

CULTURE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: CITY DYNAMICS AND ITS HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN AKURE

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Abstract

Culture has to do with the beliefs of the people, which may be tangible or intangible. Culture and human development are actively related. Technological development viewed from a broad perspective may be development from above or development from below. The development from above has its roots in the neo-classical economic theory. The development from below on the other hand, focuses on the maximum mobilization of the natural, human and institutional resources, with the primary objective being the satisfaction of the basic need of the inhabitants under review. This paper critically examines the historical antecedent of some Yoruba communities in respect of their cultural identities, heritages and monuments, using Akure as a case study. This will help to fathom the rate of changes that had occurred from the past 50 years, in order to elicit vital lessons useful for the present.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Urban development is an expression of the comprehensive process of societal change. This development is closely tied to the culture of the people and their overall responses to changes that had taken place all around them. The influence of globalization and the technological advancement has brought about rapid growth in the urban centers of the world. It has led to greater awareness, flow of communication, increase in population concentration in the urban centre and has invariably made our world today a global community.

Akure, the study area is a conglomeration of small villages, notable amongst them are Ilisa, Isinkan, Isola, Odopetu, Oke Aro, Ilemo, Irowo and others. These villages formed the core center of the Akure Township. The history of Akure can be traced back to the 15th century, to

one of the grandson of Oduduwa (the progenitor of Yoruba race) called Asodeboyede. He was a great hunter that migrated from Ile-Ife and finally settled, in where we now called Akure. Akure was fortunate to have been situated on a plain land which gave it, a natural edge over relatively large towns in the yester years (Akintoye, 1976). At the advent of the colonial masters, they found it easier to plant their administrative base at the plain land of Akure, which later became the headquarters of Ondo Province in 1920. Amongst the notable tourists attraction in Akure is the 900 years old Palace of the Deji of Akure (Pic. 1 and 2).



Plate 1: The king's palace at Akure – declared a national monument.



Plate 2: Offices and later additions to the king's palace (an indication of modern technological influences)

The study area, Akure is situated on the world map at latitude $7^{\circ} 15^1$ north of the Equator and Longitude $5^{\circ} 15^1$ east of the Greenwich Meridian. It is over 250m above sea level and has large granite deposit along the road to Ado-Ekiti. It is the capital city of Ondo State, Nigeria. It is regarded as part of the North Eastern part of Yoruba Land comprising of the Akure, the Ekitis, the Igbominas and Akokos (Akintoye, 1971). It is 204 kilometers East of Ibadan, 168 kilometers west of Benin city and 311 kilometers North East of Lagos.

2.0 PROCESS OF URBANIZATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Urban responses can be measured in terms of urbanization and urbanism. Urbanization is the process involved in the shaping of a city. It is also the process by which rural areas becomes transformed into urban centers. Urbanization has to do with the metropolitan growth, which describe changes in social organization that resulted as a consequence of population concentration, acculturation and alteration in the structure and functions of any given society.

While urbanization is more concerned with growth “urbanism” refers to the conclusion of life associated with living in cities (Mabogunje 1962), Palen (1987) pointed out that urbanism is’ more concerned with changes in the values, morals, customs and behavior of a population, which is often seen as a consequence of urbanization. It is possible for a city to have a high degree of urbanization and a low level of urbanism, or less commonly a low level of urbanization and a high degree of urbanism.

Urban culture and technological development impinges on one another. The more advance the technological awareness of the urban dwellers, the more the noticeable changes abounds.

It has been recognized that the process of shaping a city may be due to two main factors, the historical process and the political process. The historical process incorporates the attitudes of the people, their beliefs and their way of life. The political process highlights the role played by the politicians and planners in shaping the modern city.

The growth of Akure to a prominent city cannot be described strictly with the use of the word planned, but it is more spontaneous and cumulative over several centuries and more rapidly in the last 50 years. A number of factors were identified in Akure, such as education, role of capital city, commercial activities, Agriculture, industries, aesthetic awareness (Odeyale, 2001).

