

Research Article

## Landscape as a Defining Identity of Abuja Urban Space

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| Article Info              | Abstract  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Article History           | The study is an in-depth analysis of residential and mixed-use areas to evaluate the dynamics of landscape identities and their link to human behaviours. This was done by examining the Maitama Amusement Park and the Durban Neighborhood Park in Nigeria's Abuja Central Business districts. The research highlights the significance of Abuja and points out that its unique attribute, and purposeful design, to reinforce unity amongst diverse ethnic groups is imperative for contextualizing the research in the study area. In this way, the study showed that reactions to landscape identities cross and leap beyond ethnic boundaries and that the landscape is a behaviour modifier of ethnic biases. Furthermore, the study highlights the landscape's multiple dimensions and forms to show that it is an ambulatory, dynamic, and fluid phenomenon, inseparably linked with human behaviours and socio-spatial environments. |
| Received Mar 16, 2023     |   |
| Revised Apr 05, 2023      |   |
| Accepted Apr 29, 2023     |   |
| <b>Keywords</b>           |   |
| Landscape                 |   |
| Landscape identity        |   |
| Place identity            |   |
| Abuja                     |   |
| Maitama                   |   |
| Durban Neighborhood Park. |   |



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### 1. Introduction

The landscape is a relatively ambulatory phenomenon as it is perceived as how a location grows and continuously changes [1]. It is a symbolic icon amicably designed to portray human behaviours and attitudes. In other words, any modification in the landscape projects the perception of man's interaction with his natural environment [2]. Cities are evaluated based on their physical attributes and social parameters, such as population structure and other attributes that make the city a living entity. The landscape does not necessarily suggest only plant life. It is a broader concept, including the city's physical and social structures, embracing buildings and cultural escape. These often include people living in the city, their customs, beliefs, traditions and history, as all these interact to form a city landscape identity [3]. The physical dimension of

cities, which includes buildings, roads, and parks, which humans create, influences and shapes human life. Although the sense of identity is one of the essential needs for humans, landscape identity is strongly linked to human and place identity, and these have formed inseparable entities. Like this, the landscape in the context of this study is viewed as a cultural and physical construct strongly related to man's sense of place, memoirs, and inherited memories [4]. Moreover, it identifies the city and connotes all attributes that make it unique, distinguishing it from its other counterparts.

Abuja is the Federal Capital of Nigeria and was created in 1976 by the Federal Government Decree to replace the then Capital City of Lagos. Abuja was established as a symbol of Nigeria's quest for unity to unite Nigerian diversified cultural groups (especially because Abuja is located in the heart of Nigeria and therefore considered culturally neutral) and as the seat for the Federal Government of Nigeria [5]. This research aims to analyze the identity of two significant parks in the city: Maitama Amusement Park and Durban Street Neighborhood Park. Abuja is significant in contextualizing the study because its purpose is to unify peoples of diverse origins and ethnicity. Thus, making it a landmark area in examining the effect of ethnic biases and landscaping on human behaviours.

## **2. Definition of Landscape**

The landscape results from cultural processes, attitudes or values, and land use practices [4]. Current issues in European socio-political and public life indicate that the landscape in this region is gaining prominence among countries. The European Commission on Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 targeted improving the physical landscape quality in the suburbs and the European countryside [6].

### **2.1. Landscape identity**

The perception of a location's landscape character to observers is experiential and constituting identity. The landscape character of a place is thus iconic, tectonic, and visual. It manifests in artefacts, grave places, monuments, extraordinary places, or any other place that has meaning or is related to meaning [7]. Moreover, a landscape can give identity to a place, especially when no extraordinary architectural building can make the place identifiable [8]. Umpteenth numbers of up-scale buildings characterize Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria, yet its landscape can be tailored towards other political, social, and physical dimensions.

### **3. Abuja landscape**

#### **3.1. Socio-Political Landscape**

The national ideology that premised the birth and development of Abuja was purposefully socio-political. It took its niche from the fact that it will be a place where all citizens of Nigeria can call their home without fear of ethnic or cultural deprivation. In this way, the FCT's cultural, political, and social identity becomes neutral and remains welcoming and amiable to the generality of the country's citizens. With this agenda, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) ordered the reconstruction of all heads of a national parastatal in Abuja beginning in 1999.

