

The Planning Implications of Urban Sprawl in Akure

Introduction

The accurate definition of urban sprawl may be debated but a general consensus is that urban sprawl is characterized by an unplanned and uneven pattern of growth, driven by multitude of processes and leading to inefficient resource utilization. Urban sprawl has become a pejorative term without any serious examination of its qualities or benefits and without any critical analysis of its troubled alternative – urban congestion while the formation of the world's cities has always been determined by the means of transport available. The automobile has helped make these choices possible and easier. Automobiles offer more options and flexibility when people choose where to live, work, and shop. Tenements and luxury apartment buildings replaced agricultural land use. Urbanization is now a rising trend seen all over the world, especially in an alarming rate in developing countries. This makes cities grow both in number and in physical size. In quite a lot of instances, the percentage increase in population is accompanied by more than proportional percentage increase of an urbanized area. This is an indication that the two growth rates differ and urban area grows in a more rapid pace. The urban areas of most Nigeria urban centres have increasingly been replaced by offices and houses on larger lots. At first, people continued to work in cities but lived in sprawling suburbs. Urban growth and sprawl are almost synonymous and edge cities have become the dominant urban form. While the car is a symbol of wealth, the high cost of automobile dependence has actually eroded real economic growth.

In this paper, literatures on sprawl and urban growth will be reviewed. Second, while many factors may have helped the growth of sprawl, automobile act ultimately as one of the root causes. Suburbia, edge cities and sprawl are all the natural, inexorable, result of the technological dominance of the automobile. Third, sprawl's negative quality of life impacts have been overstated. Effective vehicle pollution regulation has curbed emissions increases associated with increased driving. The growth of edge cities is associated with increases in most measures of quality of life. Fourth, the problem of sprawl lies not in the people who have moved to the suburbs but rather the people who have been left behind. In this way the various planning implications of akure urban sprawl will be examined.

Akure urban population

Akure is experiencing a high pace of urbanisation compared to other emerging cities in Nigeria. Urbanisation in Akure has been never as rapid as it is in the recent times. As one of the fastest growing capital city in Nigeria, Akure is facing stiff challenges in managing this urban growth that leads to sprawl and ensuring effective delivery of basic services in urban areas. The exact population of Akure is not known because the national census of 1991 undoubtedly underestimated the number of inhabitants in many settlements of Nigeria based on political reasons. However, the current estimate today varies from 2 to 5 million inhabitants (FOS, 2001) Moreover, it is well known that population counts during the colonial period were more like estimates than real counts, and it is difficult to give even an evaluation of the

percentage rate of growth. Today, Akure remains the administrative headquarters of Ondo state whose share of agricultural workers in the workforce has greatly decreased. Meanwhile, the share of population living in urban areas increased from 20.2 per cent in 1971 to 23.7 per cent in 1981 and to 26.1 per cent in 1991 (akure master plan,1998). But these figures do not tell the whole story.

There is evidence that urban growth is increasingly dispersed and is therefore not reflected in the census of population. Urban sprawl promotes the spread of urban land use into the rural-urban fringe and draws a larger number of people into the rural-urban interface. And even though the growth rate of Akure has not risen steeply, the absolute increase in the urban population is very large, having increased from 230,000 thousand in 1971 to 1.18 million in 1991 (census, 1991). In the course of development, it is likely that out of the enormous number of rural people lacking opportunity in the economically underdeveloped places where they usually come from will continue to migrate to the cities. Most of the population growth in cities is due to migration.

Defining Sprawl

Sprawl is defined as one or more existing patterns of development. Sprawl is also defined as a process of development that occurs over some period of time as an urban area expands. In some literatures, sprawl is frequently defined by one or more examples of low-density or scattered patterns of urban development. The flexibility of definition by example makes it possible to include all sorts of development patterns, from planned communities with clustered housing and mixed uses to exurban rural estates. Sprawl is used as an aesthetic judgment about a general urban development pattern. Generally, sprawl is widely known as ugly development with tendency to discontinuity and haphazard layout. So also, Sprawl is widely seen as a cause of an externality, such as high automobile dependence thus resulting to the isolation of the poor.

