



Incorporation Of Landscape Planning And Design In Convocation Arenas In Nigerian Universities: A Case Study Of 3 Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This research studied the incorporation of landscape planning in the convocation arenas of the University of Agriculture Makurdi, Benue State University, and the University of Nigeria Nsukka. Case study research methodology was adopted in the research and an interpretivist philosophy guided the research. The research finds that the convocation arena of the University of Agriculture Makurdi has a commendable landscape design. The convocation arenas of Benue State University and the University of Nigeria Nsukka have a significant amount of room for improvement before they can reach their full potential. For the convocation arena of the University of Agriculture Makurdi, the research recommends the planting of trees to serve as noise buffers from the nearby roads and bus stand. A fresh redesign of the arena at Benue State University is recommended, while for University of Nigeria Nsukka, it is recommended that greenery and other foliage be introduced to liven up the area.

Keywords: Landscape, design, environment, planning.

INTRODUCTION

The art and practice of designing, arranging, and building outdoor areas in a way that promotes the aesthetic appeal, practicality, and sustainability of those spaces are referred to as landscape design (Klink et al., (2010). This is both an artistic and a practical endeavor. It involves the deliberate planning and arranging of natural and man-made elements in order to produce outdoor spaces that are harmonious and, according to Ayeni (2012), aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

In landscape design, numerous elements are taken into consideration, such as the peculiarities of the location, the needs and taste preferences of a client, the environment that is around them, and the purpose for which the area will be used. It takes into account both the softscape (the living parts of a landscape that include trees, shrubs, plants, and vegetation) and the hardscape (the non-living elements of a landscape such as pathways, patios, aquatic features, and buildings) that comprise a landscape (Sydnor, 2014).

When one takes even a cursory look at the higher educational institutions in Nigeria, it is immediately clear that a great deal more effort is given to the erection of buildings rather than the design or implementation of the surrounding landscape that places the buildings in their appropriate context. Those few properties that do have a landscape plan are frequently ignored, and the landscaping is frequently allowed to go unmaintained (Adeniyi et al., 2018).

The absence of a landscape design in buildings has a significant impact on how much inhabitants and users appreciate these buildings. This has a negative impact on the perceived value of these buildings (Mohd et al., 2014).

A convocation is a significant ceremonial event that is held by institutions to mark the graduation of students or the conclusion of their degree programmes. A graduation ceremony is an event where students are awarded their college degrees and honoured for their successes in school. It is often a formal gathering. During convocation ceremonies, in addition to the awarding of degrees and the donning of academic regalia, speeches and other traditional rites are also frequently performed.

For a variety of reasons, a convocation ceremony is an essential part of the academic year in universities in Nigeria. To begin, it signifies an important turning point in the students' path through their academic careers. It is the conclusion of many years of laborious effort, devoted effort, and academic success. It is a time for the graduates to be celebrated and recognized for the accomplishments they have achieved, and it also marks the conclusion of a certain period in their lives.

In addition, graduation ceremonies give an occasion for the public recognition and celebration of the accomplishments of the graduating students. The award recognizes and celebrates the recipient's academic achievements as well as their effective conclusion of a degree programme. It is an opportunity for educational institutions to recognize and celebrate the skills and abilities of the kids who attend their schools.

Furthermore, convocation ceremonies serve as a gathering place for learners, instructors, employees, relatives, and friends of the university. It helps to develop a sense of belonging as well as a sense of pride in the college or university that is shared by all. The ceremony also supports long-standing traditions and rituals, which create a sense of continuity and heritage by connecting current and previous generations of students and bridging the gap between them.

The graduation or convocation ceremony is the single most important event that a university will organize, and it typically draws thousands of guests. It is expected that the location where such a significant occasion will take place will have a clearly defined landscape that will contribute excellence and grandeur to the momentous occasion that it will host.