#### **3.2. Symbol of National Landscape**

As discussed above, Abuja is characterized by up-scale buildings built in the fashion of all architectural styles ranging from the International Style, Late Modern, Neo-Classical, and Postmodernism, amongst others. It is the intention of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to promote the persona of the FCT through these buildings, therefore, by extension, changing the functions of the buildings to national artefacts, symbolizing the material and spiritual ideologies and targeted at showcasing these attributes of Nigerians' identity to the world. Therefore, landscape behaves as a focal meaning and symbolism and provides a feeling of strong place identity among nations [9].

#### **3.3. Zuma and Aso Rock as Landscape Identity**

Abuja is naturally endowed with the Zuma and Aso rocks, which have helped to form, influence and inflect Abuja's urbanscape. Hence, these rocks have become principal figures of the Abuja landscape. Rocks have helped shape the environment and act as climate modifiers [9] because it leads to creation of other plants and plankton communities. These plant communities assist in balancing the ecosystem of the FCT. At the same time, the rocks that formed their beds influence the physiological identity of Abuja in terms of what can be observed-the rocks themselves – and what can be felt and perceived in the climate. This view was specially reinforced by Hough [8], who observed that the natural scenery has an important impact on people's perception of places, which they experience virtually in all their senses. For instance, he said, variations in hills, mountains, highlands, sea shores, Sahara, etc., have obvious and powerful effects on travellers. This way, event characteristics can produce a particular type of behavioural perception and behaviour identity when people interact with the environments in which they live. In this case, they tend to

respond emotionally to the physiological parameters of the environment – the rocks that define the outlines and boundaries of the FCT (Abuja) where they live.

### **3.4. Place identity**

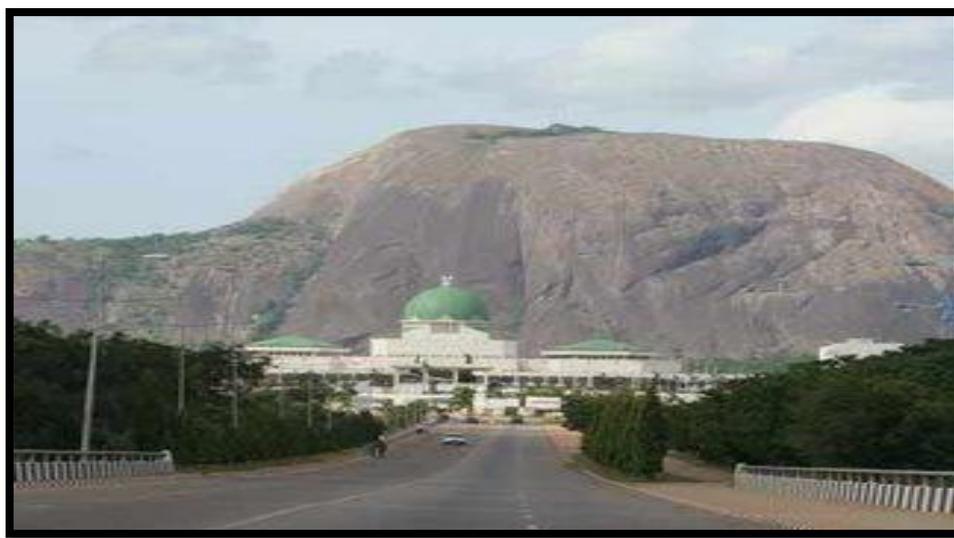
Place identity has been described as adding a place to a self-concept. Proshansky, et al. [10] posit that place identity is a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings and types of settings. The physical attribute of a place has a recognizable impact in influencing the concept of the sense of the place. It makes the place much more legible to its users, making it easily recognizable to people [11]. Methods in evaluating the identity of a place necessitate the initial comprehension of the image and behaviour of the human society inhabiting the place and how this society becomes defined through varied interests. Identity, like image, changes with time. Therefore, a place identity is a logical idea linked to the ideal image of landscape identity. This inseparable character of image and identity situates the landscape and image of a place simultaneously within similar constructs [12]. Hence, place identity includes the values and meaning expressed by the landscape. It is, therefore, not very surprising that the identity of a place is similar to its image and individual forecast of what the place should be is similar to its identity.

