Historic Preservation: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract: - The significance of historical elements in their different forms cannot be overemphasized. They served as relics of the present which connects us with the past. They are the ones providing us with insight into the past. It is the need to examine the need, prospect and the challenges facing this task that forms the focus of this paper. In a place where lip service and lack of political will prevails and dictates attitudes to historical sites, the need to highlight the importance of this sites for historical social and economic should be studied and implemented. This paper derives its data from both primary and secondary sources.

Key Words: Historical preservation, Prospects, Challenges, Culture, Heritage.

I. INTRODUCTION

The cultural elements of various ethnic groupings are peculiar to individual groups. (Okpoko and Okonkwo, 2005) They are symbols of age-long traditions that have survived several generations. Every human society has a culture. Culture includes a society’s arts, beliefs, customs, institutions, inventions, language, technology, and values. Culture produces similar behaviour and thought among most people in a particular society. Thus, the culture of a society is the totality of the way of life of its members. (Orser, 2002) Culture is a property of the society. It encompasses the ideas and habits which the people learn, share and transmit from one generation to another generation. It allows them to identify with others of similar mindsets and backgrounds. Cultural heritage can provide an automatic sense of unity and belonging within a group and allows members to better understand previous generations and the history of where they come from. (Arinze, 1990)

They therefore serve as means of identity and source of pride to the people to whom they are attributed. A large number of these elements exist more in the material aspect of culture than in the non-material aspect. (Bodam, 1998) This is partly due to the tangible form of material culture in comparison with the abstract nature of non-material culture. They have become historical materials which provide a glimpse into the past and in most cases, they have provided more than a glimpse as they have shed light on some issues and filled many gaps in historiography. The significance of historical elements in their different forms cannot be overemphasized. They serve as relics of the past, which inadvertently connect with the present. They provide an insight into the era they belong and ultimately bestow on the present, the knowledge of the civilization which they belong to. (Maduabuchi, 2006)

Historic preservation means safeguarding the existence and appearance of historical elements of a community. In a precise manner, it is the preservation of history of a community of people. It aims at preserving and recovering a community’s cultural heritage through its art and history. A prerequisite for the preservation of heritage is the value attached to it. Since it can be said that efforts will not be expanded on articles of no value, whatever needs to be preserved must be of value to the community. The values attributable to heritage can either be historical, cultural, religious, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, social, economic or political. (Orser, 2002) It is not unusual for an article to be preserved to have more values than one; hence, a historical element can also be cultural and religious. The common value that runs across all articles of preservation is historical value. The survival of an article from one period to another already gives the article historical value as it represent another age and time from which it originates. (Massey, 1986)

The desire to preserve traditional arts and local wisdom is an essential prerequisite for historic preservation. Historic preservation helps to retain the physical appearance and value of material and non-material historical elements. It enhances the continuous existence of these elements with little or no alterations. Historic preservation is a conversation of the present with the past about the future. It provides opportunities to know the importance of history. It decides on the aspect of the past which is brought into the present and the aspect which is preserved for the future. (Orser, 2002) Through historic preservation, we look at history in different ways, ask different questions of the past, and learn new things about our history and ourselves. Historic preservation is an important way for us to transmit our understanding of the past to future generations. Our history has many facets, and historic preservation helps in telling the stories. Sometimes historic preservation involves celebrating events, people, places, and ideas that are dear, at other times, it involves recognizing moments in history that can be painful or uncomfortable to remember. The importance of actively saving one’s history, not only in times of peace but also in times of conflict is to enable people to continually preserve all forms of history. (Maduabuchi, 2006)

The historical elements may include festivals, architectural structures, sceneries, arts, crafts, monuments, grooves, traditional practices, industrial sites, inter alia. The need for historic preservation is derived from the fact that heritage is not a renewable resource. It should therefore be
II. FORMS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic preservation is a wide range of activities targeted at the preservation of historical elements. It should be noted that when trying to protect historical elements, national, social, cultural, religious and economical aspects of the protection process are vital. Historic preservation may take any of the following forms:

• Conservation
• Preservation
• Restoration
• Reconstruction
• Rehabilitation (Okpoko and Okonkwo, 2005)

Conservation is an endeavour that seeks to preserve, conserve and protect buildings, objects, landscapes or other artifacts of historical significance. In order to carry out conservation, the most important thing is to determine how historical elements may be affected and explore measures to avoid or reduce harm to them. Conservation of cultural heritage is sometimes associated with art collections, museums and involves collection, care and management through examination, documentation, exhibition and storage. The conservation efforts on historical elements are largely felt on the protection and care of tangible cultural heritage, including artworks, architecture, archaeology, and museum collections. (Massey, 1986) Conservation activities also include preventive conservation practice of managing cultural heritage such as songs, arts, crafts, moral, historical sites, artifacts, archaeological sites, etc. Conservation rose to the protection of cultural heritage as they were being slowly destroyed and their historic and artistic values were lost. Conservation is sometimes seen as the more general term which refers to all activities that are aimed at safeguarding the character and value of a historical element so as to retain its heritage value and extend its physical life. (UNESCO 2003)

