

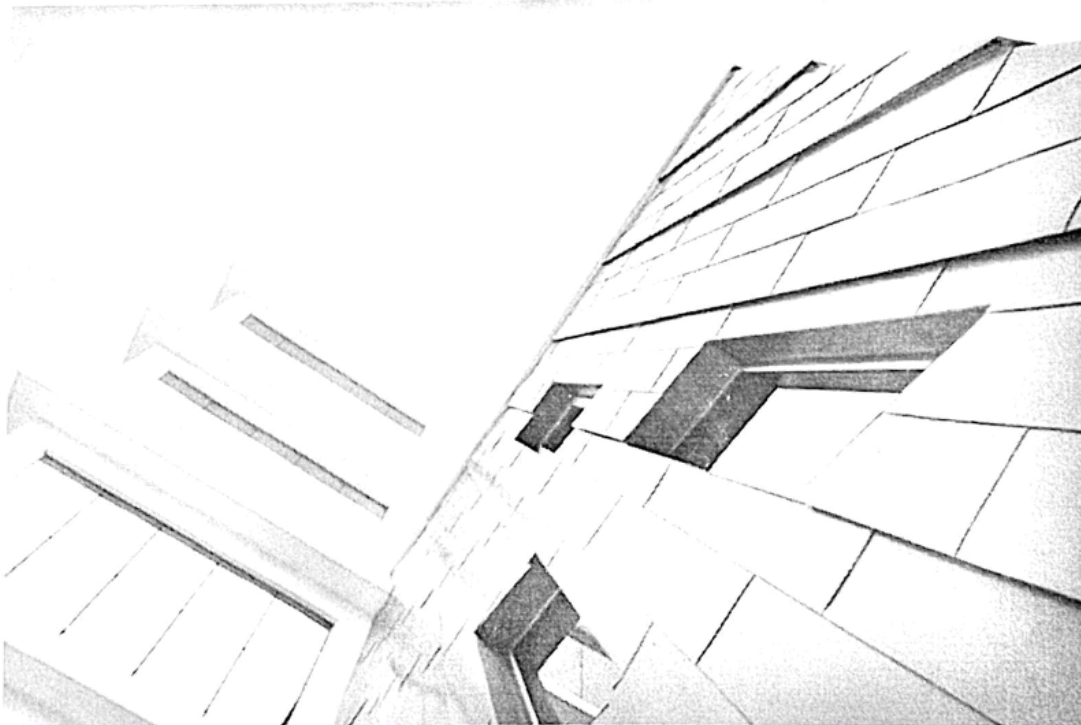
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Realism in Urban Beautification: A Landscape Architectural Perspective.

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Abstract

Landscape Architecture is the art of designing on land to meet man's functional and aesthetic needs. It has been an area of endeavor whose potential in improving urban environment is hugely unexploited in Nigeria. The theoretical orientation of the discipline by mid-20th Century were the concepts of 'ecological and sustainable design', well before sustainability became a global paradigm. Historically also, the contribution of landscape design to urban beautification evolved from private gardens for nobility to the 'garden city' concept through 'city beautiful movement' to the McHargian principle of 'Design with Nature'. Previous attempts at urban beautification in Nigeria, especially Lagos were largely during the colonial era when the Europeans adopted the 'garden style' for places where they lived such as Ikoyi and the GRAs'. The rest of 'African quarters' were designed in a grid iron form with very little provision for green space, landscaping or large-scale beautification. Since then, efforts at city beautification especially in Lagos, have only been half-hearted. Landscape design is crucial in meeting the Millennium Development Goal of building ecologically sustainable cities in Nigeria through urban beautification. Landscape elements act as carbon sink helping to clean up the air and recycle water, both of which are basic life support for urban and rural dwellers. This paper examines the historical contribution of landscape design to urban beautification through two case studies, one foreign and one in Lagos. Subsequently it articulates suggestions toward enabling policy makers and private sector stakeholders to adopt a more holistic approach to urban beautification of Nigerian cities.

