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By Stephen Femi Oyeyoade, Alirat Olayinka Agboola & Adedayo Odebode
Obafemi Awolowo University

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Flagship Projects and its' Application to Urban Regeneration in the UK and USA: Prospect in the Nigerian Context

Stephen Femi Oyeyoade [α], Alirat Olayinka Agboola [σ] & Adedayo Odebode [ρ]

Abstract- Flagship regeneration as a model of urban renewal materialized in search for pragmatic solutions to the socio-economic problems caused by deindustrialisation of some ancient cities in the United Kingdom and United States of America late 1960s. The subsequent adoption of this concept by other developed countries was due to its capability as panacea to city decay and ability to revitalize or rebrand urban centre for investment attractions and possibility of reducing the burden of social services provision on the municipal governments. The reviewed literatures explain that individual city has basic features or attributes upon which flagship projects could be developed and thereby accord such city with unique image and functionality within and outside the region. Also, the possible drive for wealth creation and eventual poverty alleviation edged flagship regeneration over other contemporary models of urban renewal. However, despite the acclaimed age long benefits of flagship projects there have been no appreciable efforts by the Nigerian government to embrace or encourage this concept even at the abundance of potentialities. The paper therefore, examines the application of flagship regeneration in the UK and USA with a view to establishing its prospect in proffering solutions to urban degeneration in Nigeria. In this course, the diversity of; cultural background, historical heritage, job specialisation, fascinating Mother Nature, etc, are perceived to be reference points for tourism flagships development. Conversely, an in-depth exploration unfolds various peculiar encumbrances that could undermine its smooth application. It was however concluded that various tiers of governments should embrace flagships development with due attention to the recommendations made for surmounting the envisaged bottlenecks and ensuring resourceful implementation.

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I. Introduction

In Nigeria and like any other part of the world, city centres used to be the baseline or reference point where people come together and establish settlement. Virtually all types of land use namely; residential, commercial, and industrial are found in cluster at the city centre with assumed adequate amenities to service the initial low population density. During this dispensation, some social services, economic activities, political affairs, etc., were found in array of city functionalities until when the main cities broadly engulfed by the influx from the less city areas like; towns, villages, hamlets, etc, in the quest for means of livelihood. As population increases, conflicting land use and logjam of human activities become more outbursts and thereby overwhelm city functionality. In other words, the population explosion gives rise to urban sprawl making cities to be non-functional and overcrowded with more pressure on infrastructures and social services. These eventually trigger retrogressive economic growth, downswing of living standards, and barriers to potential developments. Forthrightly, the urbanization problems created from yesteryears still persist and precisely apparent through; poor transportation, traffic congestion, epileptic power supply, paralytic businesses, devastated health facilities, obsolete and collapsed water supply systems, slum or shanty settlements (due to lack of affordable housing), poor waste disposal and management, insecurity of live and properties, and finally' upsurge of epidemics.

In a similar manner, many of the cities in the developed countries like; United Kingdom, United States of America, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, Spain, Russia, etc., have one time or the other faced with urban decline as a result of the system collapse brought about by overstressed urban infrastructures without instant recipe to tackle the torrential menace caused by the transpired urbanization problems (Douglas, 2016). It takes the concerted efforts of various urban and regional planners, and erudite scholars in urban development to postulate and implement various theories for the regulation of urban growth, all of which served as pathfinders and foundations to the development of modern urban theories like: urban redevelopment, urban regeneration, etc. Urban regeneration was subsequently branched out into different models among which are flagship or prestige projects (Granger, 2010).

As the known concept of urban regeneration since 1970s, flagship projects have been unfolding the socio-economic turnaround in the major cities of North America and European countries (Temelová, 2007). From late 1980s till date, flagship projects have gained substantial interest in the field of urban research and practice (Bianchini, Dawson, and Evans. 1992; Loftman

Author α: Estate Office, Division of Works and Maintenance Services, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife, Nigeria.
e-mail: femioyeyoade@gmail.com
Author σ ρ: Estate Management Dept, Faculty of EDM, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Nigeria.

