

# A Study of Design Essence a Case of Egba-Ake Traditional Squares in Abeokuta, Nigeria

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**Abstract:-** The design essence in this study denote techniques concepts of town communal relationships of an urban fabrics. The gap in this study is failure to relate the cultural past to the existing physical components of the built environment that disrupt the cultural perception of the city. The purpose of this study is to examine design essence in Egba-Ake traditional squares. Qualitative method was adopted; in-depth interview was conducted through focus group discussions from opinion leaders in the squares. Data was analyzed using Nvivo words tree and place theory. Traditional design concept of Ake palace was descriptively obtained from the opinion leaders. This study shown how squares design speak volume about the built environment of the existing urban fabric, past historic, cultural activities and traditional identity of Egba-Ake people. This research look into conservation from the angle of preserving historical resources and relating culture and society so as to make use of elements that was used to form the physical settings of city and recommended that there should be a lasting solution to loss of cultural activities and traditional identity that metamorphized into the perception of the city.

**Keyword:-** Urban Fabric, Design Essence, Square, Cultural Identity, Cultural Activities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In history, the major function of urban square is to facilitate people to gather for social, economic, religion, environmental intellect and political activities. Development over time and differences in culture altered the design and function of these spaces. Presently, in developed countries there is concern over the important role of urban squares in increasing the vitality and defined urban configuration of cities. Provision of square connotes precise organization of consistency planning of the city in the early stage of the urban formation. Yet, awareness of the needs and role of urban squares differ from one city to the other. The function of physical elements of the city is interpreted through cultural settings and social activities that takes place in the city. The role of urban architecture is to bring fulfilment to the occupants by maintaining the relationship between physical settings and social activities of the city Kim, (2008). The function of urban architecture to bring durable solution to the

physical setting of the city is not just for artistic purpose but to extend to social, cultural, economic and humanity areas and to balance cultural activities and physical elements to achieve cultural perception that was used to form the city. Sparke (1986) mentioned visual form as the avenue in which the relationship between design and culture is used to show physical elements and cultural activities that is used to form a city. She concluded that design concept that was used for an urban morphology would influence the quality of the physical elements of that particular city perception.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural characteristics of a city is view from different perspective and is seen through physical settings and social activities of the city. Urban architecture is defined as visual representation of culture therefore, city design provide diverse cultural services to the city occupants and it is used to create economic value for the city Sparke (1986). Culture of a city is interpreted in many ways that is influenced by the city design concept Sparke, (1986). A city's design is defined by the cultural limit of the city that is identified as physical settings and perception of the city Julier (2005). Elements defined by the physical setting is related to the cultural activities and the connection remain secondary. Culture defines the uniqueness of a group and is the avenue to see the city perception in physical Julier (2005). An inclusive image of a city is determined by the culture and history of a city design Lynch (1960). Idea of an urban design means different approaches that was used to form the city identity that is determined by the communal relationship Lynch (1960). This image is displayed in urban spaces including traditional squares and conveyance corridor Lynch, (1960). City evolved from the traditional square because the communal used it to communicate cultural activities and portray the community designer intent. The important origin of traditional square conceptualization is the term 'communal' Kim (2002). Kim (2002) mentioned that it varies from one place to the other to sum up the designs; the concepts of the traditional square that is expressed as a space forming a common community through communal agreement.

Whyte (1980) described while some traditional square met design goals and others did not, he used social observation of people in urban squares to comprehend the factors that

constitute a successful urban square concentrating mainly on the physical features within the spaces. Woolley (2004) corroborated Whyte in the role that design concept of squares has cultural activities that takes place within the city. He concluded that design concept of the traditional squares is the major factors that influence all the events that takes place and that suggested the city physical environment. Whyte (1980) described the close connection between qualities of squares and the people's activities that can improve the functions of the urban squares. Benepe, (2002) supported Whyte's findings that successful urban squares required the development of dedicated square users and neighbors. Such functional squares are open spaces where design success, is measured by the number of users. Whyte (1980) claimed that functional spaces have in built parameters that draw city people from one generation to the other. Squares in this study becomes an 'urban place' - a bonded unit of the township to which the inhabitants relate intentionally.

