Port Harcourt Metropolis and Sudden Urbanization

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Abstract

Port Harcourt was established in 1913 by the British colonial administration as a port for the evacuation of coal and agricultural products. However, by 1950 acute housing accommodations become palpable, consequently compelling people, particularly low-income earners to source for accommodations in the suburbs. These suburbs were not planned or prepared for this surge. This paper examines this sudden surge or drift of people into the Port Harcourt metropolis and how it has affected these communities. The paper identified a series of development plans for the city; it argues that the chaotic situation of the city, particularly in the suburbs was a result of a lack of sight and poor execution of the various development plans of the city. Multiple Nuclei Theory was adopted as the theoretical model to explain the phenomenon under consideration. The research methods adopted include observation and interviews. Five communities within Port Harcourt metropolis were selected namely; Rumuola, Rumuokwuta, Rumuigbo, Rumuomasi, and Rumueme. The paper recommends for proper planning and proper execution. It also recommends urban renewal with adequate compensation to the affected communities. The planting of trees was also suggested to help restore the status of the city as the Garden City of Nigeria.

Keywords; urbanization, Metropolis, town planning, suburbs, urban poor, and squatter settlement.

Introduction

Port Harcourt was established on August 30th, 1913 as a seaport for the evacuation of coal and agricultural products to Europe. With the establishment of seaport and rail terminal stations, the city grew at a terrific rate. The chairman of Greater Port Harcourt City

described it as the largest city in South-South Nigeria. Ngbor,,Princewill and Korka-Waadah (2013). Economically it is also the fastest growing city in Nigeria, (Tamuno,2013). Other activities that led to the development of the city include; the international airport, the existence of numerous oil companies and their subsidiaries, construction firms, the establishment of higher institutions, etc.

The resultant effect of these economic activities was the expansion of the city beyond the original size of the city within a short period. As early as the 1950s the colonial administrators noticed the high congestion of the city and began to make plans to accommodate the anticipated expansion. Today, the city has grown to the size of a metropolis. At independence in 1960, virtually all the areas described as Port Harcourt metropolis were considered as villages outside the city. Hence, residents in these areas were not considered as people living in the city Nwanodi (2013).

The central theme of this paper is that the expansion of Port Harcourt came like a surge to the surrounding villages. Again, the areas that followed the initial plans are the original areas acquired by the colonial administrators, other areas particularly the metropolis as conceived today have remained chaotic. Hence, most of the areas that are subsumed into the Port Harcourt metropolis are unplanned and unplannable. The paper argues that military regimes and successive governments in Nigeria did not anticipate the expansion of the city. The paper also identified more than twenty development plans of the city that were not implemented.

The paper adopted observation and interviews as methods. Multiple Nuclei Theory was applied in the explication of the phenomenon under consideration. Recommendations include; the implementation of plans, urban renewal, and cultivation of trees to restore the status of the city as the Garden City of Nigeria.

Definitions and Theoretical Constructs

Urbanization: Urbanization could be explained in two dimensions; as a process and as a change in the pattern of settlement, Butlin (1993), Onokerhoraye and Omuta (1986).. In demographic/ spatial terms –urbanization means an increase in the number of people living in an area. The general observation is that the urban population rises at a faster rate than the total population of the nation. Urbanization as a social process implies the diffusion of a system of values, attitudes, and behavior associated with urban culture or urban lifestyle. This may not be taken in absolute terms as urban lifestyles also diffuse into the rural or village areas. However, there are distinctions between urban and rural cultures. The most important difference between urban areas and rural is the size of the population. This also differs from country to country for some a population above 5000 is

considered an urban area. An urban area with a population of more than one million is described as a city, more than two million as a metropolis, and more than ten million as a megapolis- a status attained by Lagos, a position Port Harcourt city would soon acquire. In addition to the spatial dimension of an urban area is the view that such a population must not be homogeneous but heterogeneous with people of different walks of life and different occupations (Ekpeyong 1992)

Town Planning: Ogar, 2001 defines Town Planning as '' a body of professional knowledge with principles and practices, providing organized technical guidance on urban growth and development''. The essence of urban and regional planning is to establish a spatial order of land uses in an urban area. Technically, town planning takes into cognizance the spatial arrangement of activities to achieve maximum social and economic benefits, convenience, and beauty. (Iyuwuna, 2004) states that it is a deliberate attempt by man to use his environment in such a way as to maximize the benefits derivable from the use of scarce resource- land.