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1. Introduction

Landscape architecture involves the design of the outdoor environment of neighborhoods, towns, cities while also protecting and managing the natural environment from forests and fields to rivers and coasts. Norman T. Newton refers to it as man's design on land (Newton, 1971). Landscape architects basically integrate and apply knowledge of ecology, socio-cultural factors, economics and aesthetics to create environments that are functional, innovative, sustainable, appropriate and attractive.

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) earlier on in its handbook defined Landscape architecture as a science and art which embraces those professional activities relating to the systematic planning of land areas, the design of outdoor places and spaces of utility and beauty, the conservation of our natural resources and environment, all based on the attending physical characteristics, social, philosophic and economic values and man as part of nature, not superior (ASLA, 1977). Later on, it re-defined the profession as one which applies artistic and scientific principles to the research, planning, design and management of both natural and built environments. For the purposes of landscape preservation, development and enhancement, ASLA adds that Landscape architecture includes investigation, selection and allocation of land and water resources for appropriate use, feasibility studies, preparation, review and analysis of master plans for land use and development, production of overall site plans, landscape grading and landscape drainage plans, irrigation plans, planting plans, construction details and specification, cost estimates and reports for land development (ASLA, 1991). Similarly, the European Federation for Landscape Architecture (EFLA) and European Council of Landscape Architectural Schools (ECLAS) define the profession as involving research and analyses to realize the potential of the landscape at all stages, scales and contexts of the developmental process and includes landscape planning, feasibility studies, strategic vision, master planning and spatial design, detailed design and implementation as well as long term maintenance and management (EFLA/ECLAS, 2012).

Historically, modern man has tended to beautify his living environment, from his private garden to his urban habitations. This was evidenced by the 'City Beautiful' and 'Garden City' movements of Europe and its offshoots elsewhere. In Nigeria, previous attempts at urban beautification were done by the colonialists in their adoption of European Quarters/Government Reservation Area (GRA) and Garden style for their residential areas. Subsequent attempts from independence even in Lagos metropolis have been largely half hearted. According to Oduwaye (2005), little attention has been given to deliberate landscape planning and implementation policy at all levels of physical planning administration in Lagos. Similarly, Adejumo (2003) suggests that metropolitan Lagos had no history of streetscape development. Recent efforts of the State government on city beautification and environmental sanitation campaign, though commendable, are also largely piecemeal approach as there exists in the public domain no comprehensive open space and urban beautification plan. This paper reviews the historical contribution of landscape architecture to urban beautification through two case studies – one foreign and one local. In the end, it is recommends a holistic, ecological approach to urban beautification process in the country generally and in Lagos metropolis particularly.

2. Early Theoretical Foundation

Landscape Architecture has a definite ecological and sustainable design background. In man-nature interrelationship, landscape architecture recognizes man as part of nature. The concept of sustainability emphasizes the ecosystem which espouses that organisms exist in specific habitats where they compete, complement and cooperate towards their sustenance, using the

energy of the sun. In recognition of this interdependence, landscape architecture allows for nature in arranging man's needs on the land.

Close to the mid-20th century and before sustainability became a global paradigm, landscape architects like Ian McHarg and Luis Barragan had long posited that it was important to bring nature into the city. McHarg believed in the planning cities based on an understanding of the natural processes and conservation of critical natural assets as was epitomized in his work with David Wallace at The Valleys, a housing layout in Baltimore, Maryland and later in planning Nigeria's beautiful capital, Abuja. When city planning is done this way, it ensures that the scheme works efficiently and the characteristics of the site are expressed (Laurie, 1986). McHarg spearheaded the ecological, sustainable approach to planning and landscape design. In his famous book "Design with Nature", he outlined the processes involved in this ecological involvement in determining land uses and landscape design. He also insisted that we need nature as much in the city as in the country (McHarg, 1971). To all these, Swaffield (2002) asserts that the most significant shift in the orientation of the discipline over the past fifty years or so has been the development of concepts of ecological and sustainable design.

