HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOOD QUALITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN PUBLIC HOUSING IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the housing and neighbourhood quality of public housing in Lagos, Nigeria. It describes the nature and characteristics of the housing; and reports findings from a survey research on public housing in the study area. A survey of eight purposively selected public housing estates (five low-income and three medium-income estates) was conducted to evaluate the housing quality and neighbourhood infrastructure and identify areas of vulnerability to future public health hazards. The paper identifies and discusses the quality indicators and causes of inadequacy in the selected housing estates. The assessment of the conditions and quality of housing and neighbourhood environment in each of estates was conducted by means of penalty scoring. Blocks of houses in low-income estates reported significantly lower levels of housing and environmental quality than houses in the medium-income estates. Based on housing condition alone, approximately 34 per cent of all the housing blocks surveyed (n=225) in the eight estates were categorised as being of poor quality and dilapidated, that is, with two or more major defects. Based on the neighbourhood environment, about 65 per cent and 30 per cent in the low-income and medium-income estates respectively fall into the poor quality category. The study identifies and discusses the perceived reasons for these findings and makes useful recommendations that could enhance housing quality and improve quality-of-life in public housing. It concludes on the need for participatory approaches to infrastructure improvements and enhanced collaboration between stakeholders to maintain present housing and neighbourhood stock and develop sustainable future builds.

Key words: Housing Quality, Neighbourhood Quality, Public housing, Quality of life.

Introduction

Housing plays significant roles in people's lives – physical, psychological, social, economic, and political – with the potential to contribute to national development [1]. Public housing refers to government-provided or subsidized housing projects, which presumes the inability of the private sector to fully meet the housing needs of the entire population, especially the low-income groups. It is also called 'social housing' or 'state-housing' (in United Kingdom) and 'welfare housing' (in the United States) [2-3].

The economies of many developing countries have been bedeviled by unplanned urbanisation, leading to housing problems that manifest both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Greater research attention has however been focused on quantitative issues than on issues of housing and neighbourhood quality [4-5]. Housing and neighbourhood quality and the residential environment in general, are vital determinants of quality-of-life and well-being [6-7]. Globally, public housing neighbourhoods are usually stigmatized as being characterized by a high concentration of low-income families, poor living conditions, social vices and relatively low quality-of-life [8].

This paper therefore examines the quality of public housing in Lagos, Nigeria, through a survey of selected public housing estates provided by the Lagos State Development and Property Corporation (LSDPC). Established in 1972, LSDPC's historical antecedents confirm the fact that housing provision propelled by motives of minimal profit and social service is the corporation's original and principal function [9]. It is apt therefore to examine the quality of housing provided by the LSDPC. The study is justified by the fact that LSDPC housing estates have become a dominant component of the Lagos urban housing stock. Its housing is considered a priority area for research, based on the expected multiplier effect: the potential of providing input to improve the quality for future public housing schemes. First, the contextual and conceptual issues are introduced, followed by a description of the research method. The paper then presents a summary of the quantitative data derived from an expert rating of the housing estates. Finally, it offers some recommendations and useful conclusion.

Study Context, Concepts, Method and Findings

Context: Public housing in Lagos

Lagos State Development and Property Corporation (LSDPC), was established primarily for the provision of public housing, and is the dominant provider of public housing in Lagos. In the more than three decades of existence, the Corporation has developed residential estates in various locations in the state, and for varied categories of clients. As the implementation agency of the mass-housing program of the first

civilian administration (1979-1983), LSDPC embarked on massive construction of low-cost housing estates. Between 1981 and 1990 about 20,000 housing units – representing twenty low-income, nine medium-income, and five upper-medium-income housing estates – were provided on owner-occupier basis. It is from the low-income and medium-income categories that the population for the survey in this study was derived, namely: Anikantamo, Ijaiye-LI, Iponri, Isolo, and Ojokoro (Low-income estates); and Alapere, Ebute-Meta, and Ijaiye-MI (Medium-income estates).

Concepts: Housing Quality Indicators and Quality of Life

Housing quality is a composite concept, comprising several characteristics [10]. It is expressed differently according to contexts (urban/rural, formal/ informal housing, developin/developed nations) and varies conceptually for different user groups. Housing quality is difficult to measure directly, because quality can be laden with physical, economic and cultural dimensions which are difficult to capture. Quality has been described as the extent to which a product fulfils the requirements set for it; and "architectonic quality" as an umbrella term, covering various aspects of quality, such as aesthetic, functional (efficiency), symbolic and cultural value [11].