## **4. Field study area, Abuja**

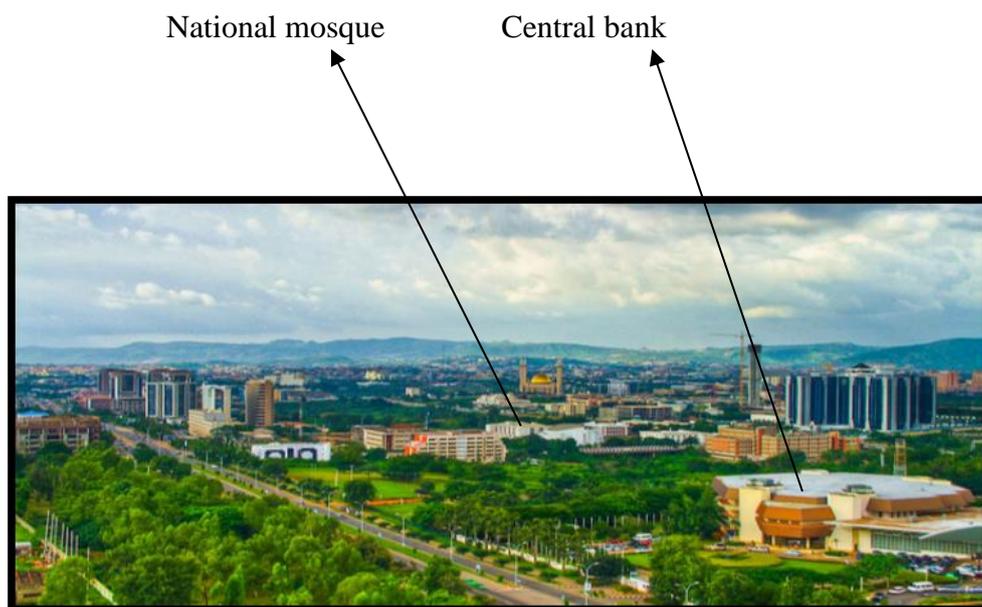
### **4.1. Brief background**

Abuja became officially Federal Capital Tertiary (FCT) on December 12, 1991. Before this period, the FCT was planned to be the capital of Nigeria in a consensus decision by a panel set up by the Nigerian military Government in 1976. The panel, generally called the Aguda panel, pointed out that Abuja's paramount role symbolizes Nigeria's aspiration for unity and greatness [10, 12]. This idea of the city is as follows: (i) Seat of Government, (ii) A place of and a symbol of unity, (iii) A melting pot of Nigeria's diverse cultures and a magnet of diverse peoples and nations, (iv) A place of physical beauty and an exemplary physical environment pervaded, not only the choice of but also the design and planning of the Capital City. Abuja is Nigeria's fourth most populated city, with an estimated population of about 776,298, according to the 2006 census.

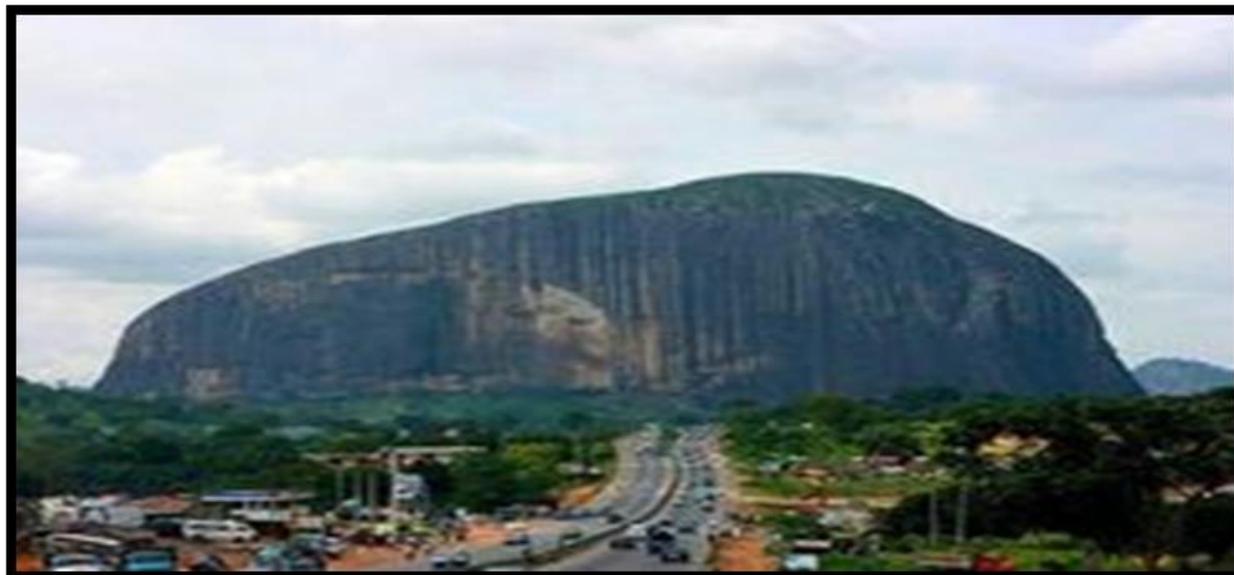
The city landscape is well defined by the Aso Rock from the south and Zuma Rock from the north; these two rocks represent the city's landscape identity. Justifications for the significance of these rocks lie in the fact that first, the Aso Rock is the highest in Abuja with an estimated height of 936 meters above sea level, and it is the ideal place from which the entire city and the presidential villa, which is the seat Government could be viewed. Secondly, the symbol of the Zuma Rock is extended to reinforce the unity of the Nigerian people by integrating and printing on the Nigerian currency. Generally, Abuja is typically slightly sloppy terrain and moderate climatic condition, shaping the planning and its greeneries [13, 14].