In more contemporary times, a number of landscape architects have revolutionized the sustainability theme in landscape design by incorporating it in architectural schemes and in urban design. One of such professionals is Roberto Burle Marx. Burle Marx works in Brazil are good examples of the incorporation of indigenous planting into the urban context (Plate 1). Burle Marx, an artist, sculptor and landscape architect was a Brazilian who made impact by reintroducing natural species of Brazilian flora that were not being used in landscapes of Brazil. He made extensive use of species from arid climates. He was famous for his bold geometric designs as well as for the integration of landscape into the consciousness of urban dwellers. Often, his aesthetics were nature based, for example, never mixing flower colours, utilization of big groups of the same specimen, using native plants and making a rocky field into a relaxing garden. He was very interested in each plant's character and what effect that had on the whole garden (Plate 2).

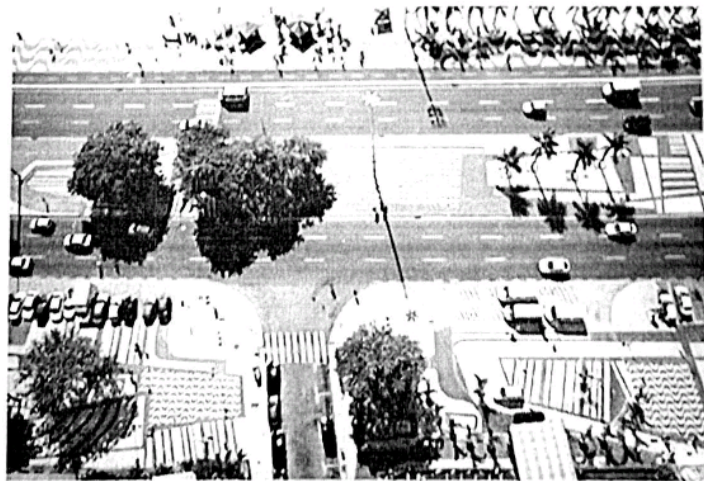


Plate 1. Illustration of a landscape project on a city scale by Burle Marx in Brazil
(Source: alchetron.com).

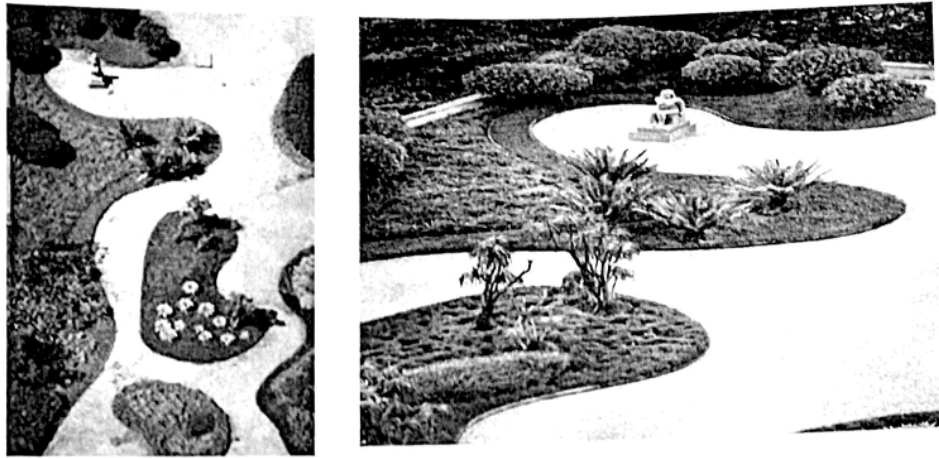


Plate 2. Illustration of an urban project by Burle Marx in Brazil (Source: alchetron.com).

