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## THE PROVISION AND USE OF OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN URBAN TOWNS OF IMO AND ABIA STATES OF NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Outdoor recreational facilities in the major urban areas of Imo and Abia States of Nigeria were surveyed. Questionnaires and personal visits to recreational centers were used to collect data. Data was also collected from the open spaces Development Commission, Owerri, Imo State. Sixty-two open spaces, one Zoo, one lake, one Golf Course and two proposed Game Reserves were in the study area. Fifty-three (84.0%) of the Open spaces were still undeveloped. Awareness of the existence of recreational centers was highly significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) with no significant differences ( $P > 0.05$ ) between the towns. Repeat visits to recreational centers were seldom. The decline in the number of zoo visitors in 1986 and 1993 was attributed to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in 1986 and the political crisis in Nigeria in 1993. Development and advertisement of the recreational centres using signposts was recommended.*

**Key words:** Outdoor recreational activities, urban towns, Imo and Abia States

### INTRODUCTION

The numerous tourist attractions in Nigeria are largely undeveloped and underutilized.

According to Uloko & Olaokun (1991), unexploited tourist attractions in Nigeria are now in decay. Anyabine (1997) also reported that zoos (in Nigeria) have become extinct, and that people no longer visit and government is uninterested. The development of out door recreational and tourism resources in Nigerian could encourage Nigerians to value recreation more and thus live healthier lives in addition to bringing in more tourists and thus increase our foreign exchange earnings. Zoological gardens, game reserves and national parks, museums, historical sites, geographical features as well as art works like calabash, wood carving and leather works are some of the attractions to tourists. They also include open spaces, parks and gardens in the urban centers of this country.

An open space in this context refers to a fairly large piece of land in a built up area provided with shade trees, flowers, concrete slabs and other facilities for relaxation by the public. Outdoor recreational facilities here include all the places (other than hotels) that one goes out in the open air to relax, play or picnic.

The outdoor recreational facilities in Imo and Abia states of Nigeria and open spaces in the major urban towns only within the study area were surveyed. The aim was to find out the existence or otherwise of these facilities in the area surveyed, the level of awareness or otherwise of their existence and level of their use by the public. The objective was to make recommendations to the Federal, State and Local Governments on the provision of these facilities and increased use of them by the public.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Information on the available open spaces in the study areas were collected from the Open Spaces Development Commission, Owerri, Imo State. Personal visits were then made to these areas and to all the known outdoor recreational facilities in the two states to assess the level of their development. Fifty questionnaires were randomly distributed to people within the towns where open spaces were sited only in order to obtain information about their awareness or otherwise of the existence of recreational centers and the level to which they put them into use.

Chi-square test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) using the randomized complete block in a quasi experimental design were used to test to the differences between the different groups of respondents and between the towns.

## **RESULTS**



## RESULTS

There were a total of 62 (sixty-two) open spaces in the area surveyed. In addition, there were two proposed game reserves, one in Bendel, Abia State and the other in Ohaji, Imo State. The study area also had one zoo located at Owerri, one Golf Course and one Lake at Oguta, all in Imo State. Owerri also had 54 open spaces (87.1%) followed by Aba with three (3) open spaces (4.8%). All other towns had one open space each. A large number (ca 84%) of the open spaces were still under-developed (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Distribution Of Open Spaces Within The Study Area

Towns	Developed Open Spaces	Undeveloped Open Spaces	T o t a l
Orlu	1	-	1
Okigwe	1	-	1
Owerri	3	51	54
Aboh-Mbaise	-	1	1
Aba	2	1	3
Oguta	1	-	1
Umuahia	1	-	1
Total;	9	53	62
Mean;	1.28	7.57	8.86

Source: Open Spaces Development Commission, Owerri, Imo State -- 1998.

The awareness of the existence of recreational centers was highly significant ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $\chi^2$  test) with no significant differences ( $P > 0.05$ ) between the towns. Owerri and Aba had the highest awareness with all 50 respondents each being aware, followed by Aboh-Mbaise with 46. Okigwe and Umuahia had the least with each having 43 (Table 2).  $\chi^2$  test indicated that the number of respondents that had visited a recreational center was significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) higher than the number of those that have not.

