

# INTEGRATION OF CULTURAL VALUES IN THE DESIGN OF EVENT CENTRE IN MINNA NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

Samuel Obadiah Aliyu<sup>1</sup>; Isa Bala Muhammad<sup>1\*</sup>; & Momoh Ajanaku Sani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Architecture, School of Environmental Technology, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Author; mib@futminna.edu.ng

## **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 is that, it is possible to integrate cultural values and perception of people in the design of urban public spaces such as event centers.

**Key words;** Architecture, Cultural Values, Gbagyi, Nupe, Heritage, Space.

## **Introduction**

Cultural values are constituted in indigenous people's world view and also what they hold in high esteem (Türkyılmaz, 2016). These values are constituted 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 (Muhammad & Said, 2015b).

Vernacular architecture was maintained for a very long period of time. However, it was a general norm across Africa in the early 1960's when new states in Africa began the process of nation building to commission large building projects to foreign Architects and in which the consequence was the influence of foreign culture in such designs (Beeckmans, 2017) Meanwhile the integration of native functions and cultural practices in architecture does help to support a country's identity (Ibrahim, 2016) . More also is that public spaces such as event centers serve as a point of congregation for cultural activities traditional rituals. Undoubtedly, the livelihood in 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 express people's feelings distinguishes them as important factor for measuring quality of urban life. Even though, sometime religious places in the cities are used in place of event centers, it is clear that the space and comfort required during worship differs from that for entertainment or other non-religious functions (Maahsen-Milan & Simonetti, 2011)

Furthermore, spatial transactions are culture specific and so is also the space required for their performance (Berker, 2011; Isah, 2016; Muhammad & Said, 2015b). More also is that 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). Furthermore, minority ethnic group in each community are the most vulnerable to the loss of cultural values and its integration in government policies (Adegbija, 2004). Contextually, the Gbagyi and Nupe ethnic group belong to the minority ethnic group in Nigeria. Interestingly, the Gbagyi and the Nupe Ethnic groups are found to constitute the major population of Niger State. However, limited studies on their cultural transactions of these ethnic group exist except few such as (Ayuba, 2016) and (Muhammad, 2015). And it is against these background that it becomes

necessary to investigate as well as integrate the spatial and cultural perception of indigenous people in the development of event centre in Minna Niger State.

### **Cultural values and public spaces**

Public spaces add value for cities as it offers place for discourse and relaxations for the people (van Melik & van der Krabben, 2016). Spaces such as parks, theatres and events centers are conceptualized in different forms. The point of convergence of these different forms of spaces both built and unbuilt is that they serve as a place of congregation of people in the city. As such public spaces in their function serves as an antonym for the private space (van Melik & van der Krabben, 2016). However, the proper functioning of these spaces requires the incorporation of cultural perception and values of the people especially in a multicultural environment (Saulton, Bülthoff, de la Rosa, & Dodds, 2017). More also is that 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 also their sense of history (Colomb, 2011). This sense of place thus contributes an important cultural value to the society.

Accordingly, architecture has some role to play in the society because it brings together what is needed in society in social function, economics and technology through shelter. As such architecture is expected to serve in the development of spaces as well as a mirror of the society's cultural values (Dijokiene, Navickiene, & Riaubiene, 2016). Similarly, the reflection of societal values, and vernacular inspired design solution also serve as a source of wisdom in resolving contemporary spatial issues (Xiaoyu & Beisi, 2015). This is because each culture is characterised with its unique solution to spatial needs while at the same time adoptable by other people outside the community.

### **Cultural landscape of Niger State**

Niger State is situated in central Nigeria with two major ethnic groups of Nupe, and Gbagyi (Nasarafu, 2011). Nupe individuals 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) While the Gbagyi ethnic group are also found widespread in Niger State as well as other neighbouring states of Kaduna, Plateau States and the Federal Capital Territory. The Gbagyi worldview in its totality is concretized in the Gbagyi way of life, rites of passage, rituals, religion, and indeed is a singular way of describing the entire personality of the Gbagyi. The Gbagyi do have a manifest of ceremonial activities amongst which is the *Knunu* (Ayuba, 2016). Conclusively the duo tribe are mostly found in Niger State.

### **Research Methodology**

The deep 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 were employed, they are interviews and participants observations. 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 who are the operators as well as managers of event centers in Minna, the state capital of Niger State. While the second category were the natives, the Nupes and the Gbagyis. The interview questions for the professionals focused on the challenges faced in accommodating the cultural needs of the ethnic groups (Nupe and Gbagyi) during ceremonies. While 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 showcased 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. Furthermore, most of the interviews were conducted in the native languages of the respondents which were translated into English at the point of transcription. While the observed data were collected using sketches and drawings and of three event centers. These are explained in the next section

### ***Participants Observation***

Participants 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. The choice was such done to ensure that capacity and locations of were these event centers are located are adequately captured.