Ralph (1976) argued that setting can be physical. 'Place' then will add physical setting to institutional setting, activity and meaning to become meaningful landscape. Meaning here refers to the setting, landscape, rituals, routine, people experiences and the context of adjoining places. He further states that as physical locations, 'place' becomes centers of felt values as people interact and become acquainted with the landscape. Garvin and Berens (1997) renowned that squares speak volume about the city image and played vital role in city formation, squares play a role of people meeting point for different purposes. They concluded that design of squares is what add flavor to other elements of the city image as the soul of the city. Tuan (1974) described squares as place that becomes a geographic entity, which provides unique experience for users over a period; the peculiar character and useful experience always attract and sticks in the memory of users. Doğan, (2016) Stated that city image is symbolic illustration of place and there is a need to understand ancient value system behind physical planning of square. Bianchini et al. (2007) stressed what is in squares design; efforts are multifaceted civic institutions set up and they jointly give birth to place's cultural resources. Ghavampour, (2008) stated that cultural characteristics of a city is part of the historical background that defines the city identity and perspective that reflected the intent of their ancestors.

#### ➤ Vernacular Architecture

Vernacular architecture, revealed how physical settings of the city is planned to satisfy cultural desires of the people and at the same time meet the need of built environment. African cities are culturally based and through contemporary symbols of their own cultural areas in ancient and medieval cities Andersen, (1977). Vernacular architecture is exceptional because is determined by the religious and communal dictate of the dwellers. Some factors are responsible for vernacular architecture of African settlement which are man-made and natural factors. The natural factors are geographical and climatic conditions;

geographical factors are river and lakes, savannahs and forests, rocks and hills and valleys and flood plains. Vernacular architectural concept was unique and peculiar to the geographical location of the cities. Each geographical location had several distinctive building features. There were not precisely trained architects, much of the information and building concepts were verbally transferred from generation to generation. The houses were built to convey the concept approved by the community from inception of the city Eglash, (1999).

Therefore, there is no presence of similar material culture or house plan in Africa. Nigeria is a country made of people with different ethnic groups and this is revealed in the structures and cenotaphs that they have built to denote their beliefs and history. The physical appearance of a city is a direct image of its people, culture, and history. The historic environment is the cultural landscape of our community. It represents the antique records of the incremental improvement of our society and localities. The role of ancient spaces and edifice in Yoruba land cannot be over strained. It is a modest medium that Yoruba's make their cultural heritage known from one generation to the other. Design essence is taken here as not only the forms, masses, voids or social and cultural motives but the coherent result of all these elements. Design essence of a structure or a system (and historic urban fabric means a system) depends in the 'relationships' among its elements. This is because the elements, the form and content, can be changed in respect to the changing criteria of the time, but its value, its soul, its architecture can only be deduced from those relationships. An entity becomes a structure, a system, not due to its various components but due to the relationship among each element, which thus forms a network. The 'design essence' of an urban fabric is not clear and evident to us, as it had been to people who lived in the same system creating that fabric; because of the awful break in our historical process caused by city transformation. However, the essence can be understood as an intangible dimension. This should be expressed through careful analysis of structure and the relationships between the different elements of that structure. Thus, the 'design essence' becomes the 'understanding' of a particular historic urban fabric. Cities are recently demanding that planning and design take history, including character, culture and meaning into account. Quite number of scholars have recognized that an historical perspective can offer a much richer understanding of the planned environment. Proshansky (1978) stated, "There is no physical scenery that is not also a social, cultural, and emotional setting". He devised the term *place identity* to denote the dimensions of self that define an individual's personal identity in relation to physical environment. Ashworth (2005) opinions culture as a process that involves selecting from everything that happened in the past in form of recorded history and accumulating the collective and individual memory and physical relics of a society together. Greider and Gardovich (1994) stated that people's analysis of

places depend on their cultural values, interests and individual experiences.

Typical examples of squares are palace squares and markets. Market place of a city is the economic hub of city while the king’s palace is the political hub of the city in most African transitional settlement. Samples of some successful design essence in urban squares namely Red Square in Moscow and Navona Rome Mohammad R. M. Abdelaal, (2012). The squares increased the physical aesthetics of the place Mohammad R. M. Abdelaal, (2012). The disrupted character of city is seen, in this study, as one of the most important reasons for the crises in the built environment, emerging not only as a lack of architectural quality and vision but as a lack of a sense of time and place. Therefore, gap in this study is failure in relating the old traditions of city making and the failure of contemporary society to provide positive and perceptive motives to design. This study examines design essence in Egba-Ake traditional squares.

