Integration of Social Interaction in Civic Centres In Nigeria: The Design Approach

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ABSTRACT

Due to urbanization, civic centre has remained a subject of utmost importance because of its role in the city and human existence at large. Civic Centre is the city's symbolic public space where activities such as ceremonial mass gathering, rallies convention, social, commercial activities take place. However, Civic centres are places that encourage an inflow of people, therefore, there is need to integrate design strategies that will enhance social interaction in the facility. Yet, little or no attention has been given to civic centres especially in Minna, Nigeria. This paper examined the adequacy of social interactive spaces provided in Minna Civic Centres, Nigeria. The objective is to identify design features and activities that will enhance social interaction in civic centres. A combination of quantitative and descriptive method of research using observation schedule, case studies and questionnaire survey was adopted. The data gathered was analysed which revealed the inadequacy of interactive spaces in civic centres that could encourage cohesion in the community. The paper suggests the integration of social interactive spaces in the design of civic centres. The paper therefore concludes that there is a need for redirection of designers of civic centres to integrating social interactive spaces that can successfully improve public life.

Key words: Civic Centre, Design Features, Design Strategies, Social Interaction

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, studies show that most people in the world grew up, lived their lives, and died within 15km to 30km of where they were born (Morris, 2005). Their communities meant what they had always known i.e. families, neighbours, familiar places, daily routine, social systems and customs they understood. However, with emigration due to greater physical and social mobility, people find themselves in places far away from home, living in communities not defined by common acquaintance, knowledge and culture, but by geography or economics (Rabinowitz, 2016). Social interaction is the meaningful contact people have with one another. It can be described as the real communication, even if only for a moment, and feelings that each party leave or shared with one another (Morris, 2005). Good places for interaction are places where people from many parts of the community, diverse backgrounds meet naturally and interact comfortably and often pleasurably because of the nature, attraction of the space and the activities associated with the space. (Rabinowitz, 2016).

In Nigeria, most civic centres are not always seen as cohesive district or perform the true civic role, and often fail to function as engaging public spaces (Oluigbo 2011). There is need to examine design features that will overcome these problems and create a social, commercial and recreation place that will enhance human interaction in civic centres and reduce fear of social exclusion. The aim of this study is to examine the adequacy of social interactive spaces in the design of civic centre with particular reference to Minna, Nigeria. The objective is to examine the current design elements in relation to providing social participation and interaction in the use of Civic Centre. The key research question in this paper focussed on what design element(s) can be integrated to enhance social interaction in the use of civic centres.

LITERATURE REVIEW

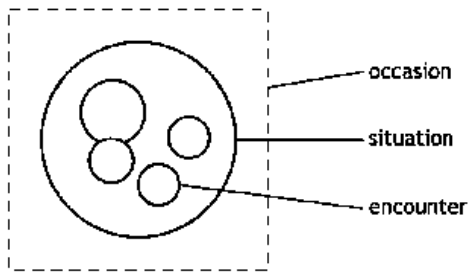The concept that reflects the design of social interaction

Fig 1:The concept of Occasion, Situation and Encounter
Source: Ludvigsen, 2006

The figure above shows his foundational concepts that reflect the design for social interaction. The 'occasion' is the social construct that provides the reason for gathering. In relation to space and place theory, occasion can be interpreted as 'place', where 'place' is the notion that offers the dimensions for live experience, interaction, and used by its inhabitants (Hornecker, 2005). 'Situation' is the specific manifestation of the 'occasion'. It is an environment that opens up possibilities to interact between the people gathered already because of the occasion. In relation to the space and place theory, 'situation' is similar to 'space' which refers to the structural and geometric qualities of a physical environment, or a user interface for a virtual environment (Harrison and Dourish, 1996). An 'encounter' involves a more dynamic set of activities that can form, change, and disappear in flux at the situation. Therefore, if a 'situation' is the social 'space' that provides the opportunity to gather, an 'encounter' is the actual interaction that takes place.

Goffman (1963) argues that being present in a 'space' for an 'occasion' already opens up opportunity for dynamic activities. Even though people do not actually interact with each other,

a situation can still be regarded as in a stage of 'passive' interaction, while if they start activities, i.e. they start encounter, they can be regarded to be engaged in a stage of 'active' interaction. He also identified two levels at each stage. Level I in stage I (Passive) is 'co-presence', where only gathering takes place and people may have their own focus, which are different from each other, a notion he labelled as 'distributed attention'. Level II is 'co-attention', when some event at the space can draw everyone's attention towards that though no one actually interacts with other. This has been labelled as 'shared attention'.