The observations showcased that there are 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 Characters 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 that it is a multi-functional space. The character of the interior flat and therefore allows for different seating arrangement.

This scenario of large open space is also found in several event centres, the only difference mostly is on the material used in the construction as seen in Figure 2 and 3. The common feature in most of the arena is the provision of perimeter fence in which a manager of one of the centres confirmed the importance of this in the following quotation.

*“Even though ceremonies are public, most organisers prefer that only invited guest are allowed into the venue, similarly the fence allows for the protection of vehicles against burglary as well as theft”.*

This showcases the importance of perimeter fence as well as a large covered open space for the effective performance cultural activities.

### ***Space and Culture in the Design of Events Centre***

Culture has been established to have influence on how spaces are constituted. (Isah, 2016; Muhammad-Oumar, 1997; Muhammad & Said, 2015b; Rapoport, 1969; Stephenson, 2007). Similarly, activities of people are also shaped by their cultural values and therefore people’s

transactions are grounded in space and culture (Bishop & Marshall, 2017). In furthering these assertions, a native respondent (Gbagyi by tribe) aged 47 has this to say:

*“Cultural activities such as weddings need to take place in a setting that should allow for the performance of all the rituals of marriage”*

furthermore, another respondent has this to say:

*“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”*

Similarly, this assertion is further stressed by another native respondent in the following quotation:

*“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 sometime these activities are taken to the village squares”*

As such the performance of cultural activities do 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 to also include the Nupe ethnic group as showcased in the anecdote of a native Nupe respondent below:

*“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”*

To rephrase, it can deduced that vernacular spatial requirements for culture activities are not necessarily constituted in built-up spaces (Tangible) but could also be represented in intangible (un-built spaces)

### ***Advancing cultural heritage through social interaction***

A 49-year-old Gbagyi respondent asserts as follows:

*“We have a strong culture which is usually accompanied with several event 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)

Similarly, a native respondent has this to say:

*“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 just like most ethnic groups portray their cultural values through traditional rituals and ceremonies. Similarly, their neighbors the Nupe ethnic group also have similar spatial needs in the performance of the socio-cultural activities such as the need for large open spaces (Muhammad & Said, 2015a; Muhammad & Said, 2014).

The need for such large space for marriage ceremonies for the Nupes is buttressed in the following by a 55years old Nupe woman in this anecdote:

*“Marriage ceremony is not completed without the performance of traditional dance at the center of the community’s 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 as a result 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, turbaning ceremonies and a host of other celebrations.

### **Unveiling the symbols of cultural values**

Traditional forms and cultural symbols must be widely use in architectural and urban design so as to achieve a sense of belonging as well as social cohesion within a community (Chen, 2011).

Cultural symbols of identity in communities are most at times are 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 feature found to be of a common value to the Nupe and Gbagyi ethnic group 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 the 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 decoration inside the bedrooms (Figure 3)



Figure 3: (a) Pots as element of decoration inside bedroom while (b) as container for water. Evidently the commonality of earthen pot as a cultural symbol for the Gbagyi and Nupes is found being displayed at the entrance foyer of one of the event centers as shown in Figure 4

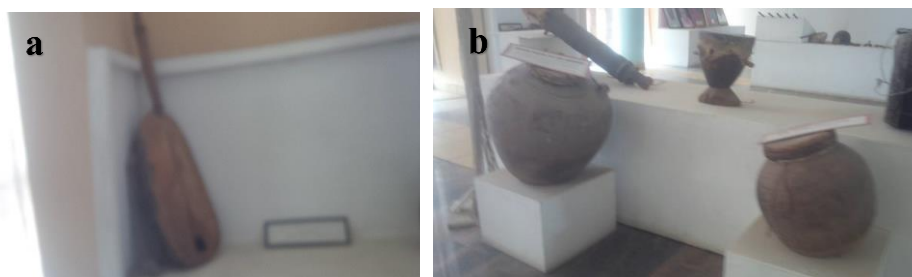


Figure 4: Traditional Guitar (a) and traditional pot (b) displayed at the entrance Foyer of U.K Bello Art Theatre Minna, Niger State

This therefore means that cultural symbolism of the Nupe and Gbagyi people is portrayed in the earthen pots and the calabash.

### ***The Integration of Cultural perception in design of an event center***

Several factors constitute the requirements for a culturally integrated Spaces (Isah, 2016; Lu, 2012). However, for this study, the critical factors that are required to meet the needs of the Nupe

and Gbagy people is 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. Consequently, the Figure 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 Gbagy ethnic group .