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and Nevin, 1995; Smyth 1994; Turok 1992). Interestingly, flagship projects have instinct of augmenting city features and inducting the physical renewal of decayed neighbourhoods. Conversely, the search for feasible solutions to the menace of cities decays in Nigeria has from time to time involved application of different urban renewal strategies at various dimensions. Among the strategies adopted are: satellite or new town developments which were targeted at decongesting the overcrowded city centres (this was for instance adopted in Ibadan and Lagos in the 80s and 90s); urban redevelopment programme sponsored by the World Bank in some south-west states of Nigeria in the 1990s and 2000s; model city and mega city developments in Lagos being implementing since 2005 till date, etc. The motives behind the adoption of these strategies are to rebuild, reconstruct, or form a new status or standard that will be holistically revitalize the functionalities and economic bases of cities with a view to facilitating sustainable growth for direct or indirect benefits of individual and society at large. Of all models of urban renewal adopted in Nigeria, flagships regeneration or prestige projects remain probably unpronounced or unexploited (untapped) and untested for solving urban decline.

The foreignness of flagship also accounts for scanty literature that locally delve into subject matter, hence the justification for this article. Also, the successful practice of this concept in the advanced countries instigates this paper to investigate; what urban problems is flagship projects meant to work out? what are the strategic procedures that can facilitate its resourceful adoption? and, how can its application regenerate the declined cities in Nigeria? As a result, the essay aims at reviewing the practice of flagship projects in the UK and USA urban regeneration schemes with a view to determining its prospect in solving city degeneration problems in Nigeria. While the objectives for achieving this are; identification of urbanization problems that can be solved owing to the adoption of flagship projects; examination of the evolutionary features or attributes involved in flagship projects as urban regeneration strategy, and, determination of factors that can expedite its application and prospect in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, it was concluded that the idea of flagship projects was found to be one of the significant components that is worthy of inclusion in urban policy formulation and implementation despite the observed shortcoming of myopic response to the multidimensional urban problems.

II. Urban Decay and Flagships Model in Urban Regeneration

a) Causes of City Decline

The gradual degeneration of cities components usually serves as an indication or manifestation of urban decline. The identity and functionality of any city could be ripped off when degeneration totally blossom with no instant remedy within reach. In other words, city decays when it is overwhelmed with inability to serve the needs of its residents and eventually come short of the expectations of its governing authority. The collapsing of city features is being generated by structural economic change alongside depopulation, property abandonment, property devaluation, social problems, and urban environmental deprivation (which may be varied many at times). In the history, the swift industrialization witnessed by the UK and USA in the late 19th and early 20th centuries paved way for fundamental reform in social, economic and spatial base of urban centres of these developed countries. However, the changes in economic and employment trends as well as technological improvement brought about range of urbanization problems. The emergence of these problems compounded the drawback suffered by core or inner areas of the cities in view of weak economic base, inability to adapt to new production technologies and infrastructural requirements.

In addition to the effects of industrial evolution, the growing propensity of suburbanization also contributed to the exodus of significant functions and occupations from the city centres to the fringes or newly developed sites. This scenario has been considerably contributed to the urban maceration (breaking-up) as in contrast to the immense suburban developments in most Western European countries and in the United States of America. Consequently, the movement of prosperous activities to the suburbs gave room for the emptiness of inner city been characterized by; deficient socio-economic base, poor housing condition, environmental degradation, high unemployment, social vices, low education standard, etc, (Dieffendorf 1989; Clark 1989; Couch, Fraser, and Percy 2003).

The causes of urban change that possibly lead to urban decline may be relatively different in view of process or sequence of occurrence in the underdeveloped or developing countries like Nigeria. For instance, some of the urban centres or cities in Nigeria like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Abuja, etc, are just experiencing economic reform that triggered massive industrialization and globalization in the UK and USA in the19th century. The rapidity of momentum gathered by the economy of these developed countries as at that era could not be compared to the present fragile economic basis underlying the growth of urban centres in the developing or underdeveloped countries. It is obvious that unequal wealth distribution and inadequate reserves and resources engendered undesirable development reform and consecutive urban decline in Nigeria like in other countries of its class.

