

Evolution of Landscape Architectural Education: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract: Landscape Architecture being a profession and discipline whose philosophy and practice emphasizes harmonization of human development with nature, it is important to ensure that professionals are properly trained to reflect this. The process of getting the training started in Nigeria after so many attempts. The paper examines the historical background of landscape architecture education in the country and the challenges in creating awareness of the profession and sustaining the Landscape Architecture programmes that have been created. It details the components of the various programmes while discussing the progress and challenges to landscape architectural education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Landscape Architecture, Education, Evolution of Degree Programmes, Nigeria

Introduction

With our Landscape undergoing dramatic change and as our unique natural environments and heritage are progressively degraded and destroyed, the need for enlightened intervention becomes compelling. Landscape Architecture, a profession and discipline whose philosophy and practice emphasizes harmonization of human development with nature is very crucial to these interventions. Allied to the need for such interventions and intermediation is a parallel need for sound training of professionals in Landscape Architecture. Such training will equip the professionals with adequate skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of intermediation in addition to preparing them to train succeeding generations of the profession.

The desire of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) along with that of our colleagues in the Society of Landscape Architects of Nigeria (SLAN) to establish and nurture degree programmes in Nigerian Universities dates back to the mid 1980's. But until recently, no programme showed any real promise of emerging from these efforts. The coalition of opportunities presented by the formal birth of SLAN, the administrative will by a few university authorities coupled with the initiatives of the Department of Architecture, ABU and NIA have provided new impetus. Since then, two MLA programmes and a PGD programme have been established while three BLA programmes are in the process of approval.

In this paper, previous attempts toward establishing degree programmes were reviewed while citing the University of Lagos experience in LA. curriculum. Further, both IFLA and ASLA criteria for both undergraduate and graduate degree programs were outlined. Also, contents of BSLA and BLA degree programmes in addition to two MLA programmes in the United States were reviewed. All these along with teaching experience form the basis of suggested contents or guidelines for MLA and prospective BLA programmes. The underlying aim in this effort is that continuing discussions will form the basis of acceptable standards for education programmes to the professional body, NUC and postgraduate schools of intending universities alike.

Previous Attempts to Mount Educational Programme in LA

The International Federation of Landscape Architect (IFLA) with the assistance of UNESCO has shown a long standing interest in establishing professional bodies and training programmes in Africa, particularly Nigeria. For this purpose, IFLA's president, urged by UNESCO in early 1985 undertook a mission to Lagos, Abuja and then to Malawi. (IFLA News 15 June 1985).

In Lagos, the visiting president was hosted by the emerging Society of Landscape Architects, spearheaded by Mr. O. I Fasusi (an architect and Landscape Architect) and he departed with a promise



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by the University of Lagos to establish a programme in Landscape Architecture. Subsequently through the promptings of O. I. Fasusi and to further the awareness of the profession, IFLA in 1993 agreed and fixed the 30 IFLA World Congress to hold in Nigeria. This was tagged 30th IFLA World Congress, Lagos - Abuja, 14th – 17th September 1993, while the IFLA International conference was to hold in Cape Town, South Africa from 20th – 25th September, 1993. The Nigeria segment was to be hosted by the then emerging Society of Landscape Architects with considerable help from Sheraton Hotel and Towers and Nicon - NOGA Hilton Hotel. The theme of the congress was “Landscape Planning for Control of Erosion and Environmental Degradation”. Along with desertification, coastal erosion, landscape architectural education in Africa were the titles for the envisaged discussion sessions. Almost pulled off, the congress suffered from the fallouts of 1993 political crises. As a result, the South African conference, which unknown to us was a safety valve to the Nigerian experiment became a beneficiary and hosted the 30th IFLA World Congress. For a while, there was limited effort at creating awareness or any coordinated attempt at national level on actions leading to the establishment of one or more educational programmes. Individual universities like University of Lagos were satisfied with nursing the ambition and spiking that with several feeble attempts to mount a Landscape Architectural programme.