Preservation aims at retaining the original appearance, values and purpose of historical elements. Preservation activities do not only protect the elements, the elements are retained where their values originated and for the purposes which they are known. Thus, preservation does not only protect, it ensures that the historical elements remain pure and original in their own environments. Preservation also wades off the effect of foreign and modern civilizations on the historical elements. The purpose of this is to present an unadulterated historical element to the present and the future. The preservation of historical elements remains vital and essential for the cultural benefits of future generations. (Maduabuchi, 2006)

Restoration activities aim to bring historical elements of heritage value back to its original form. (Rypkema, 1994) It adopts methods that prove effective in keeping the element close to their original condition for as long as possible Articles of historical values become restored by doing away with modern renovations and in its stead, historic materials are used to augment and return the article to the clime and time it represents. Restoration of historical practices will entail the reintroduction of such practice where it has been faced out and the removal of modern and foreign elements to the practice. Such practices include religious festivals, rituals, social festivals, and other non-material aspects of culture. (Massey, 1986)

Reconstruction means the production of replica of existing historical elements. This imitation may be produced in order to protect the limited number of existing ones so that the pressures of wears and tears are not solely concentrated on them. This may also be done to enable the availability of such elements beyond where the limited few can reach. The replica follows the same pattern, style, culture with the only difference being the material which is new. For instance, the replica of an 18th century hut looks exactly like the original except, it looks new. The reconstruction of old styles and designs in fashion and architecture creates the semblance of the period. (Okpoko and Okonkwo, 2005)

Rehabilitation consists of the renovations of historical elements to prevent physical destruction or damage of such properties as a result of neglect and deterioration in order to put them to a use which is usually different from their original use. (Rypkema, 1994) This activity retains the element and prevents it from neglect as it is put to use. Nevertheless, the heritage value of the element is usually eroded; examples include Cocoa House and Gongola.
Brewery. (Randy et al, 1997) It is usually the last form of historic preservation considered by those who are concerned about the value of historic heritage as it may include relocation of the element and change in the character of its use and setting. Rehabilitation is equal to just protecting the physical assets. It aims to conserve, use and develop the heritage and to sustain it values and significance by giving the heritage a compatible use. It is worth of mentioning that, the most important innovation of the management approach involves the sustainability principle. (Bodam, 1998)

III. PROSPECTS OF HISTORIC

The preservation of the past and the present for the future provides a link between the periods. It also provides ample materials for the knowledge of the past. In essence, knowledge of the past is not transmitted only in abstract form but with evidence from preserved elements. (Bodam, 1998) This knowledge serves as a rallying point and helps to unify people of the same culture who can identify with it. It may aid present and future generations in developmental processes. It creates in generation the zeal to exceed the achievements of past generations. This is not to say that the people of this generation do not take pride in their history, but they see it as a foundation which they can build on. It also creates the consciousness that “posterity will judge”. Thus, people become wary of what to contribute to History as subsequent generations will assess such contributions.

The diversity in different cultures from antiquity is emphasized and promoted through historic preservation. The beauty in diversity is the major promotion of cultural tourism. This helps the government to generate revenue, and provide employment for the community and country at large. Opportunities such as tour guide, curator, custodian, etc. Restoration and reconstruction of arts and crafts help to restore local livelihoods and in most cases prevent rural-urban migration. (Massey, 1986)

Replication of historical elements will enable people to have access to the elements for their various purposes. While the original elements will not bear the brunt of patronage, it can be exclusively reserved for cultural, religious and other purposes for which they were designed. In most cases, arts and crafts fall under this category of elements that can be replicated for exhibition and transported overseas. (Madaubuchi, 2006) The preservation of the non-material aspect does not enjoy such privilege. They can only be passed down from generation to generation for preservation and sustenance.

IV. CHALLENGES OF HISTORIC

Value remains an important attribute of historic elements. The elements must be deemed valuable and values must be attributed to them. There exist numerous values and a historical element must possess more than a value. It is important for it to have historical value and other value(s). (Rypkema, 1994) For instance, the first storey building in Nigeria has historical value, economic value as a property and aesthetic value given the architectural design of its time. The overlap of values of an element becomes a challenge in its preservation. The process of determining the most important of the values becomes near impossible in most cases. Historical elements of cultural and religious values are often supposed to be seasonal and special. Historic preservation forms adopted in most cases tend to erode the respect for traditional culture. (Eboreime and Gella, 1998)

Historic preservation is a money-consuming enterprise. The ritual and other traditions that do not attract tourists do not generate revenue in most cases. Sustaining preservative mechanisms for these elements becomes a difficult task due to lack of fund or inadequate funding. The lack of financial resources and attractions for some historical elements has made preservation near impossible. Inadequate personnel for historic preservation and lack of skills required in handling the material elements pose a great challenge. (Randy et al, 1997) Availability of fund without the professional wherewithal will not produce the desired result. Lack of skilled personnel of antiquity materials will frustrate or truncate historic preservation.

V. CONCLUSION

In recent times, a governor of a state in Nigeria threatens to pull down a historical building close to an Obas palace He was quickly reminded of its historical religious importance. This decision almost cause a civil disorder, when he was educated of the need, he rescinded his decision. This is one of many challenges facing historical preservation highlighted. The society should strive to preserve our heritage because of its social, economic and political importance.

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