### III. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The selected case study is Egba-Ake palace square and Itoku market in Egba-Ake town, Abeokuta. Egba-Ake is among the towns in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. Local government headquarters of Ake Abeokuta 7°09'00"N latitude, 3°21'00"E longitude is in Egba-Ake town. Egba-Ake has grown phenomenally in the past fourteen years in term of residential development and human population. According to National Population Commission (2006) Census, population of Abeokuta is 449,088 out of Ogun state 3,751,140. Ake is the administrative hub of Egba-Ake where Ake people are govern traditionally. The palace is also the seat of Abeokuta paramount ruler while Itoku market is the economic hub of the town that is identified with Adire fabrics. Figure 1 below shows the map of Abeokuta south where Egba-Ake is the headquarters among Yoruba south-west towns.

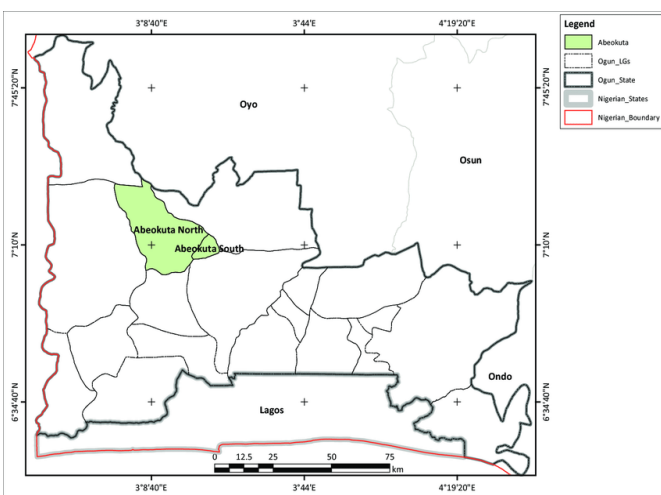


Figure 1: Map of South-West state in Nigeria showing Abeokuta south location

### IV. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method was adopted in this study; in-depth interview was conducted through spontaneous questions from focus group discussions between interviewer and Egba-Ake traditional institution, local experts and opinion leaders in the squares. Personal observation was conducted in the squares. Vernacular architectural concept by an unknown designer of Ake palace was descriptively obtained from the opinion leaders. Place theory, sustainable theory and Nvivo words tree was used to analyzed and presented the collected data.

### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Design essence of Egba-Ake suggest her unique embodiment, peculiarity and identity. Signifies essential exclusive architectural, engineering, and artistic design achievement, and conveying information about Egba-Ake past and tell fascinating stories of the Egba-Ake in Abeokuta, Ogun state Nigeria. Design essence signifies buildings structures meaning in squares in Egba-Ake were discussed below;

#### ➤ History of Egba-Ake

In 1830, Sodeke led Egbas into Abeokuta where he met some inhabitants from Ijemo and Itoko on ground farming and hunting. The Alaketu and the Alake first settled together in Ketu; and the Alake was engaged in cloth weaving. The early settlers in Egba forest engaged themselves in farming, hunting and were living peacefully and freely of one another in their respective communities. The government was managed in the province by its king and his council. Abeokuta South local government headquarters of Ogun state is in Egba-Ake. Alake of Egba-Ake is the paramount ruler in Abeokuta. As a typical Yoruba town, Egba-Ake economic activities revolve around the center of the town where the main market Itoku is situated. The studied squares include the king’s palace and the market. The market is a subset of the king’s palace. The king’s palace is a symbol of power and authority where the community evolved and grow. It also serves as the center of administration while the market served the economic hub of the town.

#### ➤ Historical Antecedent of the Traditional Squares

**Ake’s palace** is the political hub of Egba-Ake, while Itoku market is economic hub that drives Egba Ake community with famous tie and dye fabrics called Adire in the native parlance.

#### ➤ Architectural Design Element and Environmental Features of the Traditional Square

The belief and custom of Egba-Ake people in unity and togetherness was what brought about Ake’s palace design concept. Ake’s palace is captured with architectural unique buildings constructed in Yoruba vernacular styles. Egba-Ake’s interest in religion and tradition is what brought about the



tripod concepts of religion within the palace. Everybody has freedom to whatsoever religion he/she believes in and within the square. This was demonstrated in the location of the three religions buildings within the palace (the mosque, the church and Iyamode temple). The palace has a notable entrance that connected to a major route that lead to the palace square where festivals and occasions take place within the square. The first

palace is called Ake Museum where different sculptures are used to beautify the palace with gigantic and decorated columns showing royalty of the king within the palace. Ake Museum verandah is where king stayed to welcome palace guests and listen to complain in the past. The sculpture depict the vocation of the first king of Egba-Ake Okekenu I as sculptor.



