

CONCERN AND ROLES OF PHYSICAL PLANNING IN LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The role of the town planner is changing day by day and this is due to the various challenges being faced by him as the custodian of the environment. The various consultancy services provided by the town planner give a clear picture of this development. This paper identifies consequences of poverty alleviation, the problem of slum development and issues of affordability as some of the causes for concern, on the part of the town planner, for local economic development. It discusses his roles towards achieving local economic development to include the provision of economic services, influencing renewal/regeneration policies and advocacy for the poor among other things. It concludes by saying that town planners in the developed world will find it easier than those in the developing world to face the challenges at hand.

Keywords: Local Economic Development, Poverty, Physical Planning, Consultancy, Environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern times, the planner is believed to have been trained to intervene in several aspects of life especially that which concerns man as a social being and the environment in general. Little wonder why several scholars and professionals of initially different backgrounds in training have been able to comfortably take up town planning. This ranges from sociologists to political scientists, health workers to lawyers and from economists to geographers to mention a few.

In planning practice across the globe, consultancy services rendered by planning firms could be an eye opener to what extent the physical planner can be dexterous in the use of his skills. Of course it will be amazing that a planning firm could offer consultancy services in minerals and energy planning (Development Control Services, 2006). Additionally, while several law firms have trained town planners on their payroll (Johnston, 2006), junior barristers are taking to planning law out of sheer interests and several interesting challenges provided by such decisions (Papas, 2006).

However, of special interest is the connection between the planning profession and

issues of economic development. There are many concerns about the micro-economy of citizens or groups that will live the plan of the town planner. Therefore, local economic development is of utmost concern to the town planner since planning comes in direct contact with persons living in defined localities. Consequent upon this is the great necessity for the discourse on issues of poverty alleviation. Also, due to the inability of the poor to afford and maintain an ideal accommodation in a planned environment, the town planner needs to be concerned about the micro economy of individuals and households (Omole, 2000, p.23; Markandya, 2001, p.5).

From another perspective, in the age where multinational organisations such as the United Nations and World Bank have so much interest in addressing the problem of poverty through researches and allocations of aid (Collier and Dollar 1999), this paper seeks to pursue the above interest as of paramount importance. It seeks to provoke the thought of the relationship between town planning and local economy development (thereby justifying the need to research into such issues as poverty alleviation) and the weight of such relationship without neglecting to pinpoint the roles of the town planner in facilitating local economic development.

2. ELEMENTS OF CONTEMPORARY TOWN PLANNING

The term “town planning” has always been the household label for the physical planning profession. Since there are several types of planning, it is germane to always use a more specific title, which implies the orientation or tendency of the profession as one dealing with the physical environment. Hence the term “physical planning” has become synonymous to town planning at certain times.

Of equal importance is the fact that based on the evolutionary process which the town planning profession is going through, it may be difficult to adhere to a definition or two. Yet, foundational thoughts cannot be ignored in its definition and so using the words of Fasakin (2006), physical planning is an orderly (spatial) arrangement of the various land uses such as residential, industrial, commercial, recreation and open space, transportation, public infrastructure and other ancillary activities. It seeks to achieve functionality and compatibility among various land uses. He also added that all types of planning share certain commonalities that aid an attempt at a comprehensive definition. These commonalities, he said, are first, the existence of a problem, second, a goal to be achieved, third, a set of objectives to realise the goal, fourth, a projection of a set of future states and last, a clear cut choice of preferred

future state based on proper evaluation of available alternatives. It is then of importance that there must exist a set of choices or alternatives which are courses of action for solving planning problems.

So, planning as inferred from above, can be defined operationally as series of steps put in place to solve a particular problem in a preferred way after due consideration of alternative means of achieving a goal. In other words, it is the art and science of making choices among options in the present and future; and securing their implications subject to allocation of resources (Oyesiku, 2002)

However, first time planners have been found in “application package” situations where they still can or have to function or practise in manners not dysfunctional to the goal of physical planning. Planning Consultancy will have much light to shine in this respect. Exemplified here are situations where advocacy planning and expert witnessing, environmental impact assessment, project management and monitoring services, research and studies, and training have come within the jurisdiction of the planning profession (Awogbemi, 1997). This is not to mention services in the area of waste planning, telecommunication planning and community participation among others (Development Control Services, op. cit).

