



Investigating the Relationship Between Urban Planning and Public Health Professions in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Urban planning profession plays an important role in shaping health conditions of city and city residents. The links between urban planning and public health are many and varied having positive influences on the population. This study uses Imo state of Nigeria as a study area in understanding the link between both professions. Structured questionnaires sample the opinions of forty field personnel from Ministries of Physical Planning and that of Health (twenty respondents each). The study used comparative table analysis in understanding the link between both professions. The analyses showed that there is no link between both professions in the state. Planners pursue physical and structural development of the state while public health practitioners are involved in regulating sanitary conditions, hospital needs and drug distribution in the state. Political interference and a need for more training of planners is the major problems for planners while public health workers decry the conditions in which they operate as their major problem. The study revealed that planners agreed that there is a connection between both professions in achieving a healthy population for the state as opposed to public health professionals who do not see any link. This study therefore proposed a re-orientation of public health professionals to see urban planners as partners in progress starting from the course contents of students in higher institutions. Also seminars and conferences should be collaboratively held to improve on the awareness of both professions. There is also the need for invitations to be extended when major development projects and programmes are being initiated by each profession to see where each can add value and improve upon such projects.

Keywords: Urban Planning; Public Health; Planners; Physical and Structural Development

Introduction and Methodology

Apart from illness due to genetic defects many diseases can be attributed to man's interaction with his environment and since urban planning and environmental management is the modification of the environment. Benefits, welfare and security of man is pertinent to state that good, creative, visionary planning [1] and management of the environment would boost the health and welfare of man especially when it seems that there was a time when both urban planning and public health collaborated frequently to achieve favourable outcomes for urban populations. This has been the situation for a long time but current observations seemed to reveal that the situation between the two professions has radically changed.

Urban planning and public health emerged as a response to the devastation caused by the rapid urbanization and industrial-

ization in most parts of Europe but presently there seems to be some disconnect between the two professions leading to many urban health problems presently in many urban centres especially in cities of developing countries. There is growing recognition by numerous researchers especially health practitioners that the built environment, land use and development patterns continue to play important roles in morbidity and mortality in different communities especially in most advanced countries like the United States of America [2]. Therefore close cooperation between urban planning [3] and public health would help to increase urban health outcomes if the relationships are well managed. But in many climes such as in developing countries there seem to be hardly any synergy between the professionals with serious implications for the environment, citizens' health and over all development.

With the emergence of a wave of new bacteria and virus such as SARS and COVID 19, there is now call for better collaboration

between various agencies dealing with health of citizens to be able to proffer solutions as well as create opportunities for surveillance in order to combat these ailments before they attain world crises levels. Both urban planning and public health are two important disciplines that can help in contributing to healthy living and development of any country. This study intends to bring to fore the connection between urban planning and the public health profession in developing countries using Imo state of Nigeria as a case study in achieving health goals.

A review of numerous local and international publications served as a baseline for the study as well as observations of how public health officials and urban planners conduct their activities for first-hand information. Primary data is articulated through interviews of current heads of Ministry of Lands and Physical Planning and Ministry of Health. Also forty questionnaires were randomly administered to twenty professionals in each field that is twenty urban planners from Ministry of Lands and Physical Planning and twenty public health officials from Ministry of Health both of which are based in Owerri capital of Imo state. A map of the study area is presented below.

For development and life to be meaningful, the health, safety and wellbeing of a society must to a large extent be guaranteed. This is why good health is a priority for many governments both in developed and developing countries for which large amount of resources are expended on measures to improve and protect the health of citizens. The health of a population is dependent on various aspects of societies [4] and these aspects should be understood individually as well as collectively if better health outcomes are to be achieved. These aspects include the physical environment, the economic as well as social factors interacting together to contribute in providing good health. Therefore from these explanations public health cannot be guaranteed only by public health professionals but through the coordinated efforts of different professionals, including planning professionals.