3. Landscape Design in History

Early Period: During the early period, gardens were usually designed for nobility. Through the various periods in history, from the Monghul gardens of Persia designed for the emperors and their relatives to the Spanish Islamic gardens of Alhambra, lavish lush landscapes were made accessible only to the elite. Key among the grand formal gardens of the 17th Century was Versailles, designed by Andre Le Notre at an enormous scale, for the French king, Louis XIV. The garden was set within an estate of 15,000 acres, meant to entertain the French nobility; its rigid, almost punishing geometry emphasized the thinking in that era of man's supremacy over nature. Apart from the main central open space, there were different kinds of gardens, waterworks, small theatres and other fantasies for the amusement of the king and his courtiers. The gardens provided an outdoor setting, in keeping with the grandeur of the palace (Laurie, 1986).

Laurie (1986) also noted that the Italian Gardens of the early renaissance were designed as intellectual retreats where scholars and artists could work and debate in the coolness of the countryside, away from the heat and frustrations of the cities in summer. A good example is the gardens of Villa D'Este. With its boisterous fountains and fantastic views taking in the picturesque views of the scenic country side, the garden was a water delight set in the rural villa for the Italian nobles. It was designed by Pirro Ligorio in 1549 for Cardinal Ippolito D'Este of Ferrara. The fantastic hydraulic effects for which the villa was famous was as a result of diverting part of nearby River Aniene (Newton, 1971).

19th Century: The town planning movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented the convergence of a number of reform initiatives aimed at ameliorating the urban squalor occasioned by extraordinary rapid industrialization and urbanization. By the late nineteenth century, most North American cities had a league for public health reform, parks and playground association, a fledgling architectural association usually fostering City Beautiful ideas along with a municipal art movement and a lobby against corruption and illegal practices in city government. Toward the end of the century, fuelled by the ideas of the Garden City movement in Britain and the urban park movement in North America, these groups advocated town planning as a remedy for the ills they addressed (Stetler and Artibise,

1977). The physical planning component of the resulting reform movement focused on proposals for improving sanitary conditions, structuring the city fabric with wide tree-lined streets and conserving natural environments and the proliferation of recreational developments.

The 'City Beautiful' concept arose from the resultant congestion of the industrial cities of the 19th century. In order to reduce the cramped, monotonous cities, city planners decided to create an environment which the urban environment hitherto was not: big, broad and beautiful. Spear-headed by Daniel Burnham, this city planning concept conceived great plazas, broad avenues generously punctuated with monuments, and various axes terminating with grand colossal buildings just as Civic centers and Civic Center Plan became a popular theme. This Civic Center plan contained the Civic Center in an imposing location and open space landscaped in the traditional fashion, fountains distributed around the plaza and garden with the Civic Center usually capped with a frosted dome which terminated a long and broad vista (Gallion and Eisner, 1980).

Ebenezer Howard was instrumental to the 'Garden City' concept towards the end of the 19th Century, as he sought the abolitions of the evils of the industrial revolution. Disturbed by the depressing ugliness, haphazard growth and unhealthy conditions of cities, he proposed a city where the dwellings would be distributed about a large central court in which the public buildings would be located; the shopping center would be on the edge of the town and the industries on the outskirts. A permanent belt of agricultural land would surround the entire city on the periphery (Gallion and Eisner, 1980). Basically, this meant a city with concentric circles, the inner core of which would be a civic center in a park.

The development of public park system in the 19th and early 20th century centered mostly around the concern for public health, morality and the development of the Romantic Movement as well as for economic reasons (Laurie, 1986). The need had long been identified in the 18th century for such a place where the teeming populace could exercise and find amusement. Fredrick Law Olmstead and his partner Calvert Vaux, won a competition for the design of a Central park in the heart of New York's busy commercial district in 1865. In the park they laid out a piece of rural scenery and made a deliberate attempt to screen out the anticipated buildings beyond the park boundaries, thereby creating a peaceful environment amidst the city noise and bustle. This immensely successful, first major park in the United States of America, gave momentum to an urban parks movement, and it is still in existence today. Fredrick Law Olmstead was highly instrumental to the development of these early parks in North America and certainly changed the way cities were planned. Catherine Howett in discussing the contributions of Fredrick Law Olmstead, said "the example of Olmstead's career had brought the profession of landscape architecture to a position of equality with the other civic arts - architecture, city planning, and public sculpture - by the end of the nineteenth century" (Howett, 1993 p. 19).