**Figure 1.** Aso Rock, in the background of the National Assembly [15]



**Figure 2.** The landscape view of Abuja's central area shows the national mosque and central bank [15].



**Figure 3.** Zuma Rock shapes the Abuja North boundary [15].

#### **4.2. Parks and open spaces in Abuja**

Abuja is a city with ambient green areas and Parks. Pioneer architect Manfredi Nicoletti designed it and was officially commissioned by Queen Elizabeth II during her official visit to Nigeria in December 2003. Other parks are Maitama Amusement Park and Durban Street Neighbourhood Park [16].

#### **5. Methodology**

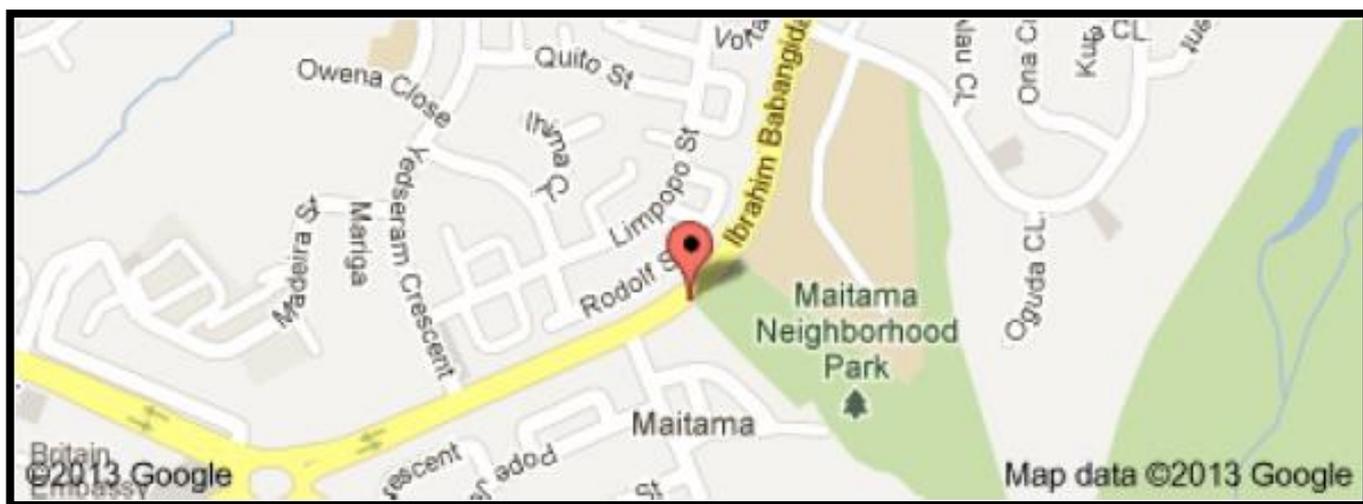
Dwellers' responses to the socio-economic and spatial landscapes were analyzed concerning variables addressing the usage of the park, its aesthetics, accessibility to the area, available facilities, green landscaping, and ethnic groupings through a reflective analysis of the Maitama Amusement Park and the Durban Neighbourhood Park, both located within the Abuja Central Business District. Maitama Amusement Park and Durban Street Neighbourhood Park were selected for this study because of their place identity, adequate urban facilities, and people of diverse and variegated ethnicity. Data were gathered through a random quantitative survey by administering a questionnaire to respondents at the Maitama Amusement Park and Durban Street Neighbourhood Park and observation.

