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Re-imagining Public Spaces for Urban Health

Key findings from two multisectoral stakeholder co-design workshops on “Informal Appropriation of Public Spaces and Urban Infrastructure for Leisure Physical Activities (ALPhA)” in Lagos and Yaoundé

Background

The research project “Informal Appropriation of Public Space for Leisure Physical Activity in Lagos and Yaoundé (ALPhA)” aims to re-imagine urban space for healthy, safe leisure physical activity in Lagos, Nigeria, and Yaoundé, Cameroon.

As part of this endeavour, the project team held two multi-sectoral stakeholders co-design workshops on May 31 and June 7, 2022, in Lagos, Nigeria, and Yaoundé, Cameroon, respectively. The purpose of these workshops were to share study findings and to work with the stakeholders to re-imagine urban public spaces for safe inclusive physical activity.

During the workshops, stakeholders were presented with a selection of public space sites identified by the project that are regularly appropriated for physical activity. Guided by a framework for considering health risks, participants identified strengths of each site (features that were supportive of safe physical activity), site weaknesses (features that posed health risks) and identified opportunities to re-imagine and shape each of those sites to make them more conducive for physical activity.

Findings are presented for both cities below.

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LAGOS

Bisola Durosinmi Etti Drive (Off Admiralty Road) Lekki

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| Title |  <p style="text-align: center;">Bisola Durosinmi Etti Drive</p> |
| Description of site | <p>This is a long walkway on Durotimi-Etti Drive, located off Admiralty way, Lekki phase 1. The walkway has a baby palm tree lined up from the beginning to the end. The floor finishing is interlocking blocks and the space has a barrier separating it from a canal. Other structures such as streetlight poles can be found on this space, as well as advertisement boards. The activities performed here are i. Walking, ii. Running or jogging iii Cycling, done individually and often spontaneous as people exercise here whenever they want to.</p> <p>Location: 6.437063; 3.466035</p> |
| Site strength | <p>There are features such as trees (greenery spaces), street lights, good roads, pedestrian walkway, and bike lanes that are available to protect health when bike riding. However, to promote a consistent bike riding routine on this site, proper signage needs to be installed and the municipal government needs to launch a bike-renting scheme.</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>Bisola Durosinmi Etti Drive is adjacent to a busy freeway with many hazardous manholes. Users could fall into the manholes especially at night if the space is not well lit. There is also no signage, dedicated bike lane, speed breaker, sensors that monitor pollution that could promote bike riding as an activity. The landscape of this site could unfortunately cause injury to people using the space for leisure physical activity. Users could hit their legs on the structures mounted on the space.</p> |

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| Identifying opportunities | <p>Bisola Durosinmi Etti Drive is a space regularly used by people for leisure physical activity despite their vulnerability to the weaknesses of the site. To ensure a healthy space for walking, biking and other leisure physical activities that users perform on Bisola Durosinmi Etti Drive, the municipal government must upgrade this space so that people of all ages including people living with disabilities (PLWD) are able to use it safely. Thus, dedicated bike lanes and more green infrastructure must be installed. A bike renting scheme should be established as this will help intensify a bike riding culture among people of all groups in Lagos, especially in the neighbourhood where this space is located. As necessary, some of the manholes must be blocked and adequate signages must be installed to provide information on specific structures to users. Importantly, the sections of Bisola Durosinmi Etti Drive that are on a slope must be levelled up to aid easy movement while running, walking, cycling or jogging (while cognisant of the need for flood risk resilience).</p> |
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IBB Sports Centre, Oworonshoki

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| Title |  <p style="text-align: center;">IBB Sports Centre, Oworonshoki</p> |
| Description of site | <p>IBB Sports Centre is an Open space, under a bridge used for physical activities. It is located on the side of the road. Activities that are performed here are team sports (football, handball, volleyball, basketball), Running or jogging, both organised and spontaneous.</p> <p>Location: 6.550376; 3.395819</p> |
| Site strength | <p>The space has a green lawn, albeit scantily covered. There are trees planted along the space's perimeter fencing. The space is designed to accommodate a variety of sporting activities. It also has well designed entry and exit gates, spectator stand and sitting arrangement, as well as rest rooms. These features will encourage people to use the space.</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>The space has poor lighting, no security, poor solid waste management, it is in close proximity to heavy traffic. The space is also not properly maintained and regrettably underutilised. Due to the location and nature of the space, the safety of users is at stake. The poor landscaping could cause injury. The space also lacks water facilities; and there is no adequate signage for movement description nor fountain; all of which could complement/facilitate/enable the use of the green space.</p> <p>While the space is barricaded from the road, there are some portions of the barricade (hard net) exposed/torn, making it injurious for one. There is a security post with no security personnel in it. There are exposed iron rods at the edges of the space which are injurious when playing football especially. A refuse site is located beside the space, which is unhealthy for ALPhA users.</p> |