At this point, a debate emanates on how to fix a proper definition for the physical planning profession, which can be a perfect concoction of the elements of physical planning profession in the light of the present situation of multiplicity of planning services. Or could it be said that town planning is different from town planning practice or consultancy? Inherent in this dilemma, the planner has found himself in a situation where (at times) he has to take decisions, which greatly influence and are influenced by the economic capability of the environment, or the people (or both as it is usually the case), which he is to plan for.

3. LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Going by the thoughts of Schumman (1993) as expressed by Nel (2001), Local Economic Development (LED) is one response to the so-called development impasse. It has parallels with the anti-development argument about the need to focus on innovative grassroots movements (Escobar, 1995). The impasse was borne out of the perceived failure of the top-down non-participatory developmental

approach of governments' economic policies and arrangements over the years. The need for a shift towards putting the fate of the people in their hands and giving them the opportunities to participate in the development process stimulated LED.

Though LED is not a new phenomenon, since it has been found to be part of local government administration in the North for over a century, its growing acceptance and the increasing involvement of NGOs and community based development initiatives of community based organisations are the recent incursions into its practice. Consequently, Zaaijer and Sara (1993, p129) have defined LED as "essentially a process in which local governments and/or community-based groups manage their existing resources and enter into partnership arrangements with the private sector, or with each other to create new jobs and stimulate economic activities in an area". Blakely (1994) also says that LED is a process in which local governments or community-based organisations engage to stimulate or maintain business activities and/or employment opportunities with the principal aim of stimulating local employment opportunities in sectors that improve the community, using existing human, natural, and institutional resources. These statements have so much to say about the elements of LED.

It is clear from above that specific areas or communities (based on their peculiarities and resources) are the targets of LED. Also, is the fact that partnership is highly involved between the government and community organisations with room for further partnerships with private or non-governmental organisations, with the ultimate intention of stimulating the economy of specific communities and their residents. There are specific roles or approaches for the two major actors in the LED process and this gives births to what is referred to as formal and informal LED. According to Nel (1999), the formal LED is usually characterised by the involvement of local and higher authority structures and the formal business sectors while informal LED is usually characterised by action at the level of community-based organisations and NGOs and links with spontaneous self-reliance initiatives and the informal sector.

Longman (1995) defines "local" as an adjective in connection with a particular place or area, especially the place you live in. So, there are LED initiatives in urban and rural centres alike. The thing to be borne in mind is the contact with the grassroots or the proletariat within their immediate environment in order to improve individual

and communal economic status.

According to Pieterse (n.d.), unless one is able to disaggregate what a LED initiative is for, what it seeks to achieve and who will benefit, it is unlikely to benefit the poor at all. He emphasized the need to become much clearer about how we assess the quality and impact of LED strategies, if we are interested in its redistributive effects. Furthermore, he mentioned that LED is fundamentally about generating economic growth that is sustainable and rooted in the local economy which of course is desirable for most localities and very few groups would contest this objective. However, economic growth does not equate to poverty alleviation, and in fact strong economic growth can be accompanied with increasing inequality and poverty if it is focused on a few sectors and involves technologies that benefit small groups of people.

In his well-articulated paper, he affirmed that LED can fulfil an anti-poverty role based on the condition that there is a clear understanding of the impact of the LED strategy on sections of the community that are poor and this must be based on a clearly defined conception of when the poverty problem is being reduced. The approach suggests that this is only possible if the LED strategy is linked into the anti-poverty framework of the municipality as outlined in the steps below.

1. Define the causes and levels of poverty within the area of jurisdiction through a 'poverty audit' that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. A poverty audit broadly consists of an analysis of the causes of poverty in terms of economic, political, cultural, natural and social terms; an identification of different forms of deprivation and vulnerability and its prevalence in numerical, spatial, gender and race terms; and a broad strategy to address the various dimensions of poverty, vulnerability and deprivation.
2. Build a consensus within the council and between the municipality and its partners in the private sector and civil society on the process and findings of the poverty audit.
3. Translate the findings of the poverty audit about variable levels and categories of poverty into appropriate strategies that are geared for measurement and can be translated into clear targets.