Urban planning from the perspective of this study is the deliberate and collaborative efforts by people (both professionals and non-professionals) in our cities, towns and rural areas often through the instrumentalities of government to create better living and working environment that is intended to significantly enhance human development, health and welfare both in the present and for the future. It involves numerous aspects of thoughtful and insightful analyses of urban and rural problems, small or big in order to achieve a better society for every resident or at least for the majority of residents in various spatial locations.

Therefore the creation of a healthy environment is important if healthy individuals and communities are to be achieved. Living a healthful life is not only contingent on the level of medical advancement of the people, it also depends on the level of preventive policies, practices, programmes and attitudes that are inherent within each community and nation. One of the best ways of promoting health is through urban planning which emphasizes a livable, safe and secure environment. Preventing illnesses (epidemics and pandemics) and keeping citizens healthy and fulfilled is among the general goals of urban planning and environmental management [5,6]. Urban planning at its core tends to manage the environment in such a way as to create conditions for which the physical and mental wellbeing of citizens are guaranteed now and in the future.

Historical evidence also shows that from the beginning of civilization and man’s interaction with his environment many communities have promoted good health and fought diseases at the population level [7,8]. Man earlier on in his evolution found it imperative to understand how to promote good health [9-12] for majority of people and tried various ways in achieving it. Though each

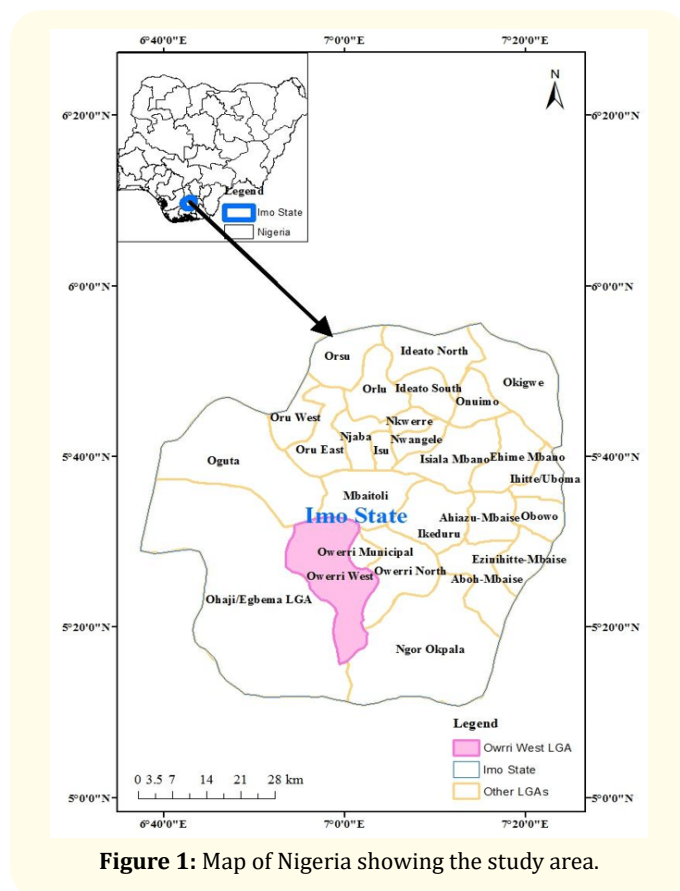


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the study area.

civilization differed in their pursuit of achieving good health due to differences in location, resources available, cultural, religious and philosophical beliefs guiding them, but there was always an inherent belief that good health promoted societal wellbeing [13-15].

The unplanned pursuit for economic development as a result of the *laissez-faire* approach by governments precipitated many urban problems that were detrimental to city dwellers especially the poor and working class that seriously affected their health and wellbeing. Cities though dated back to antiquity the industrial city however presented a situation that affected the health and wellbeing of residents at an unprecedented level [16]. Consequentially this situation led to the spread of diseases which brought about the enactment of decrees to guide how land was to be used [17], being an important feature of physical planning in the United Kingdom.

Early advocates recognized that poor housing and sanitation, harmful physical working conditions as well as overcrowding promoted disease outbreaks and ill health of people, for which urban planning and public health played a major role in remedying the situation. Various researchers have observed that public health, city planning and civil engineering evolved as a consequence of the late 19th century efforts to reduce harmful effects of rapid industrialization and urbanization particularly of infectious diseases [18-22].