**Figure 2: Museum verandah in Ake's Palace**



**Figure 3: The first Alake's residence in Egba-Ake**

The first Alake's residence is the formal resident of Okekenu I and is attached to Museum verandah. The first palace building is a storey building with ornamented columns, different compartments for different purposes and celebrated steps that shows the superiority of Alake to other occupants of the palace. The square accommodated a popular museum in Abeokuta where ancient artifacts were kept for reference purposes. The second Ake's palace was built and commissioned on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1985 by his royal majesty Oba Oyebade Lipade CRF. The palace consists of four rooms, a large auditorium and a Banquet hall at the ground floor. The four rooms serve as a living apartment for kabiyesi's aides while the auditorium is used to receive visitors for several occasions. Ake's palace buildings were renovated when his royal majesty Oba Adedotun Gbadebo, Okekenu IV was installed in 2005.

➤ *Description of some traditional features in and within Ake's palace premises.*

Towards the western side of the new palace, situated a block of four rooms' en-suite serving as living accommodation to some of Alake's aides was built and commissioned in 1985. Refurbishment and beautification of

the space outside Ake's palace referred to as palace ground and the front view was done in 2005 when the present Alake of Egba Oba Gbadebo Okekenu IV was installed. It is located at the right side when entering through the main gate. Well-constructed podium where the Alake receives large crowd during festivals and functions. Towards the left side, is Ake traditional chiefs' enclave known as Ogboni house where they hold their regular meetings. Adjacent the Ake's building is the temple of Iyamode where the new yam or Ela festival is celebrated by the Alake of Egba land with Mosade performance that comes up every August. Adjacent Mosade's building is Ipebi where Alake – elect undergoes tutelage for ninety days in traditional art of governance before his enthronement as Alake of Egba land. By the side is the central Mosque where Muslim community within and outside palace meet daily. Centenary Hall and St. Peter's Cathedral Church Ake oversee the traditional square. Itoku market design concept and products show the city affinity for creativity, Adire fabrics is been produced and sold in bulk as the market is surrounded by locked up shops and a modern shopping complex built by Senator Ibikunle Amosun the executive governor of Ogun State.

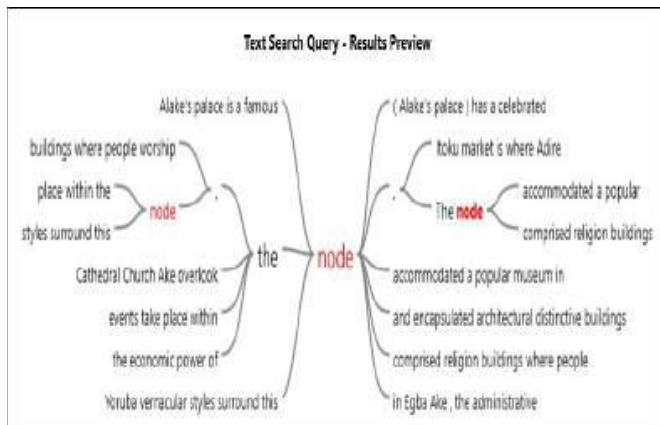


Figure 4: Nvivo words tree showing Ake palace characters



Figure 5: showing a section of Itoku Market

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study revealed, design configuration of Egba-Ake squares as the cultural setting, and the people's value for social activities, which function politically, socially and culturally. All the physical elements that was used to construct Egba-Ake palaces were put together with the view of creating outstanding and creatively appealing architectural and symbolic piece(s) in Egba –Ake community. This study revealed how squares design reflected the built environment of the existing urban fabrics, past historic, cultural activities and traditional identity of Egba-Ake people. This research was used to promote conservation from the perspective of preserving historical resources and relating it to culture and society so as to reference the elements that were used to form the physical settings of the city. Recommendation is that there should be an awareness of cultural activities and cultural identity that was used to form the city image in Nigeria schools of architecture. This study's mechanism joined to cultural drives that metamorphosed into city design principle and cultural heritage in Nigeria.

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