In the context of the developing world, two major approaches have been suggested in the literature for the assessment of residential quality: the economic and the non-economic measures of quality [12]. The economic measure entails property-market evaluation, involving the neo-classical, microeconomic trade-off models, such as the hedonic price theory [13]. The non-economic approach to quality evaluation may involve techniques to assess residents' satisfaction with housing [14]; and normative evaluation techniques for appraisal of housing quality [15-16]. This may involve the identification of 'minimum standards' or 'intervention points' beyond which something needs to be done to avert further deterioration of housing. "Building pathology" has been used to describe that aspect of building appraisal concerned principally with defects and associated remedial action [17].

Sengupta and Tipple [18] suggests the use of four major indicator variables to analyze quality:

1. housing consumption: dwelling size and occupancy rates.
2. connection to services: levels of mains infrastructure such as water, sanitation, waste disposal.
3. neighbourhood/site characteristics: playgrounds, open spaces, and other community facilities.
4. location characteristics: there may be trade-off between journey-to-work time and size of units.

In developed economies, housing quality is usually measured by the value or price of a dwelling. Tenure (owner occupied, rental or shared housing) and dwelling size

could also constitute sufficient proxy for housing quality. Owner-occupied dwellings are on average more expensive, larger, located in better areas, and are more often single-family dwellings [19]. Home-ownership increases control over one's own housing situation, gives a sense of security, and could serve as investment, an income-smoothing strategy over the life course [20]. The second indicator is size: dwellings with more rooms are in general larger and more expensive. Data on the neighbourhood in which a dwelling is located is another useful measure, since the social status of a neighbourhood and the amount of open space can be regarded as dimensions of housing quality as well.

The essential point derived from the literature is that the measurement of housing quality cannot be limited to the physical characteristics of the housing unit, but must necessarily embrace the neighbourhood characteristics.

Although Quality of Life (QOL) is a broadly used term, it may be conceptualized at a personal level as: the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life, which result from both the opportunities and limitations each person has and reflect the interaction of personal and environmental factors [21]. At a community level, as an aggregate measure, QOL calculates the liveability of communities through a combination of subjective life-satisfaction surveys and objective determinants. It is a product of the interplay among social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect human and social development, of which housing and neighbourhoods are key aspects. QOL is therefore a multi-dimensional construct which may be measured by objective analysis of environmental characteristics and by subjective analysis of people's perception [22].

Housing is thus a fundamental component of QOL. Without appropriate dwelling, people can hardly meet their other basic needs and participate adequately in society. Housing issues can have flow-on effects for health, education and well-being. In the field of housing, QOL may address environmental quality such as quality of dwelling, air, water, and neighbourhood environment or human aspects such as health, education, income, and ownership status [22]. The neighbourhood is particularly fundamental to overall QOL. The QOL in a place depends on more than just economic prosperity. Other factors such as safety, services, environmental cleanliness, and the availability of parks and recreational areas have an impact on how people feel about their housing. Informal networks and how people connect with others are important for strong social cohesion [23].

Research Method

The survey research method involved a survey of eight purposively selected public housing estates (five low-income and three medium-income estates), to assess housing and neighbourhood quality. Quantitative data collected on residents' satisfaction with their housing, are however outside the scope of this paper. The study

developed a set of criteria derived from the literature on housing quality indicators. The assessment of the quality of housing in each of the estates was conducted through expert rating by four independent assessors, using penalty scoring, and operating within similar time-frames. Multiple assessors were used to reduce the subjectivity of the rating process.

The survey adopted a systematic sample (every 5th block of particular typologies) of 225 housing blocks containing 1240 housing units: 140 blocks of 6 units (two-storey blocks); and 85 of 8 units (three-storey blocks) of two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments. These sum up to 190 blocks in the five low-income estates; and 35 blocks in the three medium-income estates (see Table. 1).

The assessment process involved a number of steps: first, was to collect and examine layout plans and architectural drawings of the housing estates, blocks and units; second, was to determine the quality indicators (from the literature and related studies); third, was to prepare the measurement instruments and the evaluators (four post-graduate architecture students) on their use. The actual rating was implemented through observation and recording, in which defects were noted and penalty scores assigned to the relevant variables measured. Uniform weights were assigned to each of the criterion because the evaluation was more interested in the comparable values of the assessment. Due to the wide scope of the survey and peculiar issues of privacy and local security, criteria related to the assessment of interiors of housing units were excluded.