4. Urban Beautification

Urban beautification is the upgrading of an environment by consciously adding various beautifying elements to the different components of the city fabric. It generally involves a deliberate attempt to physically transform a city's appearance into a "Garden City", and develop urban open spaces both passively and actively. This usually means the redevelopment of parks, green spaces and building of gardens. These green infrastructures besides being attractive are primarily functional, serving as lungs of the city as well as green buffers to break the monotony of built areas and create strong unity to the townscape.

Other urban beautification processes include: integrating and softening the hard landscape so they form one entity with the soft landscape; planting plain concreted surfaces in some places while linking isolated pockets of green spaces with trees and shrubs to form wildlife corridors; improvement of various pathways and walkways make them safer for pedestrians while including ramps and wheelchair access for disabled people. Paths and roads can be draped with curtains of greenery, shade trees and endemic palms. Areas with restricted ground spaces to plant trees with broad canopies can be landscaped with columnar trees, large shrubs, other shrubs and ground covers. Containers or planters can also be used to green and soften hard spaces such as pavements, where plants cannot be grown successfully. Embellishment of flowerbeds and introduction of hanging baskets displayed all across the city can be part of an urban beautification scheme.

Tree planting is a major part of beautifying the urban environment. Besides providing shade over footpaths and being naturally beautiful, trees serve the purpose of creating a strong unity to the landscape, soften architecture and relate to other trees on adjoining land (Plate 3). The manner of planting may differ depending on the effect intended, whether it is urban, suburban or rural areas. The urban planting is often more schematized or stylized. Trees and shrubs used are more ornamental and used to accentuate streets and avenues. For ecological sustainability, those used are also ones that produce less litter, require minimal maintenance, have strong anchoring system and can withstand the harsh urban conditions of concrete and vehicular emissions. Ornamentation with fountains, sculptures and street furniture through the city fabric are also part of this process. Beautification of the urban space can equally be as a result of individuals making impressionable improvements to their home environment. In examining the problems of urbanization, Ahiyanba, Dimuna & Okogun (2008) argued that the deterioration of urban built environment has a negative effect on the health of city residents. The quality of lives of urban dwellers, they further argued improves as the quality of the environment in which they live is improved. To have a harmonious, attractive and aesthetic pleasing urban environment devoid of health hazards therefore, it is necessary to embark on urban beautification.



Plate 3 | Landscape planting softens architecture and relate to adjoining vegetation Roberto Burle Marx work in Brazil (Source: theplanthunter.com.au)

The landscape design aspect of urban beautification may include the planting of trees and shrubs along existing streets, roads and new roads, housing estates, office blocks, business

methods and improvement of neglected sites where the environment is rehabilitated and natural habitats preserved. Landscape design on city scale is a very complex and expensive undertaking. It overlaps on many issues which are interconnected such as transport system, utilities and services like water, electricity, telecommunications to name a few.

Elements employed in urban beautification from a landscape perspective include: tree planting, street lighting, street furniture, signage and road markings, median boulevard planting, statues, sculptures and monuments, introduction of fountains and other water features, revision of pocket parks, public parks and gardens, provision of urban art. Others include: signage along thorough neighbourhood/district characterization, streetscape redesign and implementation with soft and landscape elements, waterfront development revitalization where appropriate, provision of pedestrian districts and movement networks such as plazas, walkways and promenades.

5. Historical Contribution of Landscape Design in Urban Beautification

Historically, the contribution of landscape design in urban beautification evolved from private gardens for nobility to the 'Garden City' concept through 'City Beautiful' movement to the Victorian principle of 'Design with Nature'.