Suburbs: Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines a suburb as an outlying part of a city, a smaller community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city, or the residential area on the outskirts of a city or a large town.

Urban Poor: Adelola ,(1987) described the urban poor as people who are unemployed, unemployable and under employed. He blamed urban poverty on rural –urban migration. Soyombo (1987) argued that the urban poor could be identified with the following characteristics;
(a) Low education
(b) Unstable employment,/unemployment
(c) Low status jobs;
(d) Poor housing conditions;
(e) Absence of savings;
(f) Constant struggle for survival;
(g) Little or poor material possessions, etc.

The concept of poverty is a wide area of study with different instruments of measurement. Hence, poverty is seen as a relative condition. The urban poor in this study refers to those households that are unable to afford enough food to avoid malnutrition, regardless of how wisely they manage their funds In this context, it also refers to urban dwellers who could not afford a decent living environment, Chuku,(1998)

Squatter settlements and slums: Tubobereni, (2004,) defines squatter settlement as any housing which contravenes existing legislation on the occupation land or the construction of dwellings. Slums are substandard housing environment. Wegge (1983) , refers to it as" survival housing''. There are slums and squatter settlements in almost all the major cities of the world. Whenever, rapid urbanization outpaced the ability of local authorities and national governments. to provide adequate shelter and basic amenities for the urban poor, the result is always the development of slums and squatter settlements

The Study Area; Port Harcourt

The study area, Port Harcourt, falls under the latitude 4 and 85 North and longitude 7 and 1 East. Wilcox 2009. Port Harcourt is situated on the edge of the East Niger Delta of Nigeria, over 64 kilometers from the Atlantic, Tamuno, (2013). The city was established on 30th August 1913 by British colonial administrators as part of their ground plans to exploit maximally the resources of their colonies. It took the efforts of search teams to locate the place. By 1909, coal was discovered in Udi Hills. It was the need to find a suitable seaport in the eastern areas to serve as the terminus of the railway for the evacuation of coal and other economic products from the hinterland that precipitated the search that eventually led to the acquisition of Port Harcourt. Earlier attempts made were on Opobo, Calabar, Itu, Oron, Warri, Sapele, Onitsha, and Okrika. On siting Port Harcourt, the Director of Railway and Works Sir, J. Eaglesome excitedly in a telegram, remarked;

"The unusual feature of the whole place was the absence of forest growth…I should think well adopted for a station, infinitely better than other place visited on the Bonny River",(National Archives Ref Co,58315). Otonti described the excitement among the British officers as akin to striking gold in a mining expedition.

The piece of land acquired was called by the Ikwerre people, Iguocha or Obomotu, measuring roughly 25square miles including part of the ancestral homes and farmland of the Rebisi indigenes, the Diobu a Kingdom of the Ikwerre ethnic nationality. Also, Okrika fishing settlements dotted along the banks of the creeks surrounding what was later called the Port Harcourt Peninsula (Otonti, 2013).

With the remarks by the director of railway and works and the subsequent visits by other officers coupled with the name of "the newfound land", after the then British secretary for colonies, Lewis Harcourt, work started in earnest for the building and provision of modern facilities in the town. By 1914, the temporary Wharf been completed and 24 kilometers of rail has been laid. A year later the rail line from Aba to Port Harcourt was open for both goods and passengers. Between January to May 1916, fully loaded coal left Udi Hills to Port Harcourt for evacuation to Europe, Nwanodi 2013.

Okorobia and Akpogohomeh (2010), described the Port Harcourt seaport as a natural seaport currently occupying the third of the largest seaport in the country after Apapa and Tin Can Island port. Port Harcourt port has a main quay some 1,390 meters long and has 13 berths and tanker buoys. These include 11 general cargo berths, 2 for petroleum crude/ refined products, 2 for vegetable oil, 2 for explosives, and 1 for coal. Seven transits shed storage space of over 26,000 square meters. The port has an extensive range of cargo handling equipment and provides a maximum draught of 7.6 meters.