Urban planning started relying on economic models in the planning of new towns as well as on regional analysis especially in the modernist era to open up new towns for an increasing population needing economic growth and development to power a nation [23]. During this period it would seem that the health aspect of urban planning diminished to be dominated by physical and structural expressions of cities through urban design.

Fields of study where urban planning is important

Urban planning has an over-arching effect because it encompasses numerous fields as it influences almost every aspect of human life. There is probably nowhere in human life that urban planning does not affect. Some researchers even go as far as placing public health under the influence of urban planning. This study legitimized that claim because urban planning influence covers studies of the environment, society, economy and health. Figure 2 portrays the diagrammatic representation of all that urban planning encompasses.

Imbedded within these fields of study, urban planning profession still plays tremendous roles in achieving favourable outcomes.

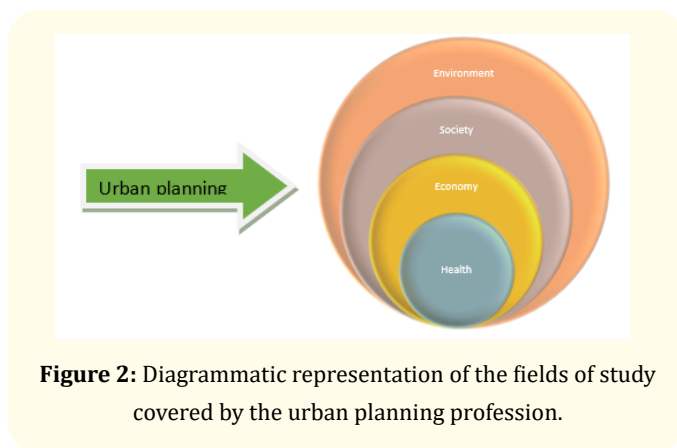


Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of the fields of study covered by the urban planning profession.

Note all these fields are intertwined as one often affects the other and cannot be studied in isolation.

The components of health under urban planning

In terms of achieving favourable health outcomes, urban planning goals are intended to help citizens achieve both physiological and psychological (body and mind) wellbeing that are favourable to man’s existence through the generation of physical plans and various mechanisms geared towards achieving a clean, healthy and orderly environment that promote good health for all members of a society [18].

Egunjobi and Abiodun [24] believed that the links between planning and health are varied as they are many, that is environmental, social and economic conditions in most cities often have both positive and negative influences on human health and health-care.

Health components of urban planning

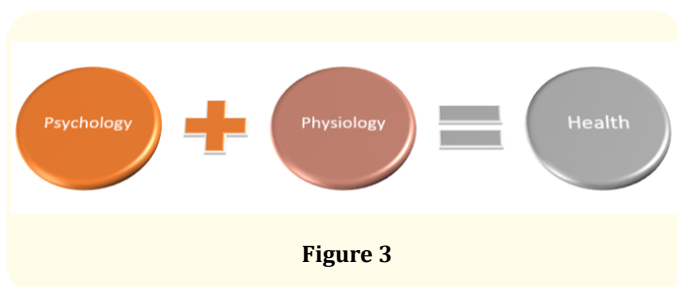


Figure 3

The economic components of urban planning

A city is simply a collection of factors of production: capital, people and land [25], that interacts for maximum potential. Urban economics tries to solve the problems associated with efficient re-

source allocation, economics of scale, agglomeration economics, and spatial/geographical distribution of the factors of production and to see the best way of harnessing all these essentials of development in improving the lives and livelihoods of residents.

It is associated with growth and expansion of urban areas that is intended to increase growth of cities and the economic well-being of residents by increasing wealth and reducing poverty of residents. This it does by pursuing plans, policies and implementing strategies that are intended to increase the rate of urban and rural growth and productivity, driving commerce and boosting industrial capacities of the various players in the economic strata of the urban and regional space.



Figure 4: Economic components covered by urban planning.