2.1 Discussion of Findings – highlights on factors of urban change

In 2001 a survey was conducted involving four of the old quarters in Akure, (Eruoba, Araromi, Erekefa and Odokoyi. Several factors were identified as the ‘agent of change’ impinge on culture (beliefs, monument, identities and structures. Prominent among these factors are, education, the capital city, commercial activities and industry. Influence of Western education through Christianity was regarded as the strongest factor, with 80% of the respondents recognizing its role. The function of Akure as a capital city and commercial activities came next with 68% of the respondents indicating these factors.

2.2 Acculturation and Impact of Technological development

Palen, (1987) argued that urban settlements can be define on the basis of an urban culture. In term of cultural criteria a city has a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions. The city is thus, “the place as the sociologist put it, where relationship are “gesellschaft” (societal formal relationship), rather than “gemeinschaft” (community or primary relationship).

The city has a form of social organization which are rather organic than mechanical. It has a large concentration of population, culturally diverse and heterogeneous, socially dynamic. Culture can be seen or perceived in terms of transformation that takes place resulting in acculturation and the acquisition of new technology.

Acculturation process is the gradual influence and imbibing of foreign culture. In Akure, the colonial era of the early part of the 19th and 20th century and the introduction of western culture especially Christianity caused noticeable changes in building construction and general way of life. This is evident in the construction of the Sacred Heart Cathedral along Oba Adesida Road and the Mosque formerly built of mud now constructed with concrete.

3.0 TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN BUILDING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

The influence of the colonial era led to the beginning of the acculturation process. The mode of housing design and construction using “thatched leaves” and “agbo-ile” structure having courtyards were virtually forgotten, as argued by Gilbert & Gulger (1994) that the incursion of the European into the third world has sometimes led to the destruction of the existing local culture. The extensive use of courtyard is seen in the palace of Deji in Akure.

3.1 The Contemporary Influence of Technological Development on Housing Design

The Brazilian influence was also seen in the various building design that are prevalent in the Akure metropolis. This building style proselyted by the Brazilian immigrant that came to settle in Lagos after the end of the slave trade, led to the indigenization of the style of construction.

These building styles were copied and repleted in other parts of Southwestern Nigeria (Arayela, 2002). This knowledge later translated into good masonry work, carpentry and related trades.

In the contemporary times cultural contact and interaction is inevitable and this led to the indigenization of foreign patterns and mode of construction in Africa. It is not suffice to say, that the idea of total abandonment of positive cultural identity and gains should be forgotten, but rather imbibed. In Housing, construction and design a lot can be gained from the past such as the use of mud and African way of building arrangement.

3.2 Recommendation and Development Strategies

Development can be from above or below. Development from above has its root in the neoclassical economic theory. Whereas, the development from below encourages the maximum mobilization of the naturally human and institutional resources, having the primary objective of raising the standard of living of the inhabitants concerned.

In this paper, emphasis is laid on the genuine extraction of positive gains of our cultural past, usable in the present. Such consideration should be addressed in the use of mud and local material in our building construction. The use of mild, stabilized with cement will help to increase the environmental friendliness of our neighbourhood and ecosystem.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The use of this natural or earthy material increases the chances of maintaining the environment from decay or disrepair. The copious use of courtyard or impluvium as displayed in Yoruba form of architecture found in house in Akure has many advantages. It allows the flows of fresh air and proper ventilation of the interior part of the building, it serves as a point where rain water could be collected and stored for future use. The courtyard also serve as meeting place, the Owa Ogoga” and Owa Nla” found in the obas palace in Akure is a good example. In the Deji’s palace 28 numbers of courtyards of various sizes were extensively used to architectural advantage.

Table 1: Measure of Factors influencing development of building types in South West Nigeria

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Capital</i> <i>City</i>	<i>Commercial</i> <i>Activities</i>	<i>Agarian</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Admin. &</i> <i>Banking</i>	<i>Organised</i> <i>Society</i>
Strong %	84	72	68	32	28	64	20
Average %	12	24	24	52	16	28	60
Weak %	4	4	8	16	56	8	20
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Author's Research (2006)

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