Propagation of LA Education and Awareness in the Country.

As already submitted in Obiefuna (1995: 34), there was no degree programme currently in any Nigerian University until recently. Part of the hindrances mitigating the development in the short term was the limited number of qualified Landscape architects and worse still, of such professionals in academics. Presently, there are no more than six Landscape architects in academics in all the universities in the country either in the Departments of Architecture or Urban and Regional Planning. Of these, three are in University of Lagos, one in Imo State Polytechnic of Agriculture Umuagwo, the fifth in Imo State University and sixth in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that some of the established allied professional programmes in architecture, urban and regional planning have helped measurably to keep education and awareness in Landscape Architecture

alive even with their limited course offerings of two or four units in the entire curriculum. For example, a BSc. programme in URP in OAU-Ife specified 2 units of landscape design for graduation, while the former B. Arch or now M. E. D. Arch of University of Lagos required 4 units for same (OAU-PEDM Handbook 1984 —87 :99). Equally some years ago, in the NIA Final I pre-qualification examinations for HND holders, candidates were required to sit for and pass examination in Landscape design.

The University Lagos Experience in LA Curriculum

The University of Lagos in its undergraduate programmes both in Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning have had significant content of Landscape Architecture courses. The B. Arch programme introduced after 1986 to about 1993 had 6 units of coursework in Landscape architecture in addition to two semesters of 6 units each of Level III Design studio structured partly on landscape design. Subsequently, due to the necessity to accommodate other emerging courses, these were reduced to the current levels of 4 units of course work with still 12 units of Level III Design studio dealing partly with landscape design. The current 4 units of coursework comprises of 2 units of introduction at level III and 2 units of Advanced landscape design dealing with thematic issues in Level V (University of Lagos Department of Architecture prospectus 2007-2010). Similarly, The BSc. urban and Regional Planning programme contains 4 units of coursework in Level II with 2 units of Advanced landscape design in Level IV. In addition, courses such as Resource analysis and management, recreation and tourism planning are structured significantly with landscape planning and design content (University of Lagos FES prospectus 2007-2010).

Elements of BSLA/BLA and MLA Programmes Elsewhere

The general contents of both undergraduate and postgraduate professional degree programmes as specified by IFLA and American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) as enumerated earlier in Obiefuna (1995) are reproduced here to aid us in evolving guidelines for prospective programmes. These elements include:

- Basic design; delineation or rendering
- History, theory and philosophy of LA
- Surveying and/or civil engineering
- Landscape analysis/ planning/design/construction

- Plant materials and/or ecology; planting design
- Comprehensive landscape architecture exercise
- Regional analysis/design/environmental management
- Professional practice.
- Remote sensing/aerial photo interpretation/computer applications.
- Elective course be offered in social and economic studies, biological sciences, horticulture, geology and agronomy.
- Optional courses to address such issues as landscape management, urban administration and recreation planning.
- Undergraduate professional education should be at least 4 years of full time study.
- Postgraduate professional education should be two years full time after first university degree.
- Post graduate programmes to elaborate on above areas at higher levels of inquiry, some should offer studies leading to specialization in site design, Landscape planning, conservation, historic preservation, computer applications and research aspects of landscape architecture.

With many American Universities which offer LA programme largely satisfying the above requirements, either in a 4-year or 5-year undergraduate or post graduate programmes, only two of them are reviewed to point to their general trend. For the undergraduate programme, the two universities were the University of Wisconsin, Madison and the University of Georgia, Athens. For the postgraduate programme, they were the University of Georgia and Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The two undergraduate programmes, one a 4 year BSLA degree, the other a 5 - year BLA degree both contain most of the elements above. Common to both of them was the selection or admission into the programme proper after a period of pre-qualification. For the 4 year programme, pre-qualification is a year, while it is 2 years for the 5 year study (UW - Madison Online LA programme 2009; University of Georgia Undergraduate Bulletin 198 1-82 pp. 229-260)