Colonial Nigeria: The influence of these concepts on Nigerian cities were minimal due primarily to the commercial goal of the colonial governance and in Lagos due to the late arising of the natural open space development policy in 1991 (Adejumo, 2003). However, the colonial government at that time adopted the Garden City approach in the planting of 'European Quarters' and later GRA's - Government Reserved Areas, with spacious, lush greenery. The GRA's became standard features of many Nigerian cities. In Lagos, this gave credence to such places as Ikoyi and Ikeja GRA. This approach was unfortunately not carried through to the 'African quarters' like Ebute Metta. The rest of 'African quarters' were designed in a grid form with very little provision for green space, landscaping or large-scale beautification.

Post-Independence: As a background, it is instructive to note that most of metropolitan Lagos as it is today is largely a cluster of many townships with indigenous core (Kadiri, 1998). Except for the former European Quarters or GRA's, various areas comprising the metropolis virtually grew without a plan (Adejumo, 2003). Apart from this, since 1887 when the Lagos Botanical Garden at Iddo was replaced by the erection of Iddo Railway terminus in 1902, public open spaces and recreation in the metropolis have received minimal attention (Fajana, 1988). As a result, the metropolis really had no history of wholesale and sustained street development. Despite the formation of commissions like the Lagos State Parks Commission in 1985, the development of public open spaces and park system since 1960 has received no more than lip service. Buttressing this is the constitution of the Lagos State Landscaping and Beautification committee in the year 2000 to find a solution to the urban aesthetics and recreational failures of the past. This resulted in a recommendation for the establishment of Lagos State Parks and Amenities Development Authority (Adejumo, 2003). This was stillborn. The closest attempt at streetscape development prior to above was the introduction of the Department of Urban Forestry coupled with the urban aesthetics program of Lagos Horticultural Society, both in 1998. Incidentally, these efforts were too few and isolated to alter the blighted aesthetic quality of Lagos urban spaces. However within the current political dispensation, the State government has been influenced into street tree planting and greening projects around the metropolis partly as a result of its membership of

C40 Large Cities Climate Summit and partly to the World Bank (IDA) – assisted Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project – LMDGP (Mehrotra et al. 2009). Although still not borne out of any comprehensive urban beautification plan, visible examples today from these efforts include the International Airport Interchange and Oshodi parks, Old Toll gate to Oworonshoki median parkland including Ojota Interchange/Gani parks, Ikorodu Road, Outer Marina and Western Avenue, Surulere and others.

Other isolated cases of aesthetically pleasing and lush planting schemes continued after independence in a few cases in the country. In the University of Ibadan and University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan which was a collaborative effort between Lancaster, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, the landscape approach in the planning both places resulted in scenic beautiful urban environment, serene and suitable for learning and healing. M. Lancaster was a consultant to Maxwell Fry, Drew, Drake and Ladsun and pioneered modern landscape design in Nigeria (Falade, 1988).

Similarly, another major landscape design work and beautification was at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, whose comprehensive master plan and landscape development plan were prepared in 1969 by the Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA (Fig. 1). The successful implementation of this plan earned the school then the appellation of the most beautiful campus in Africa.

