

The Urban Book Series

Abubakar Danladi Isah

Urban Public Housing in Northern Nigeria

The Search for Indigeneity and Cultural
Practices in Design


 Springer

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ARC. ABUBAKAR D. ISAH Ph.D
Department of Architecture
Federal University of Technology
Minna - Nigeria

 Springer

Abubakar Danladi Isah
Department of Architecture
Federal University of Technology
Minna
Nigeria

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Foreword

According to the United Nations, the number of people living in cities surpassed the number of rural residents several years ago, and the rate of urbanisation is greatest in the cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America. A critical issue of contemporary global urbanisation is the question of how the hundreds of millions of people who are living in and who will be living in cities will be housed. This question incorporates both the provision of safe and sound houses, as well as the suitability of houses for the lifestyles and cultural habits of the people who live in them. This second issue—the cultural appropriateness of housing and how it can be achieved—is the subject of this book.

In Nigeria and elsewhere, the design of public housing is often based on models that originate elsewhere rather than through detailed understandings of how people live in the place where the housing is built, or through reference to historic cultural patterns. As the author, Dr. Abubakar Danladi Isah, points out, however, this leads to a mismatch between how people want to live and the housing that is provided for them—leading in turn to informal and illegal house transformations that result in highly disordered urban environments.

But the nature of these informal transformations in fact represents the heart of Dr. Isah's argument. People change their own houses in order to make them more suitable for the way they live. The details of these transformations can provide the basis for new design standards that can guide public housing in ways that better fit people's lives and cultural backgrounds. The assumption is—and this is backed up by numerous studies in the field of environment-behaviour studies—that what people do provides an accurate guide to their needs and wants.

The book is based on fieldwork involving the careful observation of existing housing, how people transform that housing over time, and deep understanding of the traditional housing of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Dr. Isah's work shows how the detailed understanding of housing transformations that actually take place makes the bridge between people's cultural backgrounds and the ways in which public housing design might better accommodate those backgrounds. This

improved accommodation of needs will lead, it is argued, to fewer illegal housing transformations and a more ordered urban environment.

One of the Dr. Isah's important conclusions is concerned with the need for flexibility in the design of public housing. Over the twentieth century, public housing standards allowed for less and less space, and this led to dwellings in which activities were more and more spatially fixed. But even though families have particular culturally based patterns of behaviour in their houses, they also use their houses in different ways from each other, and those often unpredictable functional differences also need to be recognised through designs that easily accommodate them.

This book has implications that go far beyond Nigeria. The acceptance of informal urbanisation varies from country to country. In some places in Latin America for example, favelas have come to be understood as part of a legitimate process of urbanisation, seen as the first step in a sequence that includes the gradual provision of services and the establishment of legal ownership. But in many other places, the replacement of informal dwellings with public housing, or the initial construction of public housing (or private, subsidised housing with regulations set by public authorities), is seen to be the way forward. In these cases, the careful initial design of public housing is critical, so that people can feel at home in it, from the beginning. This book points the way to methodological frameworks that can help policy makers and architects understand how the cultural contexts in which they are working can improve the dwellings they design.

Howard Davis

Howard Davis is the professor of architecture at the University of Oregon, USA, and a codirector of the Collaborative for Inclusive Urbanism. He is the coauthor, with Christopher Alexander and others, of *The Production of Houses* and author of *The Culture of Building* and *Living Over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*.

Preface

This transactional phenomenological research in urban housing transformation centres on typical social building initiated and provided by government as public housings in the northern region of Nigeria. Basically, the research sets out to investigate person–environment relations through space and activity space relations. The basis of the study is theoretically ingrained in emancipatory research philosophy, aligning with several ways of human thought based on diverse social, political, economic, gender, and inhabitants' ethnic background in spite of existing commonalities. Uniquely common to this book is the persistent emphasis on the need to uncover the yield in housing transformation benefits and regulate unstructured public housing transformation, a gap yet to be addressed. This book thus responds to the widely experienced challenges in public housing with respect to the transition (evolution, growth and maturity) practised in public housing units in developing countries. It therefore provides direction to the challenges and changing face of housing spatial problems experienced by public housing residents living in the urban environment. This arose from the need to provide for clarity in space perception and its associated relationship with households' social traits. Therefore, relating the clarity of building entity to behavioural patterns comprehended from users' viewpoint, each with its describable, distinct but complementary features.

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Abubakar Danladi Isah

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About the Author

Abubakar Danladi Isah was awarded Ph.D. in architecture by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. He earlier obtained a bachelor's honours degree in architecture and a master's degree in the same discipline from Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria. He is a registered architect and has practised for several years engaging in housing and institutional buildings' design and construction with vast experience in both teaching and practice. He also lectures with several years of teaching and administrative experiences. He has written articles on related subjects. He has attended intensive training courses in human behaviour, ethics and peaceful coexistence. This qualifies him as a volunteer and consultant in human moral reforms. His expertise includes space use and human behaviour, building and culture, sustainable housing, research methods, and ethics.