Tang & Tareef (2012) further explained that in level III, people in small groups start dialogue with each other by sharing an object and influencing one another's experience. Here the term 'dialogue' refers to a two-way communication, which was not present in any of the levels in stage I. For example, stimulus such as a touch sensitive pedestrian walkway can generate surprise, amusement or excitement among those people who at that particular moment are sharing that walkway. Momentarily they can share their feelings to each other, thus creating a dialogue. While they move away from that walkway, they may not interact any more for the rest of the time they spent in that space. Just as was in level II of stage I, level IV in stage II urges people towards some goal, and demands interaction. Here people open up dialogue with others because of the shared goal set up by the situation at the space. This is not momentary, but might be long enough to bring up acquaintance at some point (Nee & Khan, 2012). However, all these stages refer to spatial interaction and hence offer challenge to architects to create a 'situation' where all four levels can take place.
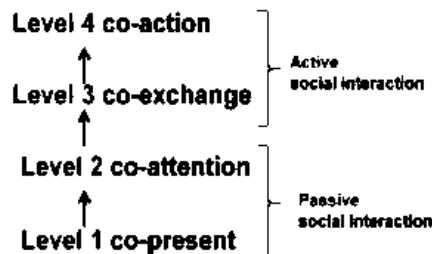

Fig 2:The two stages and four levels of social interaction
Source: Nee & Khan, 2012.

Features of sense of place in architecture

Creating a sense of place involves understanding how people develop place attachment and feel part of their physical and social environment (New Jersey Green Building Manual, 2011). Furthermore, Relph (1976) says "Place is a form of awareness of space perception," and further calls it a product of the lived- world experience. The connection between our need for a sense of place and identity and the design of the built environment requires design to be viewed as a creative process. Canter (1997) posits that physical environments are significant because of interaction of three domains: physical locale, activity performed in the locale, and meanings assigned to that union of place with activity, together are constituents of place. According to Vail & Nasekhiyan (2014), the features of sense of place in architecture are divided in to three; meaning, activities and form as shown below.
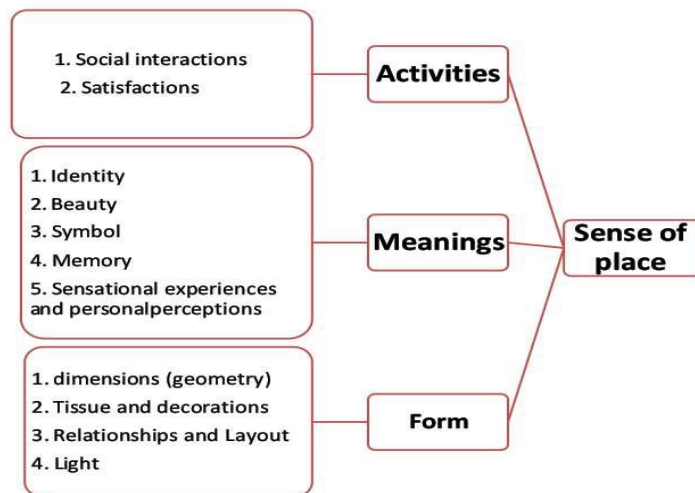

Fig 3: A representation of the factors shaping sense of place in architecture
Source: Nee & Khan, 2012

Activity is one of the major components of place associated with people's works, actions or leisure; therefore, activities connect human to places. Sense of place links the person to the environment so that his perception and feelings get integrated to the semantic field of the environment (Relph, 1976). He believes that sense of place of each environment depends on the individuals' relationship to that environment, the relationship between humans and places are interactive which means people give positive or negative things to the environment then take them. The first challenge is to figure out what kind of activities is suitable to generate higher level of interaction in public space. Gehl (2011) states that activities can be divided into three categories;

Necessary activities include those that are compulsory, happens every day or in routine intervals. For example, studying or going to school, eating breakfast, preparations to go to sleep. He further explained optional activities as those, which one wishes to do if time and space allows. For example, taking pictures while walking, doing some exercise, moving around etc. Depending on the 'occasion', and if 'situation' allows, optional activities can take place in public space, but due to the unforced pattern of the activities, it is more likely to create only passive interaction (co-presence and co-attention). Social activities are those people like to do in the presence of others. These are often termed as 'resultant' activities as the pattern of these activities are generated by the surroundings (Gehl, 2011).

Humanity has always delved into the meaning of existence as witnessed through the philosophers and theorists that have influenced the laws, sciences, politics and religions that make up our world today. Mankind is the only known animal that defines itself through the meaning has been described as a component of self-identity that enhances self-esteem, increases feelings of belonging to a community and is an

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influential factor in determining environmental values and policies (Relph, 1976). In addition, the strength of place identity is based on the emotional investment made by individuals towards a specific place and their associated length of involvement with the place (Kocher & Sutter, 2002).