The ten quality indicators developed and used in this survey and their main defects are as follows:

1. External Visual quality (ViQ): defects include peeling/fading external finishes such as renderings and painting; weathered exterior wall finishes; paint decay, and removing surface materials.
2. Material quality (PhQ): defects in building elements in need of major or minor maintenance, such as dilapidated roof, wall and floor elements, including ceiling collapse and broken tiles.
3. Structural quality of buildings (StQ): defects include evidence of failing structures such as partial settlement in foundations or sagging beams; use of non-durable materials; and overall lack of long-term integrity in terms of structure, fabrics, and materials.
4. Detailing quality of buildings (DQ): defects relate to the performance of the operational elements, such as doors, windows, ceilings, roofing members and fascia boards: broken doors and windows fixtures; leaking roofs; and deteriorating timbers.
5. Quality of housing services (QSv): defects include dilapidated appliances and amenities such as broken and leaking sanitary, plumbing, water supply and sewage disposal pipes or fixtures.

6. Quality of neighbourhood roads (Qrd): defects include poor surface conditions, pot-holes, inadequate drainage, broken kerbs, and inefficiency of vehicular circulation.
7. Quality of landscaping (QLs): defects include lack of designed landscape or poor condition.
8. Quality of open spaces (Qos): the existence, condition, layout, and efficiency of open spaces between blocks of housing units are assessed for visual, physical and functional defects.
9. Quality of environmental layout (Qen): defects include spatial disorder or general inefficiency of layout, poor pedestrian circulation and street quality.
10. Quality of the location (QLc): defects may include physical isolation, poor integration, or domination of the housing block/unit in relation to surrounding blocks and neighbourhood.

The first five criteria relate to the housing blocks, while the next five deal with their neighbourhoods. The criteria as a whole cover aesthetic, functional, and technical qualities. These quality indicators were scored using penalty scoring, in terms of the degree of defects evidenced, resulting in three grades of quality: *poor quality* (two or more major defects); *fair quality* (at least one major defect); and *good quality* (no major defect). The latter categories could however evidence minor defects. The results of the findings, based on the average of the assessors' ratings, are summarized below (see Table. 1):

Table 1: This is a table of the Summary of Housing & Neighbourhood Quality.

		Housing Quality						Neighbourhood Quality					
		Poor		Fair		Good		Poor		Fair		Good	
Estate type	No. of blocks	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Low-income	190	75	39	106	56	9	5	123	65	59	31	8	4
Anikantamo	20	15		5		0		18		2		0	
Ijaiye-LI	20	7		11		2		12		6		2	
Iponri	30	13		17		0		18		12		0	
Isolo	106	40		65		1		73		32		1	
Ojokoro	14	0		8		6		2		7		5	
Med-income	35	2	6	27	77	6	17	11	31	20	57	4	12
Alapere	4	0		2		2		0		1		3	
Ebute-Meta	13	1		10		2		5		7		1	
Ijaiye-MI	18	1		15		2		6		12		0	
Total	225	77	34	133	59	15	7	134	60	79	35	12	5

Source: Author's Fieldwork

Findings and Discussion

The study revealed a wide array of defects in which maintenance interventions, improvements, and repairs were required: visual, material, structural, detailing, and service defects. Defects related to the quality of the neighbourhood environment were also observed. These latter defects particularly constituted areas of vulnerability to

future public health hazards: open drains and broken sewerages. Degrees of defects however differed significantly between the low- and medium-income estates.

The key findings from the study are summarized as follows (see Table. 1):

(i)   The housing blocks in the low-income estates reported significantly lower levels of housing and environmental quality than those for the medium-income residents. A larger proportion of the medium-income housing (77%) compared to 56% of the low-income housing, was rated to be of fair quality. Similarly, 17% of medium-income housing, compared to 5% of low-income, was rated to be of good quality. Ratings for neighbourhood quality follow a similar trend.

(ii) Based on housing quality alone, 77 (34%) of the 225 housing blocks surveyed were categorised as *poor quality* and dilapidated, that is, with two or more major defects; 133 (59%) of *fair quality*; and only 15 (7%) were rated to be *good quality*. Of these overall figures, thirty-nine per cent and six per cent of the low-income and medium-income respectively were rated to be of poor quality.

(iii) Based on the quality of neighbourhood environment however, the analysis showed 60 per cent poor quality, 35 per cent fair quality, and five per cent good quality. Of these, 65 per cent and 30 per cent in the low- and medium-income estates respectively fall into the poor quality category; 31 per cent and 57 per cent were of fair quality; and 4 per cent and 12 per cent of good quality.