For the MLA programme, these are widely two options both culminating in a design thesis. One is a two - year study for candidates with undergraduate degree in Landscape Architecture. The other is a three - year or more study for candidates with undergraduate degree in another field. Notwithstanding the prerequisites which in the latter candidates are required to fulfill, the core

postgraduate courses in both options are as follows:

- 3 postgraduate studios covering various scales and subject areas.
- A fourth optional studio may be offered for specialization in preservation, environmental problems such as mineland reclamation, coastal zone management etc.
- Studios are supported by required courses in advanced landscape construction, city planning, urban design, natural resource law, professional practice, research and seminar in Landscape architecture
- Thesis.

Towards A Degree Programme In Landscape Architecture In Nigerian Universities

Without doubt, MLA programme was recommended over BLA for the following reasons.

1. Paucity or few number of trained LA's to anchor prospective programmes as lecturers
2. Resources, logistics and facilities required for MLA are far less with fewer student in-take.
3. Latent availability of a pool of allied professionals wishing for opportunity to specialize in Landscape Architecture.
4. The programme was potentially viable especially when sited in an urban university.
5. Time of realization or gestation from take-off was shorter, no more than 2-3 years.
6. With short gestation, programme potentially could generate a pool of lecturers and professionals alike for industry within a short period.

Evolving An Mla Programme In Nigerian Universities

What then constitutes the broad and immediate outlines of such a programme? Should it be purely a design programme, an academic one or both?

As a developing country with myriad landscape development and environmental problems, such a programme initially sought to develop strong design competence to equip professionals to handle these problems. At the same time, the programme was armed with flexibility for research particularly applied research. Such research could be very meaningful with a strong base in design. With the recent trend towards requiring PhD's in the academia (Tai, 2003), flexibility for this was to be built in for the near term. Furthermore though a postgraduate degree, the programme while being made to comply with post graduate school requirements, must as a

professional programme not run for less than 24 months or 2 years. This is barely the minimum time for non-graduates of Landscape Architecture to cover the essence of the programme.

For initial take off and ease of organization, the programme was geared toward graduates of architecture, urban design and urban planning school with strong design orientation. Subsequently graduates of art, engineering, horticulture, forestry and others may be accommodated especially with possible postgraduate diploma programme acting as a distillator.

Broadly, the main elements of the programme should be.

- Compulsory or required courses to consist of 3 studios with minimum contact of 6-8 hours weekly; History of LA, Landscape construction, plant materials and ecology, natural resource law, urban design, construction management, professional practice, seminar and research, LA and sustainable environments, all capped with a thesis.
- Electives to consist of 3-4 courses, one per semester converging environmental management, aerial photographs/remote sensing / GIS, computer applications and recreation/tourism planning. Specifically the core outlines of the programme should include but not limited to the following:
 - 3 design studies I, II, III, the first dealing with site design at small to intermediate scale from inception to working drawings; the second dealing with application of environmental behaviour/psychology while the third deals with environmental degradation such as mineland reclamation, oil pollution, coastal/gully erosion, desertification (etc). as appropriate to the area.
 - 2 landscape construction courses; the first dealing with construction at small to intermediate site scales covering retaining walls, decks, wood/concrete construction and site details for tender documents; the second, an advanced Landscape construction dealing with subdivision layouts from inception to details including low speed road alignment, drainage and sewer layouts.
 - 3 courses in plants/Ecology and Planting design; the first being a survey of both Nigerian and adaptable plants/trees, their visual design and management characteristics, their use in small to intermediate site design; the second dealing with

ecology, plant communities and their use in large scale urban and regional sites for amelioration reforestation or regeneration; the third deals with planting design for varied landscapes from small to large.