The building of the wharf and the construction of rail lines from Port Harcourt to Aba and Enugu are very significant to the growth of the city. First, people from the Igbo hinterland began to flood the city in search of jobs. Second, it led to the fast growth of the city. Third, as Nwanodi remarked, newcomers to the city in search of accommodation began to negotiate with the Rebisi villagers living immediately north of the boundary in what is now known as Mile 1 Diobu to rent or buy land on which to build houses.

The Township Ordinance No 29 of 1917 constituted the first attempt at introducing spatial orderliness in the land use pattern of Nigerian cities. Then, came the Lagos Town Planning Ordinance of 1928. The Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance of 1946 was the first planning that covered the entire country. The most recent legislation in Nigeria on urban planning is the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Decree (NURPD), No. 88 of 1992. The law assigns planning roles to the three tiers of government of the federation and provides that a developer private or government shall apply for a development permit from the relevant development control department for any land development, Iyowuna, 2004.

By 1945, the Regional Government commissioned Messrs Maxwell, Fry, and Ford to prepare a post-war plan for Port Harcourt. One of the recommendations adopted was the extension of the township boundary to include the entire crown Land up to its northern fringes. In 1946 the Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance became law. The government established the Port Harcourt Planning Authority with an area jurisdiction of some 25 square miles in 1947.

In the next ten years over a dozen plans were introduced. Later the Port Harcourt Planning Authority was dissolved and a new Port Harcourt –Obio Authority was established. Its area of jurisdictions went as far as Rumuokwuta on the Owerri Road and Rumuokwurushi on the Aba Road. The government also decided to open widespread speculation inland around Port Harcourt. Using the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance title to all land in the immediate vicinity from as far as north as Igwuruta on the Owerri Road, and Oyibo on the

Aba Road were acquired by the government. However, existing towns and villages were to be excised from the acquisition.

In the original plans of the city, open spaces were provided as playgrounds for children and recreation centers for adults. The Creek Road foreshore was a grassy area with trees, while Aggrey Road was lined with trees. (Nwanodi, 2013) , noted that one of the post–war Layouts that suffered more from lack of enforcement by planning regulations is the GRA Phase 11 where public space along Olu Obasanjo Road has been completely built over. Another aspect of enforcement of planning regulations is the commercialization of areas originally designated as residential. Thus these Government Areas are no longer desirable because of the misuse of; a large number of shops, banks, commercial buildings, and even nightclubs. By the 1973 Master Plan of the City the following areas were identified :Borikiri,
Main Town/Corporation Layout
Harbor Road Complex
Government Residential Areas (GRA) 1
Diobu Mile 1, 11 and 111
Polyclinic Complex
Amadi Layout
D-Line Complex Amadi -Ogbunuabali Villages
Trans Amadi Complex
Rainbow Town Complex,St. John.T.T.C. Complex and Government Residential Area (GRA) 11

From the foregone, it is obvious that Port Harcourt was well planned from the sight and that as the city was expanding plans were also made to incorporate villages around. However, the town planning was not executed to the later, thus leading to the present congestion of the city. One other permanent ugly feature of the city is the presence of waterfront settlements popularly called water sides. This is the squatter settlement of mostly the urban poor who occupy such places without approval from the government and build temporary structures. It is germane to state that it is not a post-independent phenomenon. By 1954 the Bundu waterside settlement had started. It was like an extension of the city near the prison into the swampland. Of course, it was subject to flooding, (Nwanodi, 2013). Tamunu explained that there were about 800 such illegal buildings described as shacks and hovels. The British administrators described them as unhealthy and overcrowded clusters of huts that were illegally erected on the crown land on the outskirts of the town. These are a disgrace to the garden city. The government insisted that they must be removed so that they do not alter the plans of the city. From the colonial period to the contemporary era part of the government policy to do urban renewal which often involves the demolition of waterfronts, slums, and squatter settlements. The urban

poor are usually the worst hits as their dwellers are often affected, Izeeogu, Salau and Wokoma (1987) explained the impacts of development programmer on the urban poor in port Harcourt. ,

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It is germane to note that each time a demolition exercise occurs in the city, it compels people to search for accommodation either in the inner city if they can afford the pay or seek accommodation in the suburbs. Iyowuna 2004, asserts that those who could move out of the city to set up sub-urban development escape the concentration of buildings and people in the cities. These suburban developments were engulfed by urban sprawl. This is how the metropolis and megapolis grew.