(iv) Comparing proportions, the neighbourhood-related defects appeared to be more severe than the building-related defects: 60 per cent compared to 34 per cent (poor quality) overall; 65 per cent compared to 39 per cent (low-income); and 31 per cent compare to 6 per cent (medium-income)

(v)   Findings indicate that the housing characteristics of the medium-income estates were distinctly of better quality than those of the low-income estates. Among the low-income estates however, Ojokoro appeared to be an exception: none of the housing blocks was rated of poor quality. This could be accounted for by its relatively younger age, and the fact that the estate is not among the nucleus of the original mass housing schemes.

Two main reasons can be adduced for the much higher quality ratings of the medium-income estates, relative to the low-income estates. The first explanation relates to the estates' initial conception and implementation. The second relates to the predominant socio-economic status of the residents. Qualitative data from archival materials suggest that: during the mass housing era, when most of these schemes were conceived, government was more concerned about quantity than quality of housing, particularly in the case of the low-income. With bold, but blind political will in many instances, the state government pursued an ambition which met the urgent and

immediate needs of some of the low-income categories, but in doing so, sacrificed quality for quantity. The disparity in quality was further widened by the obvious fact that many medium-income residents were more economically empowered to maintain and improve upon their environment. In contrast, many of the low-income original purchasers became indebted to friends and relatives, even before they could become owners of the houses. Some had to borrow additional money, in order to bring the units to minimally habitable conditions, since they received partly-completed houses. Others simply adapted to the less than habitable state of their accommodation. The path of the average medium income owner was less intimidating. Quite often, he or she was backed up with more stable employment or economic base, and opportunity to obtain long-term loans or mortgage facilities, which minimized the tension, and allowed some surplus to improve his or her housing environment. Further to these reasons, it is not unlikely, that the categorization of certain estates as low-income, and others as medium-income, has had the tendency of stigmatizing and residualizing the former, thereby increasing the "quality gap".

Contributing Factors to Housing and Neighbourhood Quality

Based on the literature, factors identified as contributing to the qualitative housing problems include:

(a)   Lack of consistent housing standards, and the ineffectiveness of existing ones; that is, policy statements on the acceptable types/quality of housing. Although global standards exist, they can hardly be applied in the contexts of many developing nations, including Nigeria. The recently drafted and adopted "National Building Code" stills falls short of meeting the requirements for assessing the quality of public housing design and construction in Nigeria.

(b)   Failure to implement instituted policies by governments and their enforcement agencies, and lack of consistency due to frequent institutional changes and rapid turn-over of appointees.

(c)   Corruption and lack of commitment/sincerity on the part of many housing sector stakeholders: policy and decision-makers, legislators, housing administrators, construction contractors, consultants, financiers, economists, researchers, and non-governmental organizations.

(d)   Lack of relevant records and data.

Recommendations

The following could enhance housing quality and improve quality-of-life in public housing in Nigeria:

(i)   Development of mixed-housing that encourages residents of diverse income levels to co-exist, reducing residualization and enhancing positive perceptions of community and quality-of-life.

(ii)   The use of durable materials with appreciable local inputs in housing construction, in order to improve their visual and functional quality and promote residents' quality-of-life and safety.

(iii)   Provision of space for children's recreation to ensure wholesome human development.

(iv)   Promotion of community interaction through design features that facilitate social networks among neighbours: semi-public open spaces, neighbourhood parks, facilities for organized youth activities, and recreational areas where people can safely walk surrounded by nature.

(v)   Consideration of visual and physical characteristics such as aesthetics and building form, as well as social amenities such as shopping outlets, primary health facilities, and schools.

(vi)   Innovative estate management options, which ensure that prompt repairs are made to the housing units; and mutual rules are consistently enforced to improve resident/management relations.

Conclusion

This paper examined the housing and neighbourhood quality of public housing in Lagos, Nigeria. It reported findings from an expert assessment, using a set of quality indicators derived from the literature. Using descriptive statistics, the study revealed a significant gap in quality between the medium- and low-income estates, which was also more pronounced in the neighbourhood dimension than in the core housing dimension of the housing estates. What then is required? Innovative public housing design, implementation and management practices that would provide local, context-related solutions. These would focus on: the improvement of existing systems; and the integration of sustainability principles and practices into housing design, construction and planning. An integrated understanding of urban housing systems based on multi- and trans-disciplinary research platforms is required. There is the need for participatory approaches and enhanced collaboration between stakeholders to maintain present housing and neighbourhood stock and develop sustainable future builds.

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