The Extent of Sprawl

Sprawl in simple terms is just the spreading out of a city and its suburbs over more and more rural land at the periphery of an urban area while in reality it is a complex phenomenon that means different things in different areas and conditions. In general, there are two concepts which come together in the popular conception of sprawl: decentralization and density. Decentralization refers to the spreading of employment and population throughout the metropolitan area. Density refers to the degree to which employment and population are centered in high density living and working areas. But most popular views of sprawl seem to believe that decentralization and lower densities tend to go together. As such, when edge cities formed, they did not replace traditional dense downtowns with new dense job centers, but rather with low density employment areas.

The Causes of Sprawl in Akure

Generally, population growth, rise in household income, subsidization of infrastructure investments like roads, ineffective land-use, excessive growth, social problems in central cities and poor land policies are taken to be the main causes of sprawl. One of the main factors that help in explaining the increasing sub-urbanization of population in rich countries is the demand for larger suburban lots. With rise in household incomes, people who move into the suburbs are motivated to a significant degree by the desire for more living space. The rise of the automobile is certainly not the only factor driving the decentralization of population and employment. The high correlation between using automobiles and living in low-density edge cities may not

prove that cars caused sprawl but is an indication that the two strongly complement each other. One factor that has surely played some role in explaining the increasing suburbanization of population is the demand for larger suburban lots. People who move into the suburbs in Akure are motivated to a significant degree by the desire for more living space. However, for a land-oriented view to explain the rise in suburbanization, it needs to explain why the demand for land should have risen so much over the last 15 years. A second major alternative hypothesis is that the growth of the suburbs has come about because people have fled the social problems of the core region of Akure. Core city problems may have led people to leave and seek solace in socially controlled suburbs. At the individual level, this theory is irrefutable. Lots of residents have surely been directly motivated in their move to the suburbs by the desire for a more attractive social environment.

Effects of sprawl in Akure

Like many other Yoruba settlements, Akure founding, growth and development, is not rooted to colonization. Though the city had a master plan but the inability of the master plan to function as an effective development control tools calls for its frequent revision. The forest belt used to provide both a limit to urban expansion and to commercial and recreational resource for the people of the city. Plots of cultivated land can be found on any vacant land and on areas close to small rivers or streams within and immediately surrounding the city. Urban built-up area increased significantly, whereas bare, undeveloped land decreased. Nevertheless, without any reliable alternative, the analysis of this paper will be based on the 1991 National Census. Until 1970, Akure was the largest city in Ondo province. The growth of the built-up area during the second half of the 20th century (from 16 km² in the 1970s to 68 km² in the 1990s) shows clearly that there has been an underestimation of the total growth of the city. In the 1980s, the Ijoka – Oluwatuyi road generated the greatest urban sprawl (east and north of the city), followed by the Idanre – Akure road (west of the city). Since then Akure has spread further into the neighbouring local government areas of Akure North and Owena. The demand for infrastructure, basic services and housing in Akure is on the increase. Issues of sanitation, waste management, crime, social conflict, governance and management also need attention. Moreover, there is a strong urban bias in the development of programmes and no coordinated efforts at rural development, which in turn is reflected in inadequate access to market for goods and services, and deplorable condition of the education, health, transportation, water and sanitation sectors. Most fundamental is the lack of resources and technical capability to manage the urban crises.

Sprawl leads to land-use patterns which are unfavourable to the development of sustainable transport modes and hence, increase the use of private car that in turn result in increased trip lengths, congestion, increase in fuel consumption and air pollution. As homes and businesses spread further and further apart, local governments are forced to provide for widely spaced services and infrastructure leading to higher costs and increased tax burden. It is an economic theory that productivity is much more enhanced with dense development since ideas move quickly when people are in close proximity. But when jobs move to the suburbs, people follow them which is the case of Akure. This may reduce productivity in the city leading to social loss. Sprawl has also created segregation of rich and poor or social isolation in general in akure metropolis. The low-income groups are abandoned in the core regions because they cannot afford car-based lifestyle. Role of transport technology can explain this social fragmentation. The much congested and deteriorated central towns end up being favorable places for crime and social unrest.

