The Use and Management of Open Spaces in Low Income Residential Neighbourhoods in Nairobi

by

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Abstract

Provision of open spaces in Kenya’s urban areas especially in Nairobi has tended to be a matter of standards provided in town planning guidelines. There’s very little response to changes in people’s socio-economic and political lives, which constantly shape and influence the level of use and participation in recreation. This trend has worked to downplay the main objectives of open space provision in neighbourhood planning spearheaded by the 19th C town planning movement. As key elements in neighbourhoods early town planners saw planning, open spaces as forums and means through which community life develops. This expectation cannot be realised in Nairobi where the planners and residents perceive urban open spaces differently, thus presenting a conflict between the expectations of the users (residents) and those of the planners.

To put the study into perspective, three residential estates (Bahati, Uhuru and Umoja II) all developed at different periods of Nairobi’s urban development have been studied. The estates are located within Nairobi’s Eastlands, a predominantly low-income housing region but showing significant heterogeneity in levels of open spaces provision and use. The study thus focused on the level of community participation in planning and management of open spaces. The study is handy at this period as more high-density residential development continues to be put up in Nairobi’s Eastlands. Developers and city authority could avoid a repetition of the current situation by taking note of the discussions and recommendations presented in this work.

A number of salient factors, which directly or indirectly influence the use, and of open spaces in the study areas were brought out. Among them is the tenure of occupancy of the dwelling units, income levels and employment patterns, site planning in residential scheme development, domestic solid waste management and implementations of landscape policy by the Nairobi city authority. As significant management problem was found to emanate from the institutional bottlenecks within the city’s local authority administrative structure. The study upholds the fact that recreation and other related activities are subject to the changing value systems of the users overtime, and the planner’s task is to keep a blest with these changes. This approach therefore, calls for responsive urban planning, which is flexible in keeping pace with emerging urban challenges.

In the light of the above views, the study has provided a number of recommendations intended to improve on the current situation of open spaces. These include: provision for a neighbourhood enterprise area (Jua-kali) in the initial stages of residential plan formulation to cater for the unemployed and underemployed members of the neighbourhood. It is also recommended that city authorities device methods, which can facilitate multiple uses of open spaces, especially the school play fields. On the other hand the institutional bottlenecks with regard to management of open spaces should be removed by allowing for consultation and coordination of duties between the relevant departments. This particularly applies to the implementation of landscape policy guidelines and domestic solid waste management.