, 2011). Cultural symbols of identity in communities are most times constituted either in natural features or items or objects commonly found and used by a community (Hubert, 2016). Accordingly, the content analysis of the respondents shows that the most common object of value to the Nupe and Gbagyi

ethnic groups is the calabash. The Nupe use the calabash as utensils of domestic chores, while the Gbagyi Women's utilization also include the use of large calabash as container for transportation of farm products. Similarly, a common tool of domestic values to both tribes is the earthen pots which are used as containers for water and also for storage and decorat the bedrooms (Figure 3)

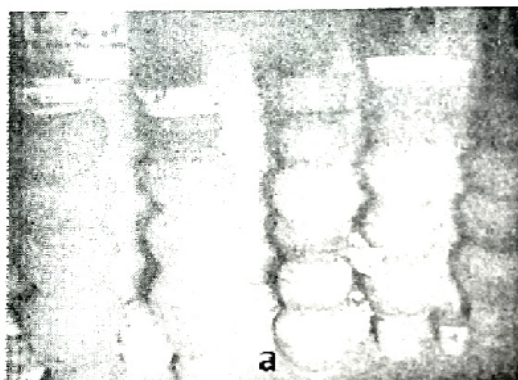


Figure 3: (a) Bedroom pottery decor

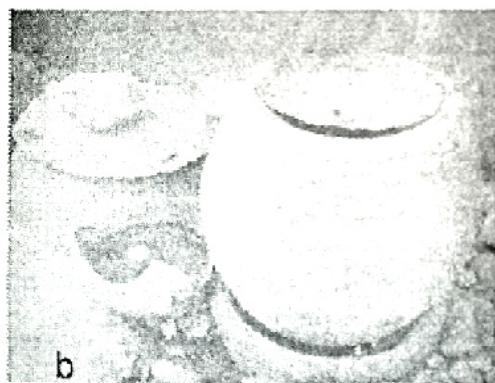


Figure 3:(b) Indoor/outdoor water pots

Evidently the commonality of earthen pot as a cultural symbol for the Gbagyi and Nupe is found being displayed at the entrance foyer

of one of the event centers as shown in Figure 4

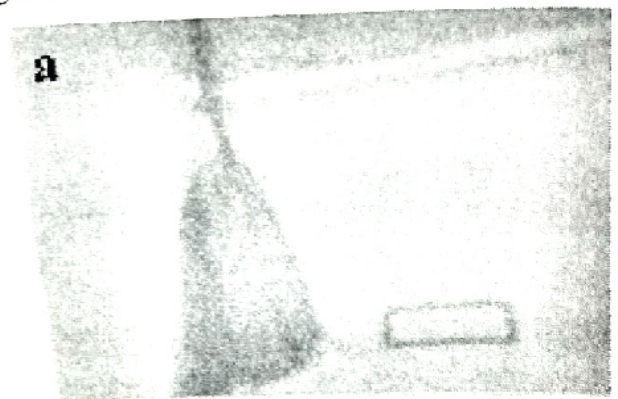


Figure 4: Exhibits of (a) Traditional Guitar



Figure 4: (b) Traditional pots (at the Foyer of U.K Bello Art Theatre, Minna, Niger State.

The Integration of Cultural perception in design of an event center

Several factors constitute the requirements for culturally integrated Spaces (Isah, 2016; Lu, 2012). However, the critical factors reported to meet the needs of the Nupe and Gbagyi people are; firstly, the provision of large open space. This space is required for the performance of activities such as dancing, new yam festivals, *hawan daushe* (Baariki), and traditional wrestling.

Secondly, it is also important to have multiple halls within an event Centre to cater for various cultural events that are likely to take place at the same time. Figures 5 and 6 showcases a possible concept in the design of an event center that is culturally sensitive to the needs of the Nupe and Gbagyi ethnic groups.