Conclusion

Over the past century, urban growth has taken the form of sprawl. The root cause of sprawl is the automobile, first people and then jobs left the high density, walking and public transport cities of the 19th century. Edge cities were made possible by the automobile and as long as the car remains the dominant transport mode, sprawl is likely to remain the dominant urban form. The economic and social consequences of sprawl do not appear to be dire. Urban sprawl involves the spread of cities into peripheral zones and the filling in of interstitial areas. Customary property owners in these areas often undertake developments that start as low-density neighborhoods, but degenerate progressively into large irregular settlements. Urban sprawl has been recognized as a problematic aspect of metropolitan growth and development in the world over. The growing concern about the issue is shared among planners, policy makers, environmentalists and people in general. The drawbacks of this practice are many. As such areas become more crowded and unmanageable, it becomes increasingly difficult to integrate them into the urban services network. For the most part, efforts to control this phenomenon as part of urban projects have been modest. They have focused largely on providing serviced plots for new settlers and have only rarely tried to anticipate the direction of urban development. The inability or unwillingness to provide proper services in the wake of urban sprawl means that the problems to be confronted in peri-urban areas are enormous. Proper implementation of master plans / development plans is a critical aspect in regulated development of urban areas.

Although the master plan of akure have been prepared, so far their implementation has not been satisfactory due to a variety of reasons, which in turn have resulted in mushrooming of slums and squatters, unauthorized and haphazard development and above all environmental degradation, lack of basic amenities and transportation problems within and around urban areas. The city planning mainly addresses preparation of land use plans through zoning. However, local authorities also need to plan for meeting the demand of infrastructure facilities and ensuring delivery of basic services. This has been dismal in the current planning practices since these are normally static master plans or development plans mostly addressing land use. These plans are also less equipped to review and evaluate any policy decisions dynamically so as to visualise the potential implications of a policy directive and also the regions of potential sprawl. It is therefore necessary to enable the administrators and planners to graduate and equip with better understanding, methods and tools to tackle the problem of urban sprawl. Further, planners need to be informed of possible areas of sprawl to take corrective actions to mitigate the implications. In this regard, there is a need for a deeper understanding of urban sprawl phenomenon, capturing the dynamics and modelling it to visualise, review and evaluate various policy options.

The implications of urban sprawl are not well understood and can potentially be a threat for achieving sustainable urbanisation. Hence, it is very essential to understand the phenomenon of urban sprawl especially from the perspective of a developing country, like Nigeria. This would eventually aid in evolving any policy and management options for effectively addressing the problem of urban sprawl. Further, the problem of urban sprawl is observed to be an outcome of improper planning, inadequate policies and lack of good governance due to various reasons. The inability of the administration and planning machinery to visualise probable areas of sprawl and its growth is persistent with the lack of appropriate spatial information and indicators. Added to this, is the inability of administration and planning to capture the feedbacks arising out of different decisions, essentially with lack of dynamic spatial models with feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, inappropriate policy decisions are fuelling sprawl

as there is no mechanism to evaluate for different policy implications. Thus, in the present context, with the escalating problem of urban sprawl, the challenges for future research is to arrive at an integrated spatial planning support system to effectively plan, review and evaluate different policy options while capturing the dynamics involved. The contribution of research by way of spatial planning support system would only be a short-to-medium term solution to this problem.

The significant driver of sprawl in developing countries most especially Nigeria which is the most populated country in Africa is the migration of people from rural areas aspiring for livelihood to urban areas, which in turn compounds the problem of sprawl. Hence, a long term solution can only be achieved through an overall economic development of the Akure and its immediate region by the way of better employment and livelihood generation activities in the rural areas that can lessen the migration of people from rural areas to urban areas and mitigate urban sprawl.

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