Empirical Review

One of the challenges of the city was the presence of creeks almost around it creating a peninsular. Of course, it has its merit as it could be used as an effective drainage system to help prevent floods. (Wilcox, 2009) notes that one of the causes of floods in the city is predicated on the fact that many roads have little or no drainage or culverts that would help to drain the waters. As a result of frequent rainfalls which are typical in the state, during heavy downpours many roads become impassable. In addition, heavy rains also disrupt the free flow of traffic in the Port Harcourt metropolis. When it rains heavily economic activities are halted.

The presence of creeks in and around the city ought to have served as an added advantage for an effective drainage system. But Wilcox noted that most areas do not have drainage and even when they do the water does not flow into a drainage system.

Moro and Derefaka, (2010), investigated trade and industry in the city. In their studies, it was indicated that what led to the expansion of the city was the free flow of goods through the international Airport, the Onne seaport, and the Port Harcourt seaport in addition to the network of roads leading to other cities in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

There are four theoretical theories adopted to explain the social phenomenon that occurs in urban centers, these are; concentric theory, and multiple Nuclei theory. The concentric as emphasized by Burgess is that towns expand outwards under the influence of centripetal forces from an original core so that each Zone grows by gradual colonization into the next outer zone. Cities' growth appears outward in an even manner in all directions from a central nucleus or core. Over a long period, and given several successive stages of growth, the city will develop a series of concentric rings or zones surrounding the central business district cite.

Multiple Nuclei Theory was first propounded by Harris and Ullman in 1945. It is by and large a modification of Burgess Theory of concentric theory. This theory suggests that city growth takes place not only from the central core but also from several other subsidiaries centered around several discrete nuclei. Around each of these centers land use of various types will also develop. Such subsidiary centers may include airports, waterfronts, universities, and industries.

Put differently, the theory suggests that as a city grows, it absorbs existing nuclei, and others are created. By this, the suburbs or communities nearby are absorbed into the city. This theory is ideal in explaining the Port Harcourt metropolis and sudden urbanization. Port Harcourt as earlier explained is a peninsular. That being the case the only possible expansion is northwards into the Ikwerre villages used here as case studies. Another possible expansion is eastwards to the Eleme axis. It therefore follows that concentric theory would be inadequate to explain the expansion of the city since it did not expand only from the core of the city which by implication would be from station Road, Government House, old GRA, and the Rail terminal station. Rather the expansion of Port Harcourt came from different nuclei areas in addition to the core center of the city. These different areas include; Rumuolumeni, which once played host to about 16 companies (such as Eagle cement, SIAPEN, and AKE OIL.) In addition to these companies is the establishment of Ignatius Ajeru University. The city also expanded from the Eleme axis because of the establishment of a Refinery, petrochemical, Fertilizer company, the Onne Sea Port oil and gas free zone, and many other subsidiaries that provided services to these companies again from the Choba axis was the establishment of University of Port Harcourt in 1975, Wilbros oil company. Off NTA to the university is the Ogbogoro community which also played host to several companies namely; WAOS, SPIBAT, TIDEX, NATIONAL TRANS COASTAL, CRUSH ROCK industries, etc all these companies and institutions of learning attracted workers to the place. Logically therefore people had to seek accommodation in these areas and places not too far from government establishments like schools, hospitals, courts, and banks. the case studies in this paper were not host to some of the big oil companies mentioned but they were places where people had to search for housing except Rumuomasi which is very close to the largest oil firm in Nigeria- SHELL Petroleum situated in Rumuobiakani.