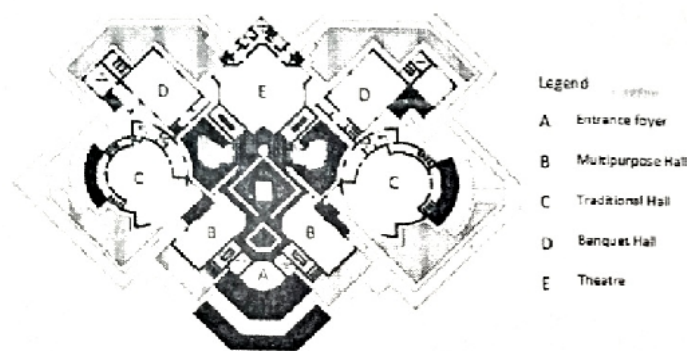


Figure 5: Culturally Integrated Floor Plan of an Event center as Conceived by the Authors

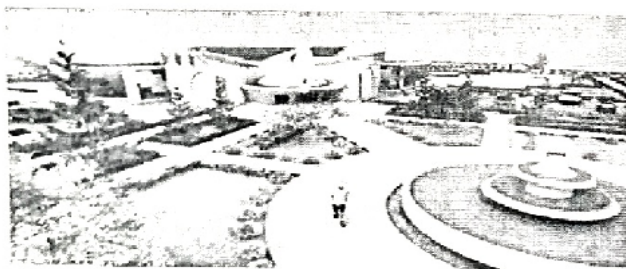


Figure 6: Culturally Integrated 3D Artistic Impression of an Event center as Conceived by the Authors.

Figure 6 showcases authors' design concept incorporating traditional elements of calabash and pottery common to both the Gbagyi and the Nupe heritage (Ali, Kotb, Elsherif, Hisham, & Osama, 2016). This is

earmarked to foster a sense of place and ownership of the edifice by the local people (Lin, 2012; US-EPA, 2002). Notable too is the provision of a concentric amphitheater Figures 7 and 8.

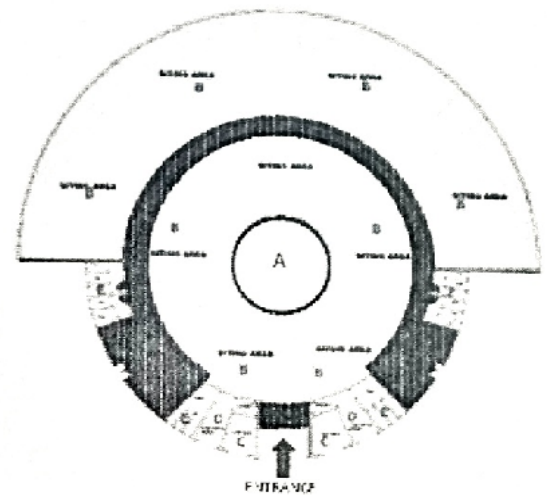


Figure 7: Floor Plan of an open-air theatre with the Performance stage labelled "A"

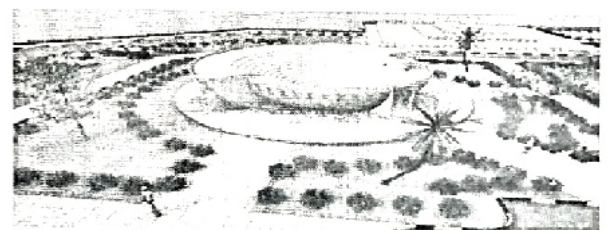


Figure 8: An Artistic Impression of Open Air Theatre using the calabash as the design concept

Summarily, the finding of the research shows the affinity of the Gbagyi and Nupe people's cultural transactions to performance of cultural most to earmarked large concentric built and unbuilt spaces. The cultural transaction specificity of the Nupe and Gbagyi shows that a concentric

open-air theatre as illustrated in Figure 7 and 8 will meet their spatial cultural congregational needs within the city. More so meeting the cultural values of the natives is the openness (without roof) of the theatre which also allows for the visual connection to the surrounding landscape as well as the sky.

Conclusion

The investigation sought to understand as well as integrate the cultural values of minority ethnic groups in the design of an event centre. Cultural values are constituted in people's way of life which also could be reflected in their spatial transactions. The study of the Gbagyi and Nupe ethnic group of Niger State showcases rich cultural values and common symbolism. Even though each ethnic group is expected to have its cultural transactions and values uniquely characterised, it is possible to have a common point of convergence especially if they share geographical landscape, common with the Gbagyi and Nupe. The cultural values can be tangibly represented in the design of event centres, as illustrated in the study -advocating for study of similar other cultural landscapes.

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