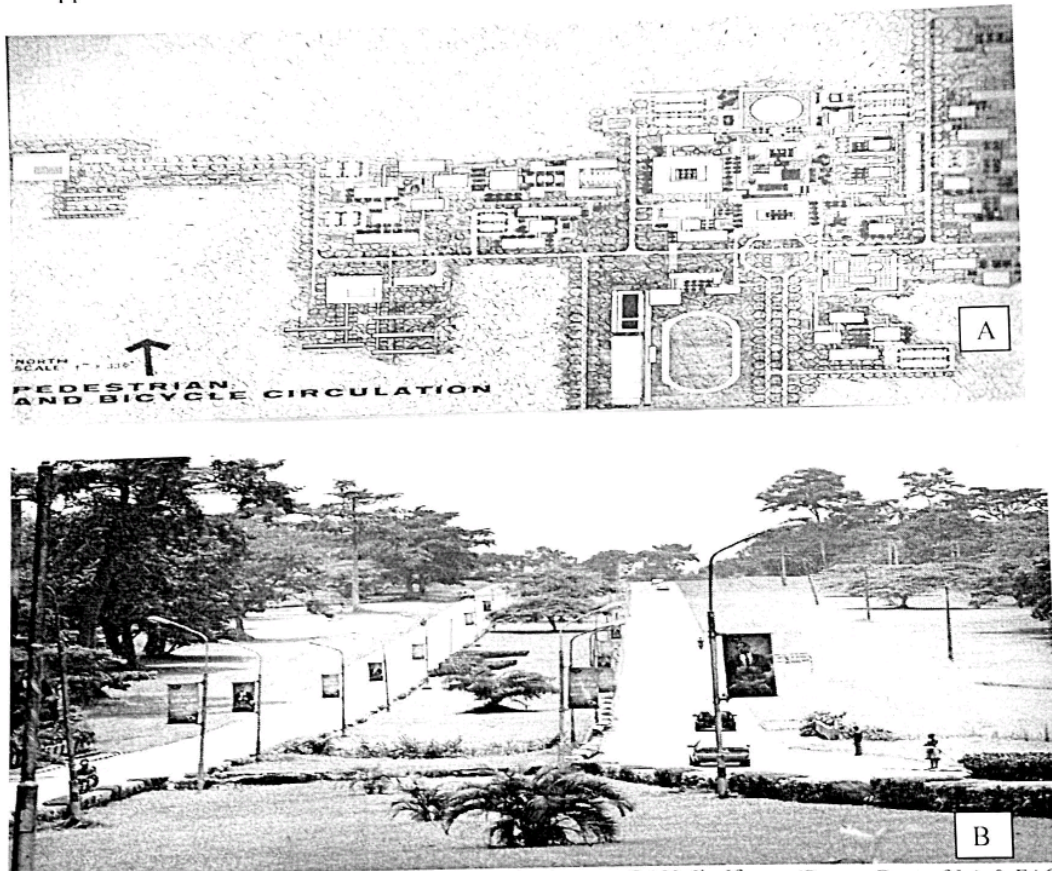


Fig. 1 A - Landscape redevelopment plan for the academic core, OAU, Ile-Ife, up (Source: Dept. of LA & EAC, 1969). B - Below is a 2015 photograph of the dual carriage main access into OAU, Ile-Ife..



b

deteriorated, owing to non-maintenance.

6. Case Studies

Lagos as a Case study

Since the colonial era, efforts at city beautification in Lagos as indicated earlier have only been half-hearted and uncoordinated. In 2001, the Lagos State Ministry of Environment solicited corporate bodies and organized private sector to help develop selected spaces and routes to enhance the aesthetics of the state (Adejumo, 2003). The fruits of that effort is exemplified by the beautification project on Ajose Adeogun Street, Victoria Island.

The Ajose Adeogun Street Beautification, was undertaken by Palmyra Co on behalf of Zenith Bank whose Corporate Headquarters is located on this street. The entire street was resurfaced with hard wearing precast concrete pavers in addition to the creation of a lush, well planted median with exotic palms, contemporary street lighting and signage to give the street a unique character distinct to the Zenith brand of excellence. The redevelopment terminated in the design of a simple but well thought out roundabout scheme (Eko Hotel Roundabout) that

used broad strokes of colour in the ground cover and the textured paving to present a classy effect. The introduction of lighting and signage as well as the glossy central time piece completed the design (Plate 4).



Plate 4: Lagos Yabuts Island beautification in Yabuts Island, Lagos

The current government of Lagos State is making a spirited effort at beautifying the city in line with its *Megacity* concept. Several projects are currently being implemented all over Lagos – some by the government and others by corporate bodies. Most of these projects are basically on arterial roads and roads in the metropolis. Examples of these are some of those cited in earlier paragraphs. A bulk of these projects is often considered a social responsibility initiative by banks, other conglomerates and corporate bodies.

Fukuoka as a Case study

As an architect with a lot of interest in landscape architecture, Fumihiko Ambasz has consistently made a mark on landscapes in the built environment. One of the most significant is his work in Fukuoka, Japan where the building and its surroundings form part of the greenery of the open spaces in the urban fabric.