About the Book

The philosophy expressed in this book centres on developing rational findings that resulted from the information elicited and evaluated through empirically established methods and sequence as evidence of its outcome. Astonishingly, this process minimises the author's emotion and biasness that are often embedded in the perception and subsequent interpretations of research outcome. After presenting results in models, charts, layout plans and diagrams, this book reports by means of analogical argument and reasoning the deductions of findings in generally accepted scientific conceptions. The concept of implied analogical argument adopted in this book connects existing causal effects between sets of attributes examined which in turn links prepositions with logical insights (Thouless 1953).

Exclusively, the research work reported in this book has demonstrated an innovative dimensionality. It has proved that indigenous urban housing architectural character can stem from users' initiatives of synthesis between root values and modern design ideals in order to attain culture-responsive urban housing design. This was achieved through its unique approach of validating user-initiated public housing layout transformation with root's cultural values. Thus, it represents a leading attempt in suggesting the adoption of transformation benefits to control spontaneous public housing layout transformation, as well as ensuring user satisfaction. Overall, the book defines the path towards attaining sustainable public housing design in culture-sensitive societies.

Abstract

Introduction: This book, *Urban Public Housing in Northern Nigeria*, the search for indigeneity and cultural practices in design is written in the context of culture sensitive communities. Beyond its explicit ideals, the book extends the knowledge on transformation phenomenon that remains an essential and inevitable aspect of the built environment which is desired in sustainable housing growth, because it espouses family space requirements while increasing housing performance. Besides, public housing residents express housing satisfaction in the accelerated transformation witnessed therein, even as the benefits are ignored and often considered as violations of building laws.

Background: These transformations rather suggest the exclusion of cultural practices in design. As such, the author embarked on the contextual analytical study of the phenomenon in order to redirect stakeholders' vision in the provision of public housing.

Goal: The research work is therefore directed towards developing culture-responsive public housing design framework that is rooted on existing users' transformation experience. As a result, a broad picture of prime design brief emerges from users' experience.

Philosophy: In order to accomplish the goal, the study employed phenomenological and interpretive dimensions banking on the researcher's participation as a privileged observer. In the process, the cultural factors behind residents' transformation were unveiled.

Analysis and Finding: Afterwards, the book provided readers with two practical evidences. First, through statistical inquiry, the significance of sociocultural elements that encourage user-instigated transformation was identified. Second, using layout pattern analysis, transformation patterns were observed, hence revealing an unbroken cultural link amid residents and their roots.

Practical Implication: The outcome significantly realigns the reader's thoughts towards the architectural characters revealed in the transformation stages that offer pragmatic response to design and policy directions, where public housing development is based on the understanding of users' desires and housing behavioural patterns.

Originality/value: This housing delivery dimension where synthesis of the implicit outcome unfolded several design intuitions on culturally responsive public housing upholds users' satisfaction by streamlining their mainstream values in housing design.

Keywords Culture responsiveness • Design patterns • Housing transformation • Indigeneity • Public housing • Space

Chapter 1

The Concept of Cultural Character in Public Housing Design

Abstract The value and the proficiency of architectural creations are often associated with the success that relates culture and space which are distinct to architecture. Architectural products host social activities with several challenges in their bond that lacks proper understanding and demands that complexities arising between culture and space be resolved. Truly, conflicts arising between cultural ideology and societal civilisation often lead to failures in the existing bond between architectural products and social communities.

1.1 General Idea About the Book

The value and the proficiency of architectural creations are often associated with the success that relates culture and space which are distinct to architecture. Architectural products host social activities with several challenges in their bond that lacks proper understanding and demands that complexities arising between culture and space be resolved. Truly, conflicts arising between cultural ideology and societal civilisation often lead to failures in the existing bond between architectural products and social communities. This is intricate as forces of changing civilisation override, instead of sustaining and enhancing social values in dwellings. In particular, technological progression that should reinforce human habitation rather sometimes fails to bridge space communication with societal norms in a dynamic housing delivery and operational context. Essentially, comprehending the conceptual relationship that bonds space and culture in housing ensures the understanding of households' desires in order to attain housing satisfaction. This book addresses this concern by exploring transformed public housing units focusing on operational pattern in a transformation phenomenon related to the integration of culture in space morphology of public housing in northern states of Nigeria.

In this situation, the book focuses on the benefits and features in users' transformation initiatives that are seldom utilised in subsequent public housing developments. Thus, the built environment is yet to address the glooming perception and desires of inhabitants as end-users, which is reflected in housing transformation, in

spite of the recognition of the phenomenon as a predictable outcome of built forms. Arguably, ignoring cultural expectations in initial public housing designs accounts for housing transformation embarked upon by residents due to functional weaknesses in activity spaces of the initial housing provision. Likewise, the worsening liveability cause by housing stress experienced by residents leads to unprofessional transformation decisions.