The societal component of urban planning

Society is beset with numerous ills that require multi-dimensional disciplinary approach in solving. The pursuit of social goals in urban planning is expressed through a unique concern for social issues and the application of the ideals of urban planning to the direction of social realities [21]. A careful understanding of social issues can create easier and better ways in solving associated problems for a better society for all.

Urban planning helps to improve society by creating avenues for the positive interactions of the different segments of society through multiple plans that are intended to improve ties and values of citizens. It also helps the planner preserve people’s culture and re-enforces their heritage especially those that are able to be manifested through physical and spatial expressions [21].

The environmental components of urban planning

Ratcliff [26] opined that urban planning as a profession has evolved primarily from focusing on public health and housing pro-



Figure 5: Components of society relevant to urban planning.

vision to working for the benefit of the environment at large. While conducting their activities the planner works with knowledge of environmental systems to improve that environment for the benefit of humans and his ecosystem. The environment for which the planner directly affects is divided into two; the built environment and the natural environment. These two and their interactions are imbedded inside the total environment for which their different systems make it possible for man’s continued existence.

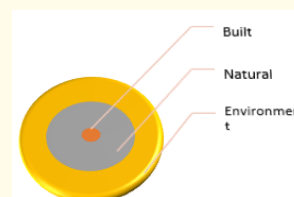


Figure 6: Environmental components of urban planning.

Overview of urban planning and public health in Imo State, Nigeria

Urban planning as seen can be judged by its intended outcomes. These outcomes can be generalized as the improvement of the environment and the promotion of the health and well-being of people. They complement each other as a good environment promotes healthy communities and these communities will eventually want to stay healthy and prosperous by also taking care of their environment.

Cities are veritable battlegrounds for the exploration of the relationships between urban planning and health. A look at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11 agenda calls for the making of cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Other SDGs likewise call for the promotion of public health improvements in cities. The UN Habitat III’s New Urban Agenda argued for a course of action that seeks commitment to

sustainability while requiring a rethink on the ways countries and communities build, manage and inhabit cities [27]. The fact that the work of planners has been made importantly explicit by these worldwide policy goals which directly affects public health of urban residents cannot be overemphasized [28].

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the result is presented in a tabular form showing how urban planning and public health in Imo State, Nigeria relate to one another from the responses of those surveyed. The ques-

tionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the challenges facing each professions and see if they are related. The second section deals with how each profession relates to each other while carrying out their operations, if it is through cooperation, collaboration or there is conflict. The third aspect is getting information on how to create synergy between both professions in order to enhance the goals of both profession taking into cognizance that both professions have intertwining goals of creating an environment for the growth and development of healthy citizens in Imo State, Nigeria.

1.	Urban planners in the state are in charge of the physical and structural development of urban and rural areas in the state.	Public health workers are involved in sanitation issues as well as regulating hospitals in the state and the provision and management of drug distribution within public hospitals.
2.	Urban planners in Imo state affirm that the major drawbacks in the state planning wise is the non domestication of the Urban and Regional Planning law as well as enormous political influence in planning matters by politicians and government decision makers. Also they also believe that there should be increase in the knowledge base of planning professionals so as to be in tune with modern planning techniques.	The major problem of the health workers in Imo state seems to be centred on terms of service as they affirm that remuneration is their major concern.
3.	The motive behind planning in Imo state is driven by the following according to order of importance; a. the pursuit of proper urban and rural planning practices for a livable environment, b. improvement of healthy living for both urban and rural residents in Imo state, c. helping state government to increase her internally generated revenue, d. implementing state government planning policies at all costs.	For public health workers their priorities are enumerated below according to order of importance; a. improvement and promotion of healthy living by citizens of Imo state through policies and programmes initiated by the Ministry of Health, b. the total implementation of health policies and programmes of the Imo state government.
4.	Planners believe that there is a link between their work and what public health officials do due to the fact that they help to provide a decent and healthy environment for residents of Imo state both physically and psychologically.	On their part majority of the public health workers who responded do not believe that there is any relationship between them and urban planners in ensuring the health of citizens of Imo state.
5.	There is very little or no interaction in terms of cooperation, collaboration or even conflict between both professions when conducting their work in Imo state according to urban planners.	Public health officials are in agreement with urban planners that there is little or no cooperation, collaboration or even conflict between both professions in Imo state.
6.	On their part urban planners in Imo state are of the opinion that there is need for health workers to synergies with them in order to improve the health and living conditions in the state through programmes that ensures liveability such as sanitation programmes, health and building codes and environmental awareness.	Public health officials in Imo state do not see any need to synergies with planners and are extremely skeptical about the ability of planners to contribute to the maintenance of good health of residents and environmental liveability of the state. For according to them planners should be restricted to the marking and demolition of illegal structures and those that are built without approved building plans.
7.	Urban planners believed that there should be greater awareness on the part of the leadership of both profession in creating awareness of the benefit involved if both profession are able to cooperate and collaborate in achieving health of Imo state citizens and a healthy environment.	Public health workers reason that if indeed they and planners pursue similar goals then there should aggressive awareness by both professions in order to achieve maximum benefits of better health and environment of citizens of Imo state.

