

Mapping Socio-Cultural Influences in Contemporary Urban Public Open Space: The Case of Biryogo, Kigali City

Dr. Josephine Malonza, Prof. Robert Rukwaro & Prof. Tom Anyamba

Link: <http://ijcrs.org/current-issue>

Abstract

This study aims at exploring the existence of the characteristics and concepts of the traditional Rwandan Public open space (POS) within the contemporary urban neighborhood of Biryogo in Kigali city. The study hypothesizes that the vibrant use of POS is influenced by both its physical dimensions; space and environment and social dimensions; users and activities. The Rwandese traditional human settlements, like other indigenous settings was planned through harmonious interactions between man, nature and culture, which in turn translated into the design of homes, compounds and their surroundings. POS in the form of courtyards was very valuable and influential in the planning of traditional Rwanda. However, rapid urbanization has transformed the concept of the traditional POS, to an extent that the same is evidently missing in current cities and urban towns in Rwanda. Interestingly, in the native settlement of Biryogo, located right next to the heart of Kigali city, concepts of the traditional POS are still visible. This paper therefore explores the existence of the concepts of the traditional Rwandese POS characteristics within the contemporary urban neighborhood of Biryogo through a study on preferences and factors influencing their use. Two case studies have been compared to a traditional reference case study, involving both quantitative and qualitative inventory processes in understanding the how the social and cultural dimensions' influences preference and use of urban courtyards. The research methodology consists of surveying the reference case study of king's palace museum and two contemporary case studies in Biryogo neighborhood. The resulting data is then processed in matrix analysis and overlay mapping to correlate the data by using both macro and micro socio-spatial elements. This in turn helps the study to make interpretations of the urban structure of POS, through which the socio-cultural influences are highlighted. They reveal that the specific physical characteristics of POS as well as the users and activities account for a vibrant use of the same through attracting and retaining people in space. In the finding of the study, significant similarities have emerged between traditional and contemporary POS, which reveal that characteristics of a peoples' socio-cultural identity can still be visible and relevant today. The same, if adequately synthesized could significantly inform the design and planning of POS in the current urban development processes in Kigali city.

Keyword: Public Open Space, Indigenous, Contemporary, Biryogo.