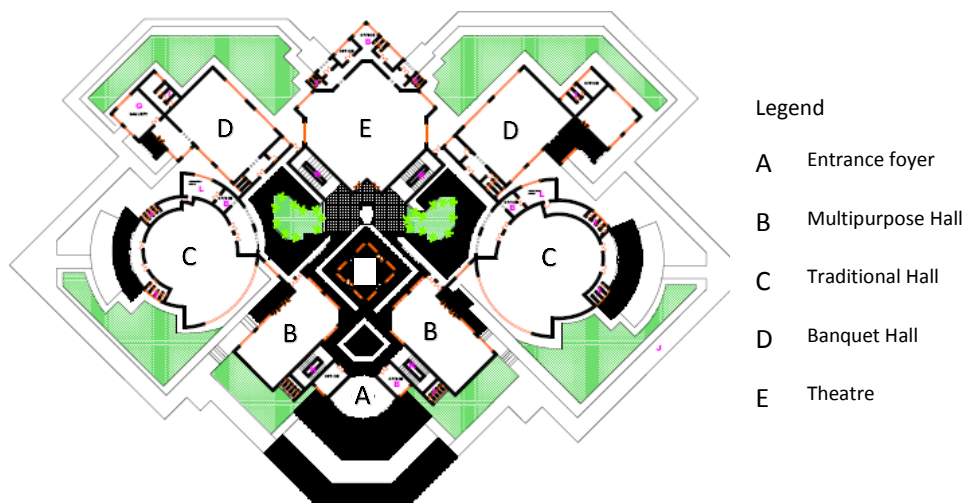


Figure 5: Culturally Integrated Floor Plan of an Event center as Conceived by the Authors



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

It can be noted that Figure 6 showcases a design that incorporated the use of traditional elements of the calabash common to both the Gbagyis and the Nupes. Here architecture was used to showcase the cultural heritage of the indigenous people (Ali, Kotb, Elsherif, Hisham, & Osama, 2016). The resultant effect of this is the creation of an edifice which provides a sense of place and sense of ownership to the local people (Lin, 2012; US-EPA, 2002).

Aside from the two afore mentioned requirements, the third important space is the provision of a traditional concentric performance built up open theater space which places the performer in the center of the circle as showcased in Figures 7 and 8.

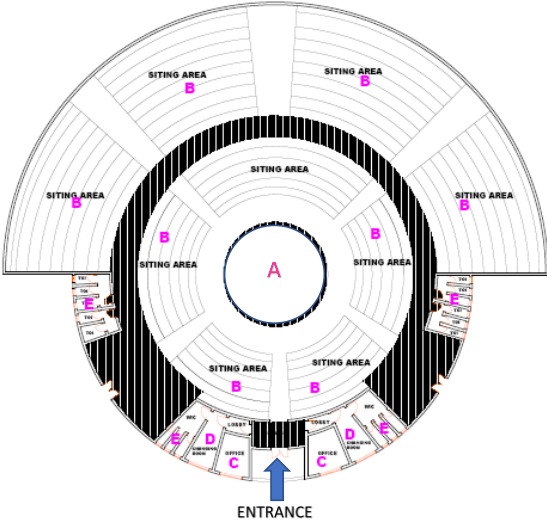


Figure 7: Floor Plan of an open-air theatre with the Performance stage labelled “A”

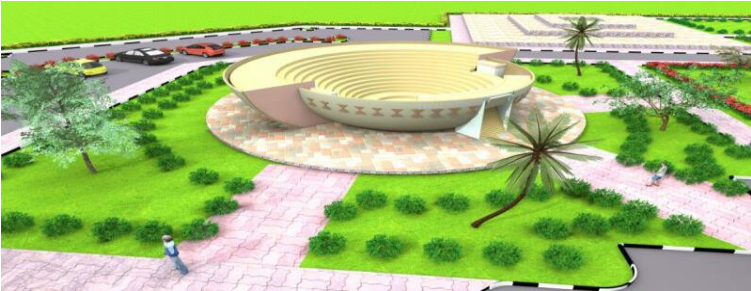


Figure 8: An Artistic Impression of Open Air Theatre using the calabash as the design concept

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 Nupes 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 also is that in 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

This research did set out to understand as well as integrate the cultural values of minority ethnic group 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 in Niger State showcases rich cultural values and a common ground of 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 a common geographical landscape. Evidently, this study showcased the common values and cultural symbols of the gbagyi and Nupe ethnic group. Most importantly is that these cultural values were tangibly represented in the design illustration by the authors. The extent to which the research advocates for more of this research in other cultural landscapes.

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