#### **6. Analysis and Discussion**

Data was obtained by observation and questionnaire administration, as earlier stated. Analysis and discussion are as follows:

## 6.1. Maitama Amusement park

Mitama amusement park is considered the largest park in Nigeria and occupies a land mass of 18 hectares. It is located along Ibrahim Babangida Road in the Maitama District, Abuja. The park has many leisure facilities, including kid base activities, play areas, rides, games, a magical world, a video arcade, food service areas, roller, skating, and perimeter trains [16].



**Figure 4.** Location map of Maitama Amusement Park (Source: Wikipedia encyclopedia).

### 6.1.1 Analysis of Maitama Amusement Park

i). It is located in Maitama along Ibrahim Babangida Way in the Maitama District of Abuja. The Ibrahim Babangida Road is busy with many popular restaurants and shopping malls. Thus, the park is in an excellent location in the central area of the districts, surrounded by residential quarters. Hence, it is a focal point of social interaction. Food services are also available [17].

ii). The park is defined by a large area of greeneries, making it environmentally friendly. Moreover, its interior spaces are well-defined and linked to paved walkways. The interiors are also properly designed and linked to the outdoor spaces by risers and semi-public spaces. Thus the park is suitably designed.

iii). Occupational profile of District members and users of the park includes wealthy merchants, officials of international organizations, and foreign diplomat corps. Thus, the park is well utilized.

iv). The park lacks a good street view and street lighting.

v). It lacks vehicular accessibility and waste disposal boxes.

**Remark:** Maitama Park has numerous recreational facilities, especially for families and children



**Figure 5.** An Aerial View of Maitama Park showing the surrounding. B. Main Entrance with ambient spaces for visitors [17].



**Figure 6.** (a). floor covering of the part figure 6. (b). Children playing area



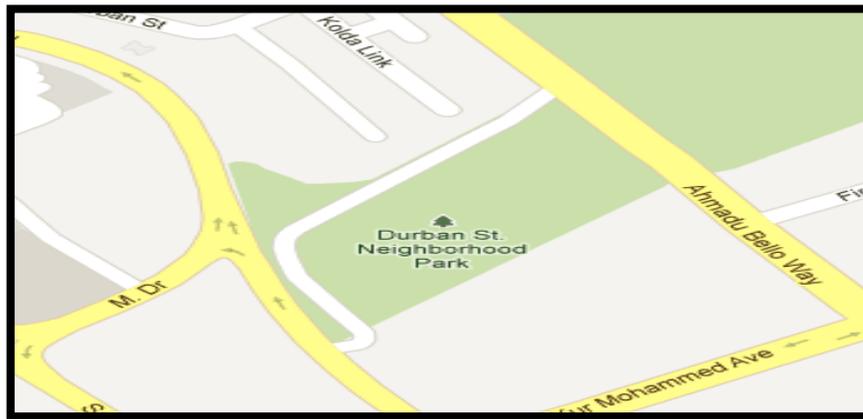
**Figure 6.** (c). part of the activities for children. **Figure 6.** (d). Children's play area [17].



**Figure 7.** Train for children's play [17].

## 6.2. Durban Street Neighbourhood Park

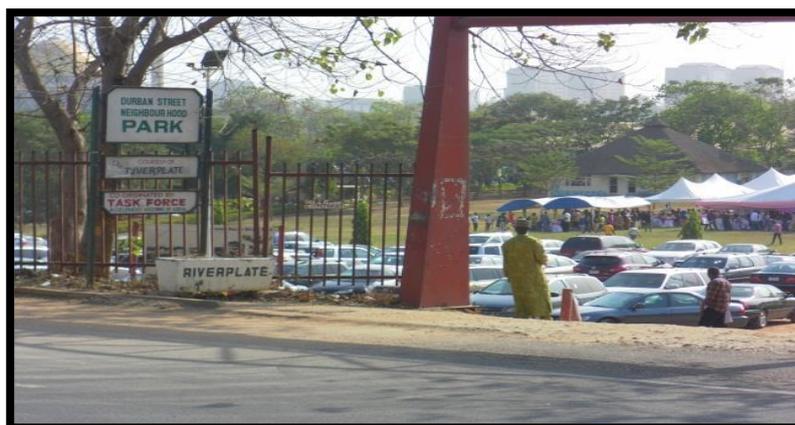
The Durban Street Neighbourhood Park is located within the Wuse City Centre along the Ahmadu Bello Way (busy access) close to Maitama amusement park. It shares some similarities in size and functions with Maitama Amusement Park, although each has uniqueness in character design and organization patterns. However, their themes in green open spaces remain the same [17].