Table 1: Comparative table showing responses of respondents on the relationship between urban planning and public health in Imo state.

From the table above there is disconnect between the both professions in terms of priorities and how they see their various professions. Urban planners are more interested in physical and structural development of the state as well as the domestication of the Urban and Regional Planning Law in the state. They are also calling for reduced political interference in planning matters in the state. Planners also believe that the knowledge of planners in the state is not enough to bring planning to where it should be and are calling for more practical knowledge on planning in the state. On the other hand public health workers see their major problem as one of remuneration, welfare and conditions of service.

Unlike public health workers, urban planning professionals are more aware of the links and relationship between their profession and public health in helping to create a livable environment for residents of Imo State, Nigeria. This has led to the present situation of no collaboration between both professions in the state. For planners they believe it is detrimental to achieving sustainable health for citizens as each profession pursues her goals independently of the other.

From the results so far observed, urban planners are more aware of the similarities that are inherent between both professions and are willing to contribute towards the cooperation and collaboration of both professions. This might be as a result of the fact that urban planning is being thought in higher institution is a multi-dimensional discipline that encompasses various elements of society that are interwoven in order to achieve the goal of making human lives more meaningful in the ever changing world that is evolving in fast and complicated pace.

Recommendation

The exclusivity of the disciplines and their non-cooperative attitude is making it difficult for citizens of Imo State, Nigeria to a better standard of living and only when they both integrate their goals that the health and wellbeing of dwellers of both urban and rural areas will be able to enjoy the benefits of both professions

From this study it has been established that urban planning and public health are geared towards improving the health and wellbeing of citizens but there seems to be a lack of synergy between the two professions in achieving better results in the Imo State, Nigeria. This study however made some recommendations to improve on the situation for better results in Imo State, Nigeria through aggressive awareness campaign.

Further recommendation is the re-orientation of public health professionals that they alone cannot guarantee the health and wellbeing. This can be achieved through the course content for them during their undergraduate training in high institutions. This will help in preparing them to be more receptive to other professions especially urban planning in future.

During Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and conferences each profession would do well to invite one another. This will also help in creating much needed awareness of the importance of both profession and from which ways of improving their operations can be achieved seamlessly without any feeling of antagonism while carrying out their duties of improving the health and wellbeing of citizens of Imo State, Nigeria.

Lastly, this study recommended joint operations between both professions especially when operations overlap. Also internships of members from each profession for some duration is also recommended so that members can get acquainted with each profession and are better equipped to better understand areas where each can gain from each other.

Conclusion

The fact urban planning and public health is facing a disconnect should not deter practitioners in finding ways of improving cooperation and collaboration in understanding how to work together in improving the lives of citizens of Imo State, Nigeria as well as other countries. The connections are strained and in some cases non-existent and this has caused many urban health challenges that will ultimately be checked when both professions can come together and work for the improvement of citizens in the state and Nigeria as a whole. This is because without good planning for both rural and urban settlements, health risks increases thereby undermining the health of population.

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