Rumuokwuta, Rumuigbo, Rumuola, Rumuomasi (the first airport base of the city), Rumueme. These communities lie within the major two roads in the city; Ikwerre road and Aba Road thus making them easily accessible to the inner and core city of Port Harcourt.
It was the imperative of the expansion of the City and the need to be proactive to prevent sudden urbanization that the Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi led administration created a new City from the existing one called the Greater Port Harcourt City. To facilitate

the growth and regulation of the City, an authority known as The Greater Port Harcourt Authority was established by a Law in April, 2009 Cookey-Gam (2013). The total coverage area is approximately 190,000 hectares and includes the whole of Port Harcourt LGA, Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre, Etche,Oyibo,Eleme,Okrika and Ogu/Bolo LGAs.

Discussions on findings

Twenty-five persons were interviewed, five from each of the communities chosen. Those interviewed were mostly septuagenarians and octogenarians. The choice of these groups of persons is predicated on the fact that they must have witnessed their villages being transformed or subsumed into the larger city of Port Harcourt. The target is to tap from their insights and personal experiences.

The general overview of the feeling was the surprise of urbanization to their communities. Some even expressed their disbelieve in their communities being absorbed considering the nature of the track meandering farm roads. Elder Charles C Emezuruike of Rumuola reported that he could not believe that vehicles could drive through Rumuola to Rumuorosi and down to Rumuigbo so that he could reminisce on the nature of the road.

A careful study of the areas and the observations made corroborate with the response from the respondents revealing that urbanization came as a surprise to these areas. The nature of the buildings and the narrow village foot roads now turned to vehicle roads are vivid indications to attest to this fact. The nature of the unplanned houses and roads is vividly observable in the five communities. To plan the communities by constructing roads, drainages, waterways, pipe-borne water, etc would be extremely difficult to achieve it may amount to erasing their traditional landmarks. In addition, as Sir Kevin Wachukwu pointed out the cost of this type of urban renewal is astronomically high because the cost of paying compensations would outweigh the entire cost of construction. To buttress the fact many buildings in these areas do not have house addresses where an individual could be traced, but they are within the Port Harcourt metropolis.

When asked about their opinion on their communities being part of Port Harcourt the respondents saw it as a welcome development. To them it has added value to their land; properties in the communities have appreciated. A retired director in the Rivers State Ministry expressed his appreciation over the sudden urbanization that as a retiree he can make up and meet other challenges through what he gets from rent, store, and house. The respondents were asked to comment freely on any perceived effect of urbanization. Among the negative effects pointed out include; the near extinction of their language, loss of traditional values, and the loss of traditional landmarks as most of the sacred places have been removed or destroyed because of buildings or constructions but the most

annoying is the near extinction of their language. As a social phenomenon, the respondents had some disagreement over some of the issues raised. Commenting on the language issue, they blamed the parents and government for neglecting the local languages. They continued that it is not urbanization that destroys languages, Lagos was cited as an example but there people still speak Yoruba both indigenes and non indigenes, suggesting that is not urbanization but outright neglect by the people.

Recommendations

Port Harcourt acquired the status of the garden city of Nigeria because of the beautiful plants and flowers; successive governments in the state have made efforts to sustain it but residents do not argue government efforts as they either destroy or uproot the flowers. It is important to educate the residents of the city on the importance of trees and plants to the environment and their health-related benefits.

Planning, the central observation in this paper is that the metropolis was not planned and that urbanization came suddenly to these areas. Given this, it is strongly suggested that government needs to be proactive by planning an area ahead of time. To do this the affected communities must be compensated adequately and made to be part of the project. Roads streets, drainages, parks, and other modern city facilities need to be provided on time.

There must be functional laws against street hawking. Markets on roads must be prohibited; illegal infrastructures that deface the city must be removed. Stringent laws to be enacted on people encroaching on government facilities, particularly roads.

The drainage system must be linked to the creeks for easy drainage

The waste management agency of the state must be empowered to deliver their duties. The waste generated in the state is sufficient to implement waste to wealth policy

Given the study area of this paper and the fact that they were not planned to reflect modern cities, it is only reasonable to suggest that the government could embark on gradual urban renewal of these areas in phases.

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