Brian (2007) and Wang (2010) observed that urban centres in the process of degeneration are more susceptible to a couple of factors that are detrimental to

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sustainable urban development. Among these are; uneven distribution of wealth, clustering of income generating activities at the key urban centres (mega cities), demographic pressures as a result of vast growing population and internal migration; high rate of poverty, social vices and unemployment; overburden of natural resources like land, water, energy; industrial pollution due to uncontrolled industrial development, urban environmental degradation, and vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters (flood, erosion, fire outbreaks, epidemics, etc) as a result of uneven urban development.

Without mincing words, urban change that usually warrant or cause decline of urban centres varies from location to location as well from one category of countries to the other. It is inevitable to note that the dynamism of socio-economic, environmental setup, demographic and political processes have pivotal role to play in rapidity of inner-city degeneration or otherwise. In essence, as the dynamism of these factors vary for each locality so as the difference in the characteristics and response to various reform processes that portend urban change.

b) Elements of Flagship Projects in Urban Regeneration Concept

Succinctly, Couch et.al. op.cit. define urban regeneration as a public policy, the goals of which include the re-growth of economic activity, the restoration of social function, and the restoration of environmental quality or ecological balance. Convincingly, urban regeneration possesses capability of serving as an intervention scheme for mitigating urban decline and rectifying possible economic failures. In other words, urban regeneration or urban renaissance is a panacea for re birthing the faded functionality and declined performance of the city on a recognizable scale. It could be considered as an apparatus or strategy for restructuring or revitalizing the degenerated urban centre through the formation of a new status or establishment of a standardized identity that pivot on bringing back the lost socio-economic value without necessarily carrying out massive demolitions of the city centre i.e. urban regeneration implements the management and planning of existing urban areas rather than the planning and development of new urbanisation. To be précised, urban regeneration is in contrast to urban redevelopment that always goes along with physical demolitions, development and massive reconstruction of the city centre with a view to attaining a structural overhauling.

Robson (2000) identifies three dissimilar spatial levels through which regeneration intervention could be implemented viz.; the region, the city and the neighbourhood. The appropriateness of intervention for each spatial level differs with respect to various change indicators and decline factors observed as they occurred. Perhaps, economic indicators may take account of; deindustrialization, manufacturing depression, increasing unemployment, welfare dependency, and infrastructural decay (McCarthy, 2012). Tsimperis (2015) measures the negative effects of deindustrialization and discovered that it is the bedrock for the application of urban regeneration in Europe and United States of America. The aim of applying this policy is to facilitate new investments to urban centres in the global economy through a vast economic transformation. With this development, there will be economic competition among cities which will subsequently graduate to regional and national levels through constant keeping of industrial production or marketing of cities as custodians of specific activities such as tourist destinations (Loftman and Nevin, op.cit.; Smith, 2002; McCarthy, op.cit.).

In furtherance to the assertion of urban degeneration factors, the use and availability of land within the built environment also play critical role in pursuing socio-economic activities that usually bring about spatial alterations as one of the impulses of urban change (Robson, 2000). It is evidenced that various acclaimed activities alongside territorial restructuring are consequential in view of socio-economic upshots and demographic pressures. It is on this note that some researchers considered these consequences as gentrification process leading to eventual urban change. In taking due cognizance of the urban change features, Lang (2005) observed that urban regeneration as a focal target of urban policy, hinged on four cardinal components thus; economic, social, physical and environmental.

However, in contemplation of effectiveness of urban regeneration policy implementation that could stimulate or invigorate prestige projects, Colantonio and Dixon (2010) recommended the following approaches:

i. *Property Led Approach:* where a usually mixed-use scheme is expected to have multiplier effects in the local economy
ii. *Commerce Driven Approach:* which focuses on the regeneration of "underserved markets" through business investments;
iii. *Urban Form and Design Perspective:* which highlights the significance of the relationship between sustainable development and urban form;
iv. *Cultural Industries Approach:* which stresses the significance of creative and cultural media industries as vehicles for regeneration;
v. *Health and Wellbeing Perspective:* which accentuates the role that well-designed space can have on neighbourhood health and liveability; and,
vi. *Community Based Social Economy Approach:* which highlights the importance of involving local

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communities in decision-making and developing social capital networks.

In essence, any of the forgoing approaches can serve as basis or stimulant for the application of flagship projects within the concept of urban regeneration policy.