Literature Review

When students are trying to decide which school to attend, the campus environment is frequently cited as a factor that plays a role in their decision-making process. It embodies cultural values in addition to aesthetic ones as well. As they enter the campus or make their way through the building, the first view that they take in is of the surrounding nature. The campus environment serves as the institution's presentation, acting as both the entrance and the greeting page for visitors. In many cases, it tells a significant amount about the college, polytechnic, or university in question (Walton & Sweeney, 2013).

Erecting an edifice without first creating a landscape plan can have a variety of unintended outcomes, some of which can have an effect on the property's utility, beauty, and long-term worth. Several authors such as Blake (1999), Adeniyi et al., (2018), Ayeni (2012) have written about the potential repercussions of ignoring landscape design, the findings are summarized in the 7 points below:

1. **Inadequate Cohesion and Aesthetic Appeal:** If the outside of the house does not have a landscape design, it may be inadequate in terms of both cohesion and aesthetic appeal. It's possible that the outdoor space gives off the impression of being disconnected, disorganized, and devoid of any sense of purpose. The aesthetic value of the property as a whole and its street appeal may suffer as a result of this.
2. **Inefficient Use of Area:** The absence of landscape design might lead to an inefficient use of the available outdoor area. It is possible that spaces will not be utilized to their full potential or optimized for the reasons for which they were designed in the absence of good planning. Because of this, the outside space may not be as functional or enjoyable as it otherwise could be.
3. **Problems Associated with Drainage and Erosion:** Taking into account aspects such as grading, water drainage, and control of erosion are essential components of good landscape design. In the absence of these factors, water may pool in undesirable spots, resulting in drainage problems and possibly causing

damage to the foundation of the property, features of the landscape, or other structures in the surrounding region.

4. Chances for Outdoor Living: A properly designed landscaping can provide chances for enjoyment of the outdoors, such as places to relax, patios, decks, or kitchens for the outdoors. However, these opportunities may be restricted. In the absence of a design plan, these conveniences run the risk of being ignored, which would result in the loss of an opportunity for external enjoyment and entertainment.

5. A Lack of Seclusion and Screening: Careful planning of the landscape can help to create privacy as well as screening from the properties that are adjacent to yours, as well as from roadways and other undesired sights. If this factor isn't taken into account, the property might not have enough privacy, which would lead to a lessened sense of safety and tranquility.

6. Missed Possibilities for Sustainability. Sustainable practices can be included into landscape design. Some examples of these practices include water-efficient systems for irrigation, native plants, collection of rainwater, and permeable surfaces. Developing a facility without a plan for landscaping could result in lost opportunities to minimize negative effects on the environment and maximize the effective use of available resources.

7. Decreased Property Value: A property's value can be greatly increased by the addition of a landscape that has been thoughtfully designed. If the property does not have an appropriate landscape design, it might not be as appealing to prospective purchasers and might not reach its full market value, both of which could result in a decrease in the property's worth.

In convocation arenas that have the capacity to host a large number of guests at once, landscape architecture plays an important role. When careful landscape design is included in convocation centers, event organizers have the power to improve the overall experience for participants, create outdoor spaces that are both appealing and functional, encourage sustainable practices, and contribute to the branding and identity of the arena.

According to ACCLL (2023), Velarde et al., (2007) and Cimburova et al., (2023) incorporating landscape planning into the design and construction of convocation arenas yields quite a number of benefits. The most prominent of these benefits are aesthetics and ambiance. Well-designed landscapes have the potential to produce an ambiance that is both appealing and aesthetically pleasing for those who are attending the convocation. Enhancing the aesthetic attractiveness and inducing a sense of calm and relaxation can be accomplished by using components such as verdant vegetation, gardens that are meticulously cared for, water features, and creative works.

In addition to aesthetics and ambiance, navigation and signage are other benefits of a well-thought-out landscape plan. The practice of landscape design can be of assistance with navigation and signage inside the grounds of the convocation arena. It is possible to direct guests to multiple parking spaces, or facilities within the outdoor areas by using well-positioned signs, walkways, and obvious navigation markers. This will reduce the amount of uncertainty that attendees encounter and will improve the visitor experience as a whole.

