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RESEARCH TOPIC¹: “Architectural Taste/Habitus”- Conflicts and Contradictions in Search of Responsive Green Urban Architecture in Ghana (A Case for Africa)

INTRODUCTION

Preamble

“We know that environmental degradation is dangerous. We know that we cannot go on as before. But how to go on, how to live individually and collectively, how to make the transition soon and how to persuade the intransigent, the selfish, the powerful and the uninterested? These are the questions that neither classical socialism nor contemporary social theory has provided sufficient intellectual or moral resources to answer. We shall have to equip ourselves.” (Goldblatt, 1996: 202-203)ⁱ

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This research focuses on Ghana. The search of responsive green urban architecture has become a hot issue in the world as a matter of paramount concern and importance. Responsive green urban architecture has become complicated and seemingly elusive with a mixture of virtues and vices: major cities of Ghana are confronted with challenges as most growing African cities; with regards to teardowns, gentrification and urban sprawl leading to suburbia and to some extent exurbia development with associated contradistinctions to appropriate high density development, infrastructural/services provision, preservation of traditional architecture and public open spaces to generate a responsive green urban living environment. According Bruegmann (2005)ⁱⁱ “sprawl is where other people live, particularly people with less taste and good sense than themselves”; however, this assertion is yet to be proven empirically in Ghana by this research. A number of research studies co-funded by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) are making enormous positive contribution to the various sectors in Ghana through their findings widely disseminated in reputed journals as well as other academic fora. Nonetheless; green

¹ The research commenced in October 2007 with 2011 as the end date. It is currently tenable at School of Architecture - The University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom. What is presented here is a *Synoptic Proposal*. And, therefore most of the issues of concern are still evolving.

issues and Taste in architecture remain non-existent or a minimalist concept. And, Literature is replete with the need for greening the built environment in African due to urbanization (Onibokun, 1994ⁱⁱⁱ; Mabogunje, 1994^{iv}).

BACKGROUND/QUESTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The Worldview of Green Case in Ghana

The 1990s saw a “short – lived” classical literary works on “green theory” (Harrison *et al*, 1996^v; Goodin, 1992^{vi}). The analysis of the “Green Case” affected developing countries by showing how closely grave ecological problems are bound to the developing countries need for development, and demonstrating the systematic connections between aid, debt, development and the environment.

Ghana has had a checkered urban development history with negative affects of jumbled land use planning and management as well environmental degradation and defacing images of towns and cities (De Leon, 1886^{vii}; Guggler and Flanagan, 1979^{viii}; Grant and Yankson, 2002^{ix}). In an address entitled “Give our habitat a greenish, beautiful look”; a former Vice President of Ghana, on 18 September 2002, bemoaned the rate at which the flora and fauna of the Ghana are being depleted as a result of urbanisation. According to the Vice President, the culture of floral beautification of our villages, towns and cities, which in the good old days won for Kumasi-the second largest and commercial city of Ghana; the accolade, the ‘Garden City’ of West Africa has become oblivious^x even though it is been said that original Garden City concept by Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), tells “nothing but lies” (Jacobs, 1961)^{xi}.

The **pertinent questions** for this research therefore are: are the happenings in Ghana, perhaps a phenomenon of “structures structured predisposed as a function to structure structures” or Taste (manifested preferences) of people? Is there ‘miscognition’ in Ghana with regards to greening the environment: where one acts as if one does not know the rules of the ‘game’ (of greening) if any? And above all, does Ghana as a nation have a green policy to guide architectural/environmental oriented development?

SNAPSHOT OF RESEARCH THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding Habitus

Habitus is a highly acclaimed sociological theory by Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). According to Bourdieu (1984)^{xiii} *habitus* is “structure structured (*opus operatum*) predisposed as a function to structure structures (*opus operandi*)”. In other words, *Habitus* is “necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application – beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt – of the necessity inherent in the meaning conditions” (Bourdieu, 1984). *Habitus* is a product of history; socially situated concept; acquired through childhood and therefore durable (Bourdieu, 1990)^{xiii}.