Postmodernists wrote passionately about form in architecture as communicator, and as a medium to reflect human experience. Gehry's belief has long been that architecture is art, in his intelligent and controlled use of sculptural geometric forms and materials that offer original works of architecture. Gehry claims his buildings exhibit a sense of discovery and delight to its users, creating an adventurous and sculptural form that resolves the synthesis of form and function in an architecture that is creative art (Kocher & Sutter, 2002).

Factors that influence the user's perception

Understanding of activities, meaning and form in public space may not be adequate for architects to design an interactive space, as social studies show that the same features of sense of place can be done differently if people do it individually and if they do in groups (Kocher & Sutter, 2002). Since in a public space people are likely to behave in groups, a brief understanding of factors that will influence the perception of the users might also be useful at this stage. The following are the factors that influence the user's perception of a place.

The physical factors that influences perception and sense of place, includes size, location, and degree of enclosure, contrast, scale, proportion, human scale, space, texture, colour, smell, sound, and visual diversity. He also thinks features such as identity, history, imagination and fantasy, mystery, joy, surprise, security, vitality, and passion cause intensive memory relationship with the place (Brocato, 2006). Community involvement provides opportunities for people to socialize and form bonds, which in turn increases a sense of place (Brocato, 2006). Sense of place is enhanced because residents perceive the community as having a social environment, which results in them being more likely to engage in community activities. It was found that residents with children are more likely to participate in the community and form social ties, as they have stronger connections to their community through their children (Relph, 1976).

Research has identified that length of residence enhances the development of a sense of place; longer term residents experience more sense of place than newer residents as they have resided longer in the community and as a result, have developed significant relationships with other residents (Brocato, 2006). Additionally, they are more familiar and intimate with the community, feel more at home, secure and that they belong. Studies have shown that age is a predictor of a sense of place, as people age, their attachment to a place strengthens as they tend to consider place in terms of geographical places or the immediate home setting, increasing their sense of place (Relph, 1976).

RESEARCH METHOD

The descriptive and quantitative research methods were used in carrying out this research. Data was obtained from the field through observation schedules and questionnaires. The attractive features that enhance social interaction in civic centres were observed. Using a qualitative methodology, three (3) major civic centres were purposefully selected in Minna (Table 1) as samples and case studies that typify certain characteristics of civic centres in the study area in order to look for observed and illuminating trend in the design of the civic centres. The quantitative methodology involved 10 questionnaires administered in each sample area giving a total number of 30 questionnaires administered to randomly selected users in the study area. The questionnaire was developed and piloted among the targeted population of the study to note the response of the respondent to the structured question after which ambiguous and complex questions were corrected.

Table 1: The selected Civic Centre and their location (Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2018)

S/N	Name of Civic Centre	Location
1	Legbo Intl. Conference Centre	Opp. Govt House, Minna
2	Abdulsalam Youth Centre	City Gate, Minna
3	U. K. Bello Arts Theatre	Chanchaga, Minna

Four point Likert scale was employed to obtain the perception and the level of satisfaction of the users. The questions were made up of a set of structured closed-ended questions and choices were selected from the given options. Required data were collected at specific periods on the sampled civic centres to facilitate meeting the respondents when an event is taking place. Of the 30 questionnaires, 25 were returned and of this number, 4 invalid questionnaires were recorded (Table 2).

Table 2: Breakdown of Administered Questionnaires (Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2018)

Respondent	Frequency
Valid response	21
Invalid response	04
Not returned	05

The data so generated was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientist) and the result of the analysis were imputed into Microsoft Excel and Microsoft word for the design of Charts that would be used for result discussions and analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the twenty-one (21) valid respondents, 14.3% were less than twenty years (<20), 52.4% were between the age of twenty to forty (20-40) while the elderly between the age of sixty-one to eighty (61-80) were 9.5% implying that the respondents were vibrant. Table 3 shows the age of respondent in the selected civic centres. Eight (8) of the respondents were males and thirteen (13) were female, hence majority of the respondents were females which could imply that females go to civic centres more than male.

Table 3: Age of Respondent (Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2018)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	<20	3	14.3	14.3	14.3
	20-40	11	52.4	52.4	66.7
	41-60	5	23.8	23.8	90.5
Valid	61-80	2	9.5	9.5	100.0
	Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Gender of Respondent (Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2018)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	8	38.1	38.1	38.1
	Female	13	61.9	61.9	100.0
Valid	Total	21	100.0	100.0	

The study revealed that the respondent who spends six to eight hours in the shopping Centre were just six percent (6%), those that spends over eight hours were two percent (2%), 35% spends three to five hours, 57% spends zero to two hours. Figure 4 below reveals the percentage of the time spent in the civic centre by the respondents.
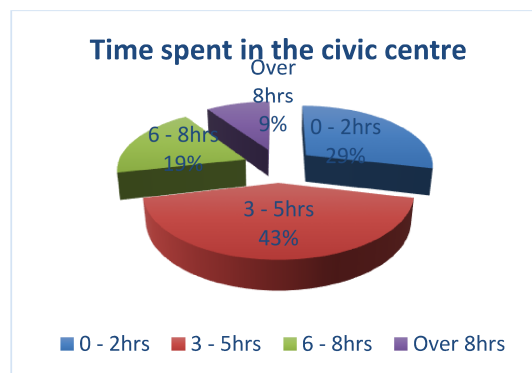