Appropriate features of landscape design, like hedges, trees, or fences, can serve as barriers to limit the amount of noise and distracting visuals that are caused by nearby buildings, roads, or other external stimuli.

METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative by nature and adopts a case study research methodology. An interpretivist research philosophy guided the research. Interpretivism allows room for the researchers' personal views and backgrounds in drawing inferences from the field (Chowdhury, 2014). The convocation arenas of three Nigerian universities were studied. The convocation arena studied are James Avatse Convocation Arena of the University of Agriculture Makurdi Benue State, Benue State University Convocation Arena Makurdi Benue State, and Margaret Ekpo Convocation Arena of the University of Nigeria Nsukka Enugu State. The three universities were selected based on their proximity to the researchers' locale.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

James Avatse Convocation Arena, University of Agriculture Makurdi, Benue State

The University of Agriculture in Makurdi is home to the James Avatse Convocation Arena, which can be found at the campus's southernmost centre. Built in the 1980s, this impressive venue is currently used as the primary location for the institution's commencement ceremonies. It encompasses a considerable area of land and is set in the midst of a breathtaking panorama. The construction is designed like an octagon and has openings on all eight sides. The arena, the stage, and the convenience areas are the three distinct sections that can be partitioned off within the convocation venue. The arena opens on all eight of its sides, yet it has a roof over its entirety, which permits unrestricted circulation of light and air. The floor space reserved for audience members has been divided into three levels to facilitate an unobstructed view of the the main stage.

The convention centre features an impressive human circulation concept and landscape design that is second to none. The arena's potential to use sunlight and ventilation from the outdoors was thoroughly utilized. The fact that the arena is located so close to a bus stop and several roads, however, makes it susceptible to noise pollution, which disrupts the activities that are taking place inside the arena.

Benue State University Convocation Arena, Makurdi, Benue State.

The Convocation Arena of Benue State University was a two-story building during the time of the fieldwork. The front portion of the building served as an administration block and contained offices and stores. The back portion of the building was a pavilion that served as a venue for convocations and other major meetings. The pavilion is situated so that it overlooks a wide open field that is presently undergoing construction. Track and field competitions are going to be held there, as that is the plan for the open field. The architectural layout of the arena that houses the convention has a lot of room for improvement. The open field is going to be used in a way that contradicts the architectural logic of a convocation arena.

Margaret Ekpo Convocation Arena, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State.

Students affectionately refer to the Margaret Ekpo Convocation Arena as "Ekpo Ref," and its construction in the 1960s coincided with the construction of other faculty buildings on campus, such as the Faculty of Education. Converted from its original function as a student refectory to its current use as an arena for university convocations after the school discontinued supplying meals for its pupils at the time of the building's construction.

It is a building with a rectangular shape and various additional ancillary facilities that are used for graduation, inaugural lectures, and other similar events. The convocation arena has a lackluster landscaping design. The ugly and unwelcoming appearance is caused by the concrete walls that surround the entire area.

CONCLUSION

It is admirable that the James Avatse Convocation Arena was designed with careful consideration given to the surrounding nature. Both the Benue State University Convocation Arena and the University of Nigeria Nsukka Convocation Arena have a significant amount of room for improvement before they can reach their full potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the James Avatse Convocation Arena be landscaped with trees and other types of vegetation that can act as noise barriers and deflectors, in order to reduce the amount of noise that is generated by the neighbouring highways and bus stands.

The functional needs for a convocation arena need to be taken into consideration by Benue State University in order to construct a purpose-built arena that will be able to fulfil those requirements.

The dreary sensation that is produced by the Margaret Ekpo Convocation Arena's concrete walls needs to be subdued by the addition of landscape features such as foliage, potted plants, and other characters from the natural environment.

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