Again, Bourdieu (1984) explains *habitus* as both a generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (*principium divisionis*) of practices. “It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus: the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e. the space of life-styles, is constituted” (Bourdieu, 1984).

Habitus and Architecture

Habitus is homogenous and it is observable in all classes of society and “fields” (Bourdieu, 1990). However, it has not been overtly applied in the field of architecture. Bourdieu applies his concept of ‘field’ in areas of social life which involved strategies taking place with respect to valuable goods or resources (Baert, 2000)^{xiv}. Though Bourdieu did not directly consider habitus in the field of architecture; it is subsumed in most of his theoretical works of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Notwithstanding the aforesaid, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) indirectly applied habitus in his *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Hillier and Rooksby, 2005^{xv}; Crossley, 1988^{xvi}; Panofsky, 1957^{xvii}).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The attainment of sustainable green urban environment is a complex system of urban development and theories; and again, it presents a plethora of challenges to building professionals of today (Dye and McEvoy, 2008^{xviii}; Towers, 2005^{xix}). This study adopts Aristotelian *phronesis* (prudence and practical wisdom) (Hughes, 2007^{xx}; Flyvbjerg, 2001^{xxi}) through the mixed methods research paradigm (Creswell and Clark, 2007^{xxii}; Silverman, 2003^{xxiii}; Laws *et al.* 2003^{xxiv}; Groat and Wang, 2002^{xxv}). Grounded Theory methodology acts as the principal paradigm (Charmaz, 2006^{xxvi}; Orona, 1997^{xxvii}; Pidgeon, 1996^{xxviii}; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994^{xxix}; Strauss & Corbin, 1990^{xxx}; Glaser & Strauss, 1967^{xxxi}).

Bourdieu, (1990) argues that the system of *habitus* can only be accounted for by relating social conditions in which the *habitus* that generated was constituted, to the social conditions in which it is implemented, that is, through the scientific work of performing the interrelationship of these two states of social world that the *habitus* performs, while concealing it. Through practice is a present past that perpetuates itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices which objectivism alone cannot account for. Answers to social questions are found through theory based research hinged on prudence, practical wisdom and empiricism (Bergs, 2007^{xxxii}; Mills, 2000^{xxxiii}; Baert, 2000).

Voting as a strategy

This research innovatively seeks to use voting as a strategy to observe peoples' independent perceptions about **Taste** (manifested preferences) by using visual images in the frame of grounded theory.

Research Ethical Issues

Research ethics will be considered as a critical need to protect the basic rights and safety of research participants from obvious forms of abuse; second, to remind the researcher of considerations such as issues of potential risks to participants, the balancing of the benefits of the research against those risks, steps up data of confidentiality, and the inclusion of consent forms as well as clarity of

language of material provided to participants (Berg, 2007, Edwards *et al*, 2004^{xxxiv}; Silverman, 2003; Williamson *et al*, 2000^{xxxv}).

EXPECTED RESULTS /CONCLUSIONS OF RESEARCH

The specific objectives of the research are to critically examine and document:

- the concept and peoples' perceptions of green architecture in Ghana;
- “architectural habitus” in Ghana through the understanding of correlates of Kinship, General urban systems, taste/cultural and “my land” (*the notion of where I come from*);
- the link between the physical change process or gentrification/teardowns and traditional architecture in Kumasi and Tamale to ascertain the extent of invasion and succession;
- efforts that are necessary for the preservation of traditional architecture to the extent possible and;

Generally, this research seeks to construct models with clearly differentiated micro-and macro-levels to empirically ascertain the correlates of Kinship, General urban systems, taste/cultural and the notion “my land” for a meaningful development of human settlements. The knowledge gained (results) will be disseminated through university teachings/seminars, reputable journal publications and other “phronetic” means: such as parliamentary briefings, and public/civil education as policy rationale for awareness creation of green urban architecture in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa at large.

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