**Table 2:** Awareness And Visits To Recreational Centers By Respondents

Town	Aware	Not	Visited	Have not	Totals
	Aware		Visited		
Orlu	45	5	44	6	50
Okigwe	43	4	39	8	47
Owerri	50	-	50	-	50
Aboh-					
Mbaise	46	3	31	18	49
Aba	50	-	49	1	50
Oguta	44	4	41	7	48
Umuahia	43	2	40	5	45
Total:	321	18	294	45	339
Mean:	45.86	2.57	42.0	6.43	48.43

Source: Field Survey 1998

**Table 3:** Frequency Of Visits To Recreational Centers

Town:	Once	Twice	3-4 Times	> 5 Times	Total
	a yr.	a yr.	a year.	per yr.	Respondents
Orlu	24	15	7	4	50
Okigwe	21	14	8	4	47
Owerri	25	18	4	3	50
Aboh-	27	17	3	2	49
Mbaise					
Aba	13	22	9	6	50
Oguta	23	17	4	4	48
Umuahia	26	16	2	1	45
Total:	159	119	37	24	339
Mean:	22.71 <sup>a</sup>	17 <sup>b</sup>	5.28 <sup>b</sup>	3.43 <sup>b</sup>	48.43

Source: Field survey 1998.

Note: Mean values with different superscripts are significantly different (P &lt; 0.05).

Owerri had highest number of visitors to recreational centres (50) followed by Aba with 49. Aboh-Mbaise had the least (31) (Table 2). There was no significant difference ( $P>0.05$ ) between the different towns.

The mean number of respondents who visited recreational centres once a year was higher and significantly ( $P<0.05$ ) different from those that visited twice or more a year with no significant difference ( $P>0.05$ ) between the towns (Table 3.)

Signposts (mean 17.5) was the most effective source of information about the existence of recreational centers followed by respondents (mean 13.71). Television as a source of information with a mean of 2.22 was lower and significantly ( $P<0.05$ ) different from all other sources of information except radio (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Sources Of Information About the Existence Of Recreational Centres

Sources of Information:						
Town:	Radio	Tele- Vision	Sign- Posts	News- Papers	Friends/ Relatives:	Total:
Orlu	5	2	20	9	14	50
Okigwe	7	2	13	11	14	47
Owerri	9	4	18	8	11	50
Aboh- Mbaise	5	1	22	5	16	49
Aba	5	2	22	7	14	50
Oguta	4	-	15	14	15	48
Umuahia	7	5	15	8	10	45
Total:	42	16	125	62	94	339
Mean:	6.0 <sup>ab</sup>	2.28 <sup>b</sup>	17.86 <sup>a</sup>	8.86 <sup>a</sup>	13.43 <sup>a</sup>	48.43