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Identifying opportunities

There is a need to implement upgrade programmes that are beneficial for the health of all ages and abilities. These programmes must give consideration for persons living with disabilities such as providing ramps for accessibility. The programmes must include the installation of waste receptacles for sorting (colour coded for recycling), provision of security guards to optimise safety and installation of solar lighting.

It is also crucial to launch initiatives that would encourage the whole community to make use of the space. These could range from publicity campaigns focused on the space (electronic/digital), installation of air quality monitoring devices to monitor and publically report on the quality of air, and creating opportunities for community interactions and school competitions.

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Amphitheatre, University of Lagos

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| Title |  <p>Amphitheatre, University of Lagos</p> |
| Description of site | <p>The amphitheatre is a public square where people come together for various activities (exercise, leisure, worship and events). It is a public square used for running, jogging, aerobics, and cycling.</p> <p>Location: 6.45407; 3.39467</p> |
| Site strength | <p>To entice people walking nearby to enter the space, there is a need to install some architectural and landscape features such as soft landscaping to improve the walkway, sign board/post, bike lanes/parking, ramp for PLWD, lighting, and small canopy to protect people from the sun.</p> <p>The openness of the space makes it multifunctional, enabling it to easily be used for organising outdoor games, and encouraging the sale of healthy foods (fruits).</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>There are no toilet facilities nor changing rooms. The space is typically made of concrete, so the surface is really rough, which could hurt people using the space for exercise routines. There's also a section of the space on a slope that could pose further injury risks during exercise. Right beside the space, there is a fast-food restaurant, outside this restaurant, there is a charcoal barbecue grill located directly beside the space. Thus, the smoke coming from the grill could affect the breathing and air quality exercisers are exposed to. A refuse site is located beside the space, which is unhealthy for users of the space.</p> |
| Identifying opportunities | <p>The University could encourage sport clubs to use the space including cycling for children, organising dance classes, non-competitive sports, aerobics etc.</p> |

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Space in front of the National Stadium

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| Title |  <p>Space in front of the National Stadium</p> |
| Description of site | <p>The space is under the bridge. It is located right in front of the national stadium. It is located on the side of the road. Activities performed here include aerobics, running or jogging, walking, cycling, engaged individually and in groups, and often spontaneously organised.</p> <p>Location: 6.498486; 3.359664</p> |
| Site strength | <p>There is a walkway for people to use for their exercise. Hence, they tend to be off the main road which makes them less vulnerable to road accidents. It has close proximity to the national stadium and Teslin Balogun stadium and usage is free for ALPhA users.</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>People using this space are vulnerable to danger of vehicular accidents. There is also the challenge of street urchins, high rate of air pollution.</p> |
| Identifying opportunities | <p>There is a need to provide billboards/signages signalling to motorists that the space nearby is used for exercise to reduce the risk of road accidents.</p> |

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Obanikoro Median

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| Title |  <p style="text-align: right;">Obanikoro Median</p> |
| Description of site | <p>A median at Obanikoro Bus stop. The BRT Lane is appropriated for exercise. There is also a garden here and BRT buses are constantly driving past. The site is located under the bridge/ road side; activities performed here include walking, running or jogging, aerobics, boxing. These activities are both organised and performed spontaneously.</p> <p>Location: 6.547222; 3.370278</p> |
| Site strength | <p>The space is elevated from the road, and barricaded from high vehicular traffic.</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>It is a road (BRT lane) and people using this space are directly exposed to fast moving BRT buses. If they are not careful, they could get hit by a bus. Also, they could hurt their joints or bones if they are not careful while working out here. The space is small; it is in the middle of the road; there is high exposure to accidents; high exposure to air pollution; not fit for people of all ages; can only accommodate few people; and people living with disabilities cannot use the space.</p> |
| Identifying opportunities | <p>There is opportunity for using the space for physical activity during BRT off peak periods (6am – 8am), opportunity to light up the space, install speed breakers, and signage.</p> |