*Figure 4:*Time spent in the Civic Centre

A regimented scoring of 1-4 was given to the varying options for the respondent perception based on the variable being measured. The scoring options are Highly Effective (1), Effective (2), Ineffective (3) and Highly ineffective (4). Table 5.0 shows that majority of the respondents are spread within the effective and ineffective section of the scale of measurement. The number of respondents in each section is multiplied by the weighted score allocated to it, the calculation for this is shown in Table 6.0 and the total score across the rows are added up and presented as the total at the end of the table.

Table 5.0: Number of respondent per opinion on Effectiveness of variables that affects interaction

Measured variable	Highly Effective (X1)	Effective (X2)	Ineffective (X3)	Highly ineffective (X4)	Total
Availability of sitting areas	4	2	8	7	21
Movement within lobbies	6	10	4	1	21
Ability to perform different activities	2	3	10	6	21
Closeness to public transport	11	5	2	3	21
Seating's within the lobbies	1	1	5	14	21
Wide Range Of Dining Options	2	1	9	9	21

Table 6.0: Number of respondent On Effectiveness of variables that affects interaction

Measured variable	Highly Effective (X1)	Effective (X2)	Ineffective (X3)	Highly ineffective (X4)	Total
Availability of sitting areas	4	4	24	28	60
Movement within lobbies	6	20	12	4	42
Ability to perform different activities	2	6	30	24	62
Closeness to public transport	11	10	6	12	39
Seating's within the lobbies	1	2	15	56	74
Wide Range Of Dining Options	2	2	21	36	61

The interpretation of the results obtained based on the Likert scale calculation is from the range of scale indicated as Highly Effective (1.00 - 1.49); Effective (1.50 - 2.49); Ineffective (2.50 - 3.49); Highly Ineffective (> 3.50). It can be observed from table 7.0 that half of the Respondent said the variables that affected interaction in the selected civic centres were ineffective. Some percentage said seatings within the lobbies were highly ineffective while the remaining proportion agreed to the effectiveness of the variables. This shows that the available sitting areas were insufficient hence showing the ineffectiveness, there were little or no sittings for dining both within the site and the building. The major activities performed in the selected civic centre is event activities, hence the response signifying ineffectiveness of the ability to perform different activities such as recreation and commercial activities.

Table 7.0: Respondents' opinion on effectiveness of variables that affects interaction

Measured variable	Sum	Mean	Interpretation
Availability of sitting areas	60	2.85	Ineffective
Movement within lobbies	42	2.00	Effective
Ability to perform different activities	62	2.95	Ineffective
Closeness to public transport	39	1.86	Highly Effective
Seating's within the lobbies	74	3.52	Highly Ineffective
Wide Range Of Dining Options	61	2.90	Ineffective

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper showed that civic centres in Minna provided places for just the basic and the mundane while important functional (i.e. interactive) spaces are overlooked thus missing out innovative and dynamic-looking places. Thus, this study recommends that cost-effective integration of interactive space should be made to enhance their design simply by breaking up the current trend of monotony found in many civic centre designs. Such facilities include game arcade, departmental store, library, vocational department, restaurant, exhibition halls, seatings around lobbies and walkways. Furthermore, attention should be given to other interactive elements such as lighting, accessibility, entertainment and other pull factors that will make a huge difference in the enhancement of civic centres.

CONCLUSIONS

This study establishes that while there are interactive spaces provided in some of the civic centre visited, the interactive spaces provided are grossly inadequate per the wants of the users. The users of the selected civic centres want social interactive spaces subconsciously; however the present spaces do not cater for this particular need. It was noticed that there were spaces that were redundant but still not used for social interaction because they were not preconceived at the design stage; the site were let bare without provision of seating. The provision of additional furniture such as couches to support relaxation when users are not in the event hall would enhance interaction and also improve their comfort level. The study also establishes that the provisions of facilities such as vocational centre, departmental store, library, restaurant gaming arcade and recreational facilities that enhances interaction in some of the civic centre. The results indicated that there is need to have more appropriate design that suited integration of interactive spaces. Since civic centres are prominent building within the community which a lot of interaction takes place within it. It is recommended that the development of civic centres should be accompanied by interactive

facilities for the benefit of the users. Spaces such as lounges, gaming arcade, galleries should be provided for interactions which would offer indoor relaxation and socialisation possibilities for the Users. Spaces such as a garden, food courts, playground, and defined concourses should be provided for outdoor interaction.

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