4. Prioritise the strategies on the basis of the development vision and strategy of the municipality as defined through the existing integrated Development processes.
5. Cost the different strategies and ensure that they are reflected in the integrated development plan and the budget.
6. Develop (measurable) indicators and/or criteria to ensure that the strategies are monitored and impact can be assessed at given intervals and at the end of the intervention.
7. Compare the strategies to national and provincial policy frameworks and adjoining municipalities to ensure complementarity.
8. Establish dedicated institutional mechanisms and processes to drive and monitor the implementation and incorporation of the anti-poverty strategy into all aspects of the municipality's operation.

4. PHYSICAL PLANNING DIMENSIONS TO LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The physical planner cannot but bother about LED or poverty alleviation due to certain reasons, which he can never overlook. They are directly linked with his responsibility as the custodian of the environment. Ignoring such issues could pose big problems to the execution of his duties in the environment. Some of the vital areas are discussed below.

4.1 Environmental Implications – Aesthetics and Slum Development

Emmanuel (2006) has pointed out that apart from the fact that the poor live in substandard physical conditions, the alleviation of poverty when not properly executed, has negative impacts on the environment. Consequently, if the town planning profession intends to fulfil its goal of achieving an aesthetic and healthy environment, issues that border on micro-economic development of families and their environment cannot be overlooked. In many of our cities, it is often the poor and least powerful that experience the worst environments, poorest health and lowest life expectancy after decades of planning (Harridge, 2006). Even, while providing infrastructure intended to make economically viable environment, proper cleaning up is not often done especially in the developing world thereby drawing the attention of the planner to proper waste management.

As an environmental profession with special interest in aesthetics and healthy living, environmental degradation, slums and squalors, the need for urban regeneration

have always been popular topics in its discourse. McLoughlin (1969, p.107) makes it clear that aesthetic quality – especially visual quality – of the urban or regional environment is one of the oldest goals of planning. So also is the concern for healthy and sanitary living conditions. Basorun (2003, p.126) mentioned that the rural population who troop to cities eventually remain unemployed for so long, and in desperate move to find shelter at least possible cost, settle down in deplorable, unaesthetic and unsanitary residential environment (typical of the slum). Hague (2006) also says that across the planet, towns and cities are growing by around 65 million people a year (about 180,000 per day) and that if such trend continues, about one-third of the world's population will live in slums by year 2030. He sees this surge in urbanisation and an escalation in urban poverty as a fuel for international debate on how planning can make development more sustainable.

The foregoing scenario has implications. Dewar (2006a) when expressing the mind of Dermot Finch, an urban researcher, said that there was need for the planning system to give much higher priority to the crucial case for economic growth. He makes it clear that there should be a stronger link between planning and economic growth. Dermot Finch lamented that “both within and outside government, there has not been enough economic focus on cities. Thinking has either been concerned with communities or about design issues and gleaming new shiny buildings”. He pointed out that if you did not get the economy right, nothing else matters. Slums are sustained when slum dwellers are returned into the same vicious cycle of poverty when compensated with amounts below that which can afford an ideal housing in the market (Gillman, 2006). These facts justify the need for the planner to take special interest in economic development of localities where they provide plans.

4.2 Housing and Affordability

According to Adeagbo (2000), inherent in the goal of physical planning is the enhancement of efficient functioning of the urban system through effective coordination of various urban land uses such as the residential land use among others. In this light, the planner is expected to provide layouts for housing development; consider proposals seeking approval for such development and assess renewal schemes or change of use in the same respect. However, he is to bear in mind or needs a measure of knowledge about the economy of the different income classes of people being provided for in a specific community. Or else he will

not be serving the interest of everyone in the environment in a world where housing is seen to be the *sine quanon* (Aribigbola, 2000).

At this point, issues of housing affordability are paramount, and interest in LED of particular locality or community of interest cannot be overlooked. Department for Communities and Local Government (2006), as part of its definition, says that affordable housing includes social rented and intermediate housing, provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. It says in explicit terms that affordable housing should meet the needs of eligible households including availability at a cost low enough for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Working within this context, the planner is expected to understand the economic dynamics within the local setting and to provide information on possible mortgage facilities possibly beyond local shores.

4.3 The Need for Citizen Participation

Harridge (op cit) emphasised that planners must combine to tackle inequality and improve diversity in the environment. According to him, planners do not deal with a single, homogenous public but a diverse mix of races, cultures, communities, ethnic groups, faith groups and innumerable interest groups of all kinds. Thus, the need to involve the public in the development planning process. Though the discourse about citizen or public involvement is not new, he did not believe that planners effectively engage with the public but rather, in some cases, their work reinforces division and inequality. Thus, the need for physical planning and planners to take interest in LED issues as professionals who are concerned with the welfare of the public been planned for.