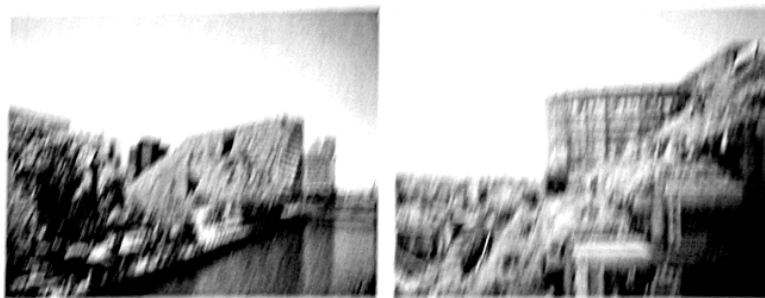




Plate 5. Illustrations of ACROS Fukuoka Prefectural International Hall & Park by Emilio Ambasz
(Source: greenroofs.com and emilioambaszandassociates.com).

In this scheme, Argentine architect Emilio Ambasz transposed a 100,000m² park in the city center into a high-rise of 15 stepped terraces of the ACROS, "Asian Crossroads Over the Sea," Fukuoka Prefectural International Hall (Plate 5). In the design for this, Ambasz proposed a powerful new solution for a common urban problem: reconciling a developer's desire for profitable use of a site with the public's need for open green space. The plan for ACROS, Fukuoka reconciled these needs by creating an innovative agro-urban model.

Through his inspired synthesis of urban and park forms, Ambasz, merged landscape architecture, architecture and urban design in the handling of the spaces and in his use of a mixed palette. Situated beside the waterfront, the project managed to bring in the country side into the urban context in maintaining the existing Central park while still providing the required functional spaces, merging nature and architecture within an urban context. Upon completion, the project beautified the resulting space rather than imposing on it. It allowed a major urban structure to exist symbiotically with an invaluable urban public opens pace.

7. Suggested Approaches

The Holistic Approach

It is important to beautify holistically. The piece meal approach needs to be jettisoned in favour of a more comprehensive model. One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) requires the trend of building ecologically sustainable cities. Goal 7 of the MDG is to ensure Environmental sustainability. Target 8 is to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources. To achieve this, we need to actively pursue the greening of our cities in a determined, organized, holistic manner with comprehensive planning as a necessary step.

The Sustainability Approach

Towards the development of sustainable cities, it is important that we produce air that we breathe through natural processes. For Lagos in particular, where water abounds, it is possible to tap into its resources as water is also a carbon sink where plankton grows. The issue of maintenance needs to be addressed as it forms a major part of an urban beautification scheme. If the urban beautification cannot be sustained over time, then it cannot be considered effective.

Landscape design is crucial in meeting the Millennium Development Goal of building ecologically sustainable cities in Nigeria through urban beautification. Landscape elements act as carbon sink helping to clean up the air and recycle water, both of which are basic life support for urban and rural dwellers. Landscape elements are key in this pursuit. The green

infrastructure act as carbon sink taking up carbon dioxide as part of basic life support and ecological services for urban dwellers.

The Ecological Approach

Alan Ruff believes that developing landscape schemes along ecological lines brings about the creation of a powerful form that can reflect and effect positive environmental change (Ruff, 2002). This is just as important for us in Nigeria, as we need to review the way our environment functions in line with global trends. In this light, beautification needs to move beyond mere aesthetics to incorporate the ecological approach in conserving and reviving the natural ecosystems in the urban area to ensure sustainability of our urban existence.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, landscape design is an integral part of urban beautification and should be holistically harnessed to achieve sustainable and aesthetically pleasing, wholesome urban environments for the satisfaction and enjoyment of city dwellers in Nigeria especially. Recognizing the interdependence in nature as espoused by landscape architecture, nature and landscape elements should thus form key elements of progressive urban beautification for our urban sustainability.

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