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YAOUNDÉ

Carrefour Meeç

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| Title |  <p style="text-align: right;">Carrefour Meeç</p> |
| Description of Site | <p>An open space in a well-built-up environment, which has the presence of police and gendarmerie offices surrounding it.</p> <p>Location: 3.870004; 11.484939</p> |
| Site strength | <p>The space is accessible as it is free with no restriction. The space allows for social integration, which is not discriminatory to its users as all classes of people are welcome. The space is well equipped and surrounded by security outfits such as the police offices to uphold and preserve law and order. The space mimics an attraction park, having a pleasing ambience, with the presence of green spaces and water bodies acting as natural air purifiers.</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>Little or no separation for people using the space from road users as there is no parapet in the space. Hard surfaces in the space which are inadequate for intense physical activity. Poor lighting increases safety risk. The space lacks identity on the types of activities that the space can support. The dominance of hard surfaces increases injury risks, while poor lighting increases security risks, exposing users to theft and robbery when surveillance is limited.</p> |
| Identifying opportunities | <p>The compactness, presence of security outfits, and existing water body provide opportunities for providing more architectural features to enhance the environmental quality of the space to support leisure and physical activities.</p> |

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Parking Omnisport Stadium

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| Title |  <p>Parking Omnisport Stadium</p> |
| Description of Site | <p>Parking space of the Omnisport stadium, informally appropriated for leisure and physical activities, serving a large number of users on weekdays and frequently on weekends</p> <p>Location: 3.886426; 11.538453</p> |
| Site strength | <p>The space allows for free access, which is non-payable to use. As a stadium parking space, it pulls in a massive turn out for people using this space to practise various physical activities simultaneously. Following stadium requirements for a city, it is the only designated space within a 3km to 5km radius available for physical activities.</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>Based on the multiplicity of leisure and physical activities occurring in this space, there is always a lack of coordination in physical activities. Secondly, the frequent operations and intrusions by commercial retailers hamper physical activities. Third, as a parking space for a stadium, it is used for driving training and classes for school students, and such practice is not compatible with physical activity.</p> <p>The space is very closed, with short sidewalks and damage and inconsistent parapets, which does not provide great separation between people using the space and motorists. Secondly, the use of the space for driving when engaging in physical activities poses accidental risks to people using the space.</p> |
| Identifying opportunities | <p>Landscaping the premises will provide opportunities to make the space aesthetic and provide a form of natural fencing for users and motorists. The site must have an infirmary for first aid purposes as the surface is concrete and cannot be changed as it is for parking. As a vast space, it could be beneficial for cyclists.</p> |

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Rue Tongolo (Vacant Plot)

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| Title |  <p>Rue Tongolo (Vacant Plot)</p> |
| Description of site | <p>A vacant plot within the city informally appropriated for physical activities, e.g., aerobics, jogging, and football, across diverse demographics</p> <p>Location: 3.912387; 11.5242492</p> |
| Site strength | <p>Its strategic position fosters proximity, as it is accessible to community members at all hours. Due to its openness, it guarantees security as users and passers-by are guardians of the space. With a shortage of neighbourhood parks, this public space offers an avenue for social interactions.</p> |
| Site weakness | <p>Poor maintenance limits the functionality of the space. Coupled with the absence of lighting and waste management facilities and fences to enhance security.</p> <p>Poor waste management at the site exposes users to diseases. As a vacant plot, it is a breeding ground for street urchins, which poses safety risks to users.</p> |
| Identifying opportunities | <p>As a vacant plot, it provides an opportunity to establish a structure from scratch owing to the space availability. Hence, it provides an opportunity to construct a multi-purpose sort complex to provide a structure for physical activity. Accordingly, this structure should accommodate an infirmary, toilet and water facilities for convenience, comfort and waste management. Likewise, constructing spectator stands during community events as it is an ample space.</p> |

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