4.4 Globalisation and the Environment

The planner cannot gloss over the issue of globalisation and its impacts on planning or vice versa. In the United Kingdom, the recent government's review of the planning system threw some light on this (Dewar, 2006b). The Barker review had to look at land use planning across the board to examine how planning policy can better deliver economic growth and prosperity alongside other sustainable development goals. His review would ask whether government economic objectives were being achieved in the context of globalisation, demographic pressure, environmental change and natural resource consumption. It was to also look at how planning affects economic growth and employment by analysing its impact on key drivers of productivity – enterprise, competition, innovation, investment and skills.

Though the review had its initial criticisms on the grounds that it was more economic conscious than been environmental conscious, it still springs up a reminder that in the face of globalisation, there are feedback linkages between economic development and physical planning. In the face of global competitiveness, industrialisation has produced environmental consequences, which should bother the planner and spur him to take interest in the economic development intricacies of local, national and international dimensions.

5. PHYSICAL PLANNING INTERVENTION IN LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The World Bank (2001) affirms that LED encompasses many different disciplines, such as planning, economics, and marketing. Having established the concern for LED, the mode of intervention by the planner must be highlighted. The roles discussed below, though not exhaustive, are intended to raise the awareness on the responsibilities of the planner in this subject matter.

5.1 Designing Affordable Housing

The Physical planner has the role of designing affordable or low-income housing for the low-income class in the society. It is one of the ways by which he can indirectly reduce the poverty in the society. After all, one of the indicators of poverty is lack of access to the basic needs of life such as housing (Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 2002; World Bank, 1996). The planner's involvement within the local authorities and Housing Corporations becomes very vital at this point. The local authority and Housing Corporation have the responsibility of providing affordable housing for the people. The local authorities can also play the role of providing funding to private organizations as it is been proposed in the United Kingdom; and coordinating such private initiatives for providing affordable housing (Department for Communities and Local Government, op. cit). In this respect, the planning profession gets involved in designing ideal layouts and residential schemes, providing land and facilitating access to fund under the relevant agencies mentioned above.

5.2 Provision of Economic Development Services

The Physical planner can provide help in the area of LED through consultancy services. This is a common feature in consultancy circle in the United Kingdom. The information on Table 1 below reveals an interesting trend to find an average of 46.7 percent of the planning outfits in the indicated locations to be providing economic

development services. The highest number of firms (75%) with such service is found in the Northeast and Republic of Ireland while the least number (34.5%) are found in the Southeast. This gives the picture of the trend of planning services in the developed world. It may not be the case in the developing world due to minimal level of diversification and skill found in the planning profession in such countries. The common services in such environments are mainly the land use designs such as residential, commercial and industrial developments; urban regeneration, environmental impact assessment and transportation planning.

Table 1: Town Planning Firms Rendering Economic Development Services in The United Kingdom

S/N	Location	Total Number of Firms	Economic Development Service firms	%
1	North East	12	9	75.0
2	Republic of Ireland	8	6	75.0
3	Wales	33	23	69.7
4	Yorkshire	43	20	53.5
5	North West	79	42	53.2
6	Scotland	54	28	51.9
7	London	109	53	48.6
8	East midlands	33	16	48.5
9	West midlands	60	26	43.3
10	South West	80	34	42.5
11	East of England	64	26	40.6
12	Northern Ireland	11	4	36.4
13	South East	113	39	34.5
<i>Total</i>		699	326	46.7 <i>(average)</i>

Source: Development Control Service (2006)

The reason is not farfetched. Training of town planners is yet to experience the multi-dimensional approach and the dexterity with which the planning profession is expected to handle the environment. The use of diverse tools and exposure to various multi-disciplinary conditions has not been provided for by the educational system within which the physical planner is brought up in the developing world.

5.3 Influencing Urban Renewal and Regeneration Policies

The planning profession cannot neglect its diagnostic responsibility within the living environment. This is what it does in identifying the 'sick' areas and carrying out necessary renewal or regeneration exercise. According to Omole (2000, p.27), one of the recent approaches to urban renewal is economic revitalisation. He believes that the people have to be economically empowered in order to remove them from derelict conditions and establish them in ideal housing environments. He proposes employment generation within the renewal area as part of the renewal process. This implies that the process of renewal or regeneration can involve economic initiatives aimed at developing the economy of the area under consideration. The planner who is trained with respect to LED matters is found relevant at this point.