Therefore, this research in a systematic sequence first sought to know the core activity space uses common to major ethnic groups in order to establish significant cultural features at the root. Afterwards, probe the significance of these features to public housing inhabitants by examining their experience and perspectives. Beyond the significance of the features, the study further identified and classified the configuration patterns of transformed units as well as common features of transformed spaces. The essence was to establish that residents' attained housing satisfaction by meeting their cultural and spatial desires through spatial transformation. This outcome is crucial to determine the integration of root cultural core in public housing configurations, which provides the path to develop design and policy framework for culture-sensitive communities. Besides, it will streamline community's mainstream values and protect neighbourhoods from unguided and unstructured transformations.

1.2 Purpose and Coverage of the Research

Entirely, this book focuses on households' rudiments regarding the spread of social living within activity spaces providing security, privacy and satisfaction in tune with status and culture (Correa 1991). In the regional background setting being studied, household is conceived to extend beyond the nuclear family and to include close relatives such as in-laws, brothers, sisters, nephews and niece, and domestic service providers who often reside together. Therefore, this study looked at the spatial system that defines the physical world beyond material boundaries in order to accommodate cultural subjectivity as envisaged by Ekholm and Fridqvist (2000). In particular, social activities in African homes spread to its environments and constitute social setting of inhabitants which defines the house's cultural form. Therefore, the house is not limited by tangible boundary, thus allowing cultural features to determine space coverage and material components of house configuration. Besides, inhabitants' interactions rely on the ease to perform social activities which in turn determine the effectiveness of housing configurations that leads to user's satisfaction, because inappropriate space arrangement leaves users with social difficulties (Harvey 2010). Accordingly, the built environment rather than been a platform for social performance is a structure that exhibits social behaviour reflecting predetermined insight values and patterns of its creation (Hillier 1996). Impliedly, the assertion divulges culture as significant attribute of building configuration. Thus, it becomes vital to understand social behavioural pattern of space as experienced by public

housing residents. Culture defines social behaviour and is referenced to spatial practices, attitudes, perceptions and people's lifestyle (Hornby 2006). It agrees with sociological analogy that relates cultures' role in societies as a similitude to the role of DNA in biological sciences, so cultural process is assumed to function in socially created systems (Battani and Hall 2000). It then connotes that in hosting social activities, spatial forms exhibit cultural expression that is a synergetic relationship of interest between culture and space.

Since architects link users' personality with buildings in order to express social ideals with physical forms in relating social values to architectural forms, then its success will reduce housing abandonment (Brand 1995). Intensely, it remains significant to clarify complexities in architectural creations (Jones 2011). Mostly, there is need to analyse ideological conflict between indigenous and general perceptions with regard to public housing in both concept and relationship. Consequently, Hillier et al. (1984) affirm social meaning as most significant in in-built buildings. This is achieved with creative theories grounded on natural insights (Bafna 2012). Changes on initial design of public housing by inhabitants were thus measured. Significantly, these changes related the spatial morphology of public housing structures particularly in the context of quality and lifestyle of inhabitants in Nigeria. This research therefore is an extension of existing studies on housing transformation that have constantly upheld the need to consider transformation benefits, including culture in design in attaining users' satisfaction in housing delivery.

The scope of this research is limited to the low-income public housing initially owned and established by government and sited in state capitals. The cultural focus was on the major ethnic groups living in northern Nigeria. According to Mustapha (2006), dominant ethnic groups in northern Nigeria are Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv. Equally, Dudley (2013) outlined the major ethnics as Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri Nupe and Tiv. However, Anthony (2013) named Hausa and Fulani as most dominant ethnic groups in the region, followed by Nupe, Tiv and Kanuri. Thereafter, ownership of these housing units was later transferred to the inhabitants. The settings chosen for evaluation offer rich information on heterogeneous public housing units transformed from homogenously designed neighbourhoods. Public housing is foremost among public buildings in expressing inhabitants' cultural values, hence a key landscape element in urban settings. In culture-sensitive communities such as in Nigeria, hybrid multi-ethnic cultural setting and lifestyle need to be fused into the built environment in order to achieve sustainable urban development. Greatly, this research contributes in developing users' experience that covers cultural ideals introduced during transformation practices into design guides. Buttressing this, Rapoport et al. (1980) assert that in the search of environmental standards, environments are culturally specific in providing design requirements.

Housing is not devoid of social challenges particularly with cultural diversifications in cultured spatial settings where housing stress easily erupt, a situation commonly associated with inhabitants of public housing in Nigeria. Interestingly, inhabitants portray distinctive collective culture unlike what is witnessed in the cultural origin which expresses a necessary postulation for ethnographic inquiry (Patton 2005).