Source: Field Survey 1998

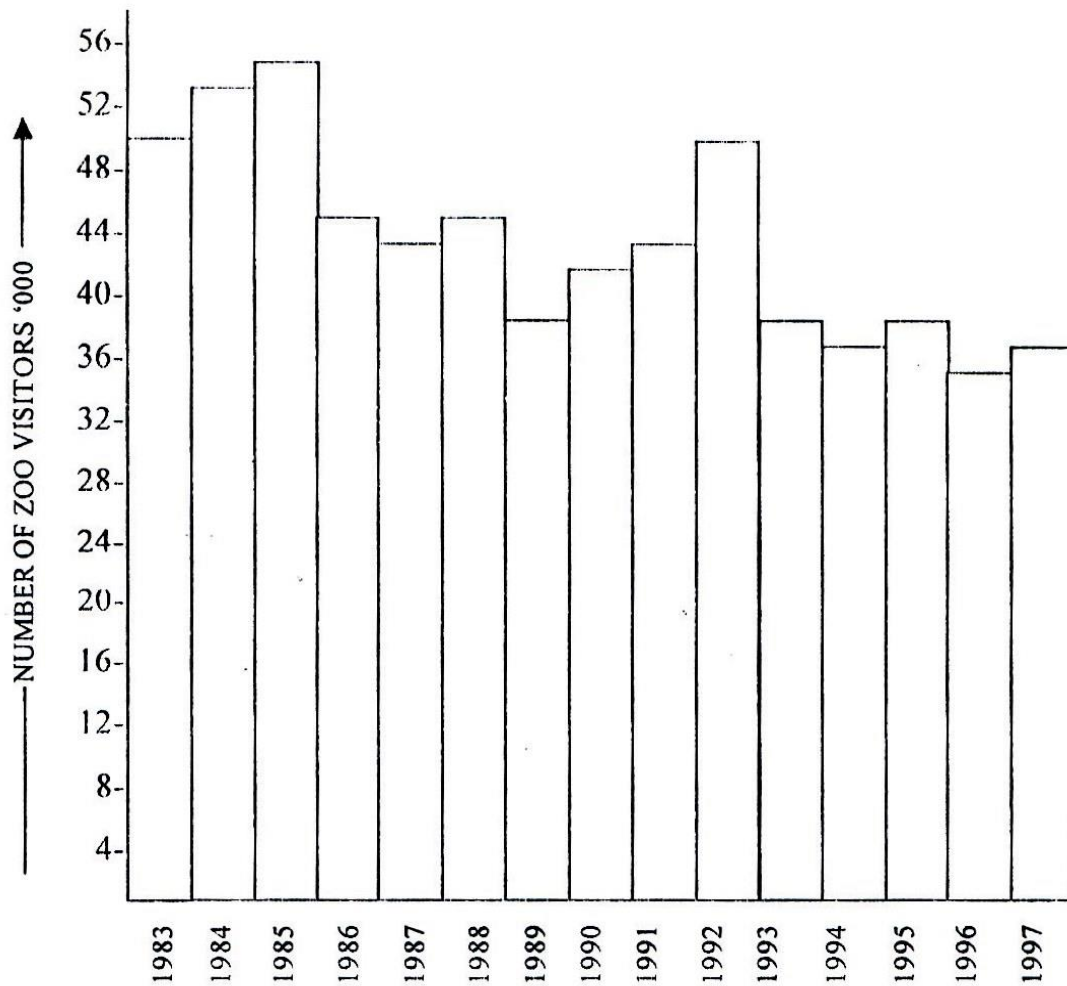
Note: Mean values with different superscripts are significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ )

The number of visitors to Owerri zoo (Fig. 1), rose from 49,700 in 1983 to 53,900 in 1985. Thereafter, there was a sharp decline in 1986 (44,500), which continued till 1989



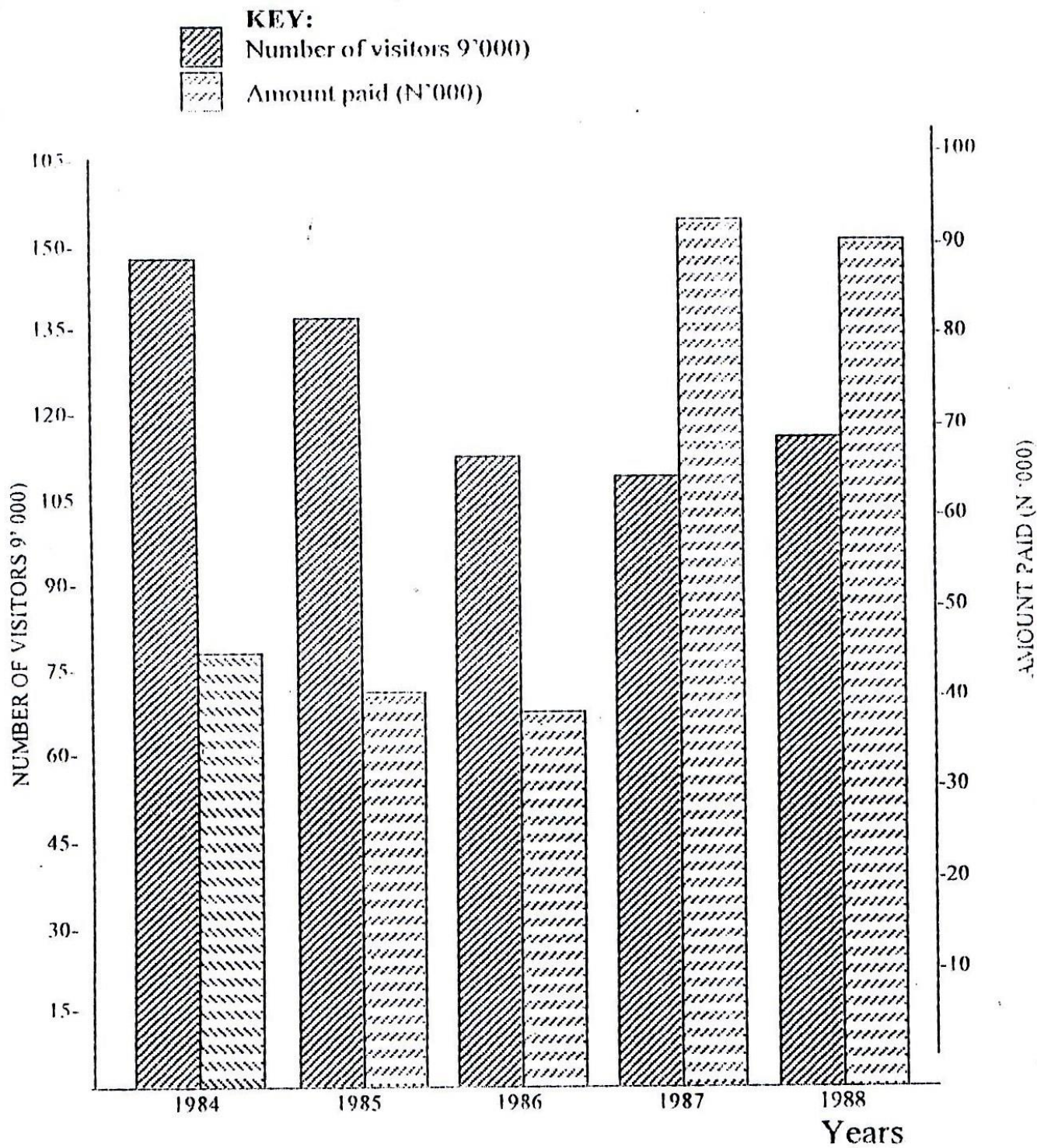
(36,300). The number rose gradually to 44,000 in 1992 then dropped again to 36,000 in 1993. The number remained low (between 32,000 and 35,000) from 1994 to 1997.