As mentioned earlier on, the compensation paid to those evacuated from renewal areas should be such that can assist them to obtain affordable housing in their new environment. Otherwise, the vicious cycle of generating another slum will occur. Planners should be able to influence policies to make right recommendations for compensation of slum dwellers at the point of urban renewal. The knowledge of right recommendations is based on the know-how of local economic intricacies coupled with the existing housing market within the locality.

5.4 Advocacy for the Poor

Davidoff (1973, p.277) has much to offer in this respect. He made it clear that the recommendation that city planners represent and plead the plans of many interest groups is founded on the need to establish an effective urban democracy. Therefore, pluralism in planning is justified by the need for thoroughness, fairness and establishment of true democracy. The welfare of all and the welfare of minorities are both deserving of support. As such, planning must be so structured and so practised as to account for this unavoidable divergence of the public interest. According to him, when pluralism planning is practised, advocacy becomes the means of professional support for competing claims about how the community should develop.

The advocate planner is responsible to his client and would seek to express his client's view. He would be more of a provider of information and an analyst of current trends among other things. The nature of his work is such that he is expected to be educational so that he has the job of informing other groups,

including public agencies, of the conditions, problems and outlook of the group he represents. Basorun (2003, p.202) also buttressed this when he added that the action plan that emanates from advocacy planning approach could be utilised to source funds from interested partners (government organisations, NGOs and Civil Society Organisations) to implement development programmes that will alleviate the sufferings of the poor, marginalized and the disadvantaged. Inferential at this point is the fact that the planner working as an advocate should be equipped to fight the course of the poor as one of the social or interest groups in the society.

5.5 Information through Researches on LED

It is the responsibility of the research and academic institutions to provide vital information for the planning profession. Such vital research outputs are bases for planners to make recommendations and conclusion on their plans.

Weiler (2002), in his effort to add value to the highly vulnerable agricultural sector of Colorado's San Luis Valley, explored the twin potential information gaps involved in regional industrial development that may affect both private and social investment perspectives. He was able to establish the need for universities to focus on the provision and analysis of information regarding development possibilities in order to supply them to those who stand to benefit most from the economic development efforts. He sees universities as provider of information on local economic development issues. Research institutions are not to be left out of the responsibility of providing very relevant information for decision-making in vital areas of social life and environmental issues. Town planners in the academia must see the need to research into areas of local economic development and how it affects physical planning within the environment. Such information is disseminated through seminars, conferences, workshops and submissions to governments at all levels to assist in making right decisions that will assist those at the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.

5.6 Cost Recovery Proposal for Plans and Designs

Within the context of cost recovery for implementation of physical development plans, the planner is able to make proposals that will benefit residents such that within the limits of the local economy, they would be able to pay for making use of the components of the plan over time. This is not a recent thought as the toll fees on many roads are targeted towards cost recovery while several housing loan schemes

also have the same intention. The User-Pay-Principle has also been found useful in getting benefactors to pay for facilities provided in their communities. Planners and the planning profession should continually make it a point of duty to plan for or design facilities within the context of the general economy of a locality in order to make it easy for users to pay for such facilities. The running and maintenance of such facilities can also be catered for with such payments.

Since the thought of social welfare should be borne in mind when communal facilities are provided, the cost recovery component should be spread over a long period of time to make it very convenient for users to pay back and afterwards sustain the facility.

6. CONCLUSION

Several issues have been raised to include the concern and the roles of the physical planning profession in the area of local economic development. The concerns were seen in the light of the justification for planners to take interest in local economic development as a thing of great necessity for development plans to see the light of the day and be useful to the people meant to live the plan. The roles have been seen as the responsibilities of the planning profession in making use of LED skills and knowledge through its already existing roles and engagements in the environment towards making the environment liveable and affordable. Several other challenges may be faced in the efforts towards the acquisition and utilisation of LED skills and initiatives. Ab initio planners may find this a bit demanding while planners with economics background could find it relatively easier to cope with such responsibilities. However, it is paramount at the present time to adjust to the demand. In the context of the emerging trends in the profession, the need to face the challenge at hand seems highly unavoidable though planners in the western world may be adjusting fast to this demand while the developing world may still have a long way to go.

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