**Figure 8.** Satellite view of the park showing the neighbourhood [17].

### 6.2.1. Analysis of Durban Street Neighbourhood Park

- i). This park is in a relatively quiet environment with sparse residential buildings, unlike Maitama Amusement Park. This way, it is far less effective than Maitama, as most visitors visit this park only during the weekend.
- ii). Vehicular accessibility is excellent, unlike Maitama Amusement Park.
- iii). The design image and identity are appealing. Moreover, the park enjoys a good road network with other parts of the city, enhancing mobility and quicker access to the park. The interior design of the part is an inappropriate fact. The spaces are incoherent and not well-linked.
- (iv). The park provides large and ambient space for recreation and enhances privacy
- (v). Amenities provided are poor compared to Maitama Park. This may be attributable to the park's location (dissociated proximity to many residential areas), unlike Maitama Amusement Park.
- (vi). Poor lighting in the interior; however, good visual contact with the environment is enhanced. Therefore, the park possesses the identity of defensible space, whereby those within the intestine of the building can monitor events around them. This gives a sense of security, unlike Maitama Park, where this facility is not provided.



**Figure 9.** The main gate of Durban Street Neighbourhood Park [17].

Following the appraisal above, Table 1 below is a concise summary of the assessments. The Table compares the Maitama Amusement Park and the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the Maitama Amusement Park and the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park.

| S/No | Maitama Amusement Park, Abuja  | Durban Street Neighbourhood Park   |
|------|--|--|
| 1    | The areas around the park are residential quarters, which puts the park in use throughout the week.                                      | Areas around the park are mixed-used and residential, making it too busy only on weekends.   |
| 2    | The park environment is generally green  | The park environment is generally green  |
| 3    | Not well accessible for people with means of mobility  | Easily accessible for people with mobility means and ambient parking spaces.   |
| 4    | Provide a beautiful image and identity to the city, and make it more appealing to the visitors irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. | Provide a beautiful image and identity to the city, and make it more appealing to the visitors irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds.   |
| 5    | Areas around the park are residential, making it in use throughout the week.   | Areas around are mixed-use residential and public buildings, making it busier on weekends.   |
| 6    | Adjudge as good facilities to its users despite differences in cultures and ethnic origins   | Adjudge as good facilities to its users despite differences in cultures and ethnic origins   |
| 7    | Users commonly admit that interior spaces are designed appropriately to their satisfaction, irrespective of cultural or ethnic biases.   | Users commonly admit that interior spaces are appropriately designed to their satisfaction irrespective of their cultural or ethnic biases interior spaces link-up less coherently compared to Maitama Park. |
| 8    | Facilities/amenities are adequate for the users  | Facilities/amenities are inadequate for the users  |
| 9    | Activities are primarily designed for children and families  | Activities taking place are essentially in the form of trade-fair  |
| 10   | Natural lighting is not considered in the design   | Natural lighting is not considered in the design   |
| 11   | View through the fence has been neglected by all users, irrespective of ethnic origin.   | View through the fence is considered in design by all users irrespective of ethnic origin.   |
| 12   | Site aesthetics are enhanced through landscaping. This promotes visitors' interest irrespective of ethnic origin.                        | Site aesthetics are enhanced through landscaping. This promotes visitors' interest irrespective of ethnic origin.  |

## 7. Conclusion

This study underscores the impacts of the socio-spatial and socio-economics landscape of the FCT, Abuja, on users' behaviour. It further examined the relationships between the variegated ethnicity of FCT on the socio-spatial and socio-economic landscapes. According to the report, Abuja was intentionally created as a hub of togetherness. The socio-graphic structure of Abuja is multi-ethnic and multiple in structure from an ethnic demographic perspective so that all of Nigeria's citizens can visit Abuja without worrying about ethnic fragmentation. Despite the region's residents' diverse ethnic backgrounds, this enables the area to serve as the symbol of national identity in all forms and aspects. Indeed, this served as additional background for understanding how ethnic biases affect socio-economic and physical landscapes. Accordingly, the study demonstrated that, independent of racial factors, geographical and economic landscapes alter and/or modify people's behaviours. In addition, the study's discussion of the inhabitants' self-reflective evaluations of Maitama Amusement Park and the Durban Street Neighbourhood Park shed light on the importance and significance of landscape identity.

**Declaration of Competing Interest** The authors declare that they have no known competing of interest.

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