This trend is strikingly similar to the trend of visitors to the Zoological Garden, University of Ibadan from 1984 to 1988 which falls within the same period (Fig. 2).



Source: Zoological Garden Owerri Imo State (1998)

**Fig. 1:** Number Of Visitors To Owerri Zoo Per Annum From 1983 – 1997



Source: Zoological Garden, U.I. (1989)

Fig. 2: Number Of Visitors To Zoological Garden, University Of Ibadan Between 1984 And 1988



## DISCUSSION

The status of Owerri as the Capital of Old Imo State could account for the large number of open spaces and the zoo sited there. The large number of undeveloped open spaces (84.1%) shows the low level of commitment of the state and Local Governments in the area to the development to the recreational industry. A significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) higher number of people visited the recreational centres only once a year. This is because once the initial curiosity is satisfied, most people do not repeat visits to recreational centres. Thus few people in the area studied take recreation as a way of life.

The decline in the number of visitors to Owerri zoo in 1986 could be attributed to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced by the Federal Military Government in 1986. This made the people to re-order their priorities and few people considered visiting the zoo as an important venture. This fact is buttressed by the trend of the number of visitors to University of Ibadan zoo within the same period which followed exactly the same pattern as that of the Owerri zoo.

In difficult times, many people use their spare time to look for more money in order to make ends meet since it is only when the freedom from the sheer struggle to survive increases that the demand for outdoor space and recreation also increases (The New Encyclopaedia Britanica, 1981).

The increases in the number of visitors to Owerri and Ibadan zoos from 1987 to 1988 coincided with the increase in the number of tourist arrivals in Africa within the same period which was from 10.1 million in 1987 to 12.0 million in 1988 (Business Times, 1989).

The renewed increase in the number of visitors to Owerri zoo between 1990 and 1992 again dropped in 1993, perhaps this was due to the political crisis in Nigeria occasioned by the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election.

## CONCLUSION

In the area studied, only a few of the recreational centers have been developed for use by the public. The few developed recreational centers are under-utilized by the public as most people visit them only once a year.

The results of this study suggest that a lot needs to be done by both the Local and State Governments in the development of the existing recreational facilities and in the

encouragement of people to use them. Signposts which proved to be the most effective source of information about the existence of recreational centers should be used to advertise them. A similar study should be carried out in other states of Nigeria.

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