- Natural Resource Law dealing with rights to land, air, water and light with ownership; both individual and collective responsibilities for public welfare and safety; FEPA laws, local/state and Federal responsibilities with selected decided environmental cases.
- One course each in urban design, urban planning, construction management and sustainable environments/cities as well as History of Landscape Architecture.
- One seminar and one course on Research issues in LA; in the first, a seminar is expected to be delivered by each candidate while the latter is a pre-requisite for thesis.
- Electives with a minimum of 3 by each student were to be drawn from environmental or resource analysis, environmental management /conservation, housing, aerial photos/remote sensing/GIS, computer applications, horticulture, recreation/ tourism planning, urban renewal or in accord with the interests of the faculty.
- Thesis - a design thesis; a synthesis of theory and practice covering especially applied research and design proposal.

Establishment Of MLA Programmes In Nigeria

After much procrastination and various other difficulties, two MLA programmes have been established in two Nigerian Universities - University of Lagos in 2007, and Ahmadu Bello University in 2009. The programmes were established under the Department of Architecture of both schools. They have suffered similar setbacks in the enrollment and commitment of the students. None of the two programmes has graduated students due to a number of challenges. Both programmes are part time and the initial intake very low; in University of Lagos only 4 students registered for the pioneer set- inspite of various advertisement and enlightenment in NIA and various universities that had Department of Architecture. The first set were unable to go far as they had problems with coordinating their studies

with the very busy schedules of the Lagos traffic and frantic pace of life. The other problem encountered by this set and subsequent sets was the design deficiency of the students. Most of those who chose to come into the programme were not doing so well in architecture and were unaware of the equally exacting design requirement of the Landscape Architecture as a course of study. The average size of the classes are four students. The set that is getting ready to graduate in the University of Lagos consist of students from architecture, engineering and botany backgrounds. This year, the number has increased to six.

The challenge is to attract students who appreciate the profession on its own merit and not as an alternative to poor performance in architecture. The paucity of qualified Landscape architects in the Academia has also hampered the establishment of the MLA programmes. More so in Ahmadu Bello University where there is only one Landscape architect (The second one died a few years ago – just after the commencement of the programme in ABU). In ABU the problem was ameliorated by the involvement of SLAN – who were formally invited to intervene to save the programme by the University administration. SLAN arranged for some practicing landscape architects and one of the landscape architects in the academia to help out and continue the teaching of various courses

It is pertinent to note that some polytechnics have been producing a crop of students who may have been a good source of students – with HND in Landscape Architecture and Horticulture, especially in The Imo State Polytechnic of Agriculture, Umuagwo where they are being produced by a notable landscape architect. Unfortunately, the students up to now were not allowed to continue in the University as most do not accept an HND qualification. For the growth of the programme, this issue will have to be addressed as a means of bringing in students that are truly interested in the profession.

The myriad of teething problems being encountered by the MLA programmes that have been established, have compelled the current considerations for the introduction of the BLA programme in order to register any impact. Consequently, both the Universities of Lagos and Federal University of Technology Owerri are presently processing

approvals for 5-year BLA programmes. This will certainly boost the study of landscape Architecture in Nigeria.

Sustaining the Established MLA programmes

So far, this has been an uphill task. Again with a short gestation of 2- 2 ½ years, a significant first turn over is expected. Out of these, a few may be encouraged to join the faculty even on a part - time basis. The expected affect is that within 5 – 10 years, a handful of the two or three batches graduated may be expected to become teachers in the programme. Consequently in a decade, one or two programmes would have graduated sufficient professionals to anchor the programme in perhaps three geographical zones of the country.

Conclusion

The outlines of the MLA programme discussed above are by no means exhaustive. Instead they offer a broad framework for continuing discussion and adjustments over time. It is hoped that the on-going discussions will culminate in a programme content which fulfils the potential student needs and meet the requirements of the professional body(SLAN), National Universities Commission (NUC) and post graduate school of offering and intending universities alike.

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