III. Origin and Application of Flagship Projects in the UK and USA

a) *Advent of Flagship Projects in UK and USA*

Yesteryears in the United Kingdom and United States of America, there have been vital modifications in the role played by the urban governments in view of the public service delivery and the modality of executing these services. Succinctly, from the industrial epoch till the wake of 1970s, municipal governments were saddled with the provisions of; public health care, security, education, and employment amongst others (Eisinger, 2000; Cook, 2004). In addition to these responsibilities, MacLeod (2002) stated that the Western-European welfare system was instituted between 1945 and 1970 to advocate provision of public housing units for the purposeful needs of larger population affected by the aftermath of Second World War. Conversely, at the dawn of 1970s gradual changes began to unfold and introduce new dimensions into governance by refraining from redistributive policies (that entails provisions for all basic needs of citizenry by the government) and embracing more entrepreneurial policies of growth and development, which equate private sector practices (Harvey, 1989; Swyngedouw, Moulaert and Rodriguez, 2002).

This gradual changes in the government policy agenda facilitated immense input on globalization of British and Western economies through ground-breaking launch of manufacturing and knowledge-based industries. Consequent on the advent of these diversifications, major cities in the United Kingdom begin to witness paradigm shift from production status to consumption class (Fainstein and Judd, 1999), the scenario which led to the development of various sectors like: tourism, recreational industry, commercial and professional services (Hall,1993). Notably, the changes are unsubstantiated in the cities that have large industrial base compare to the ones that have diversified economy (Hall, 1993; Murie and Musterd, 2004).

Harvey (1989) stated that municipal governments pay less attention to social responsibilities in order to pursue more entrepreneurial policies tailored towards economic development and growth as similar to the motives of practitioners in the private sector. Such policies are intended to creating enabling environment for further economic investment rather than wealth redistribution and social welfare. Doucet, (2010) revealed that these pro-growth policies were in turn work out on social welfares like jobs generations and wealth creations by means of encouraging competitive investment among various neighbourhoods in the city. There was every tendency that the contests set up by the policy among neighbourhoods gradually transformed into inter cities competitions and specializations on jobs, investment, and tourism which was subsequently elaborated and spread beyond regional or national boundaries with globalization of the today's world economy.

The competition has tremendously targeted the consumption factors in the aspect of quality of life, the built environment, municipal facilities, cultural and social factors with little or no emphasis on orthodox factors of production (Evans, 2005). In this regard, Tavsanoglu and Healey (1992) observed that the exploitation of environment to boost consumption factors has been the famous approach of changing the image of a city upon the renaissance of urban economy and encouragement of inward investment. These two instincts are the evolutionary features that flagship projects bound to create or modify in the context of urban regeneration (Yalcintas, 2010). Consequently, the concept of flagships focuses on specific locations rather than being spread across a wide geographical area. In other words, more focus is on particular zone or district in the city rather than the entire city (Tavsanoglu and Healey, opt.cit). In the light of private sector involvement in flagships, there have been strong profit-oriented motive which usually tend toward selecting high-profile city centres in siting projects. The selection of locations is generally based not on greatest need, but rather greatest potential for profit.

Nevertheless, since the emergence of the first flagship projects in the United States of America and subsequent ones in the United Kingdom in about two decades after, this approach has been commonly adopted for cities regeneration to an extent that a perception emerged that "a city without a flagship lacked a regeneration strategy". O'Toole and Usher (1992) stated that the two famous flagship regeneration projects: Baltimore's Inner Harbour and Boston's Faneuil Hall have reproduced hundreds of flagship projects. These succeeding projects were used to create and sell the image of economic revival, entrepreneurialism and competitiveness in an era of increasing globalisation (Cook, 2004; Swyngedouw et al. op.cit). Thus, flagship projects in its emergence and context have become one of the major models of urban regeneration and city rebranding which categorically impact on urban populace. On the contrary, some schools of thought have considered this model of urban regeneration as a subjective skill which only focuses on economic upgrading of the city without much ado about comprehensive revitalization of other city functionalities that capable of salvaging the entire residents from urbanization problems (Harvey 1989; Hubbard 1996; Vicario and Monje 2003).

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b) Flagship Projects and Urban Problem Solving in the UK and USA

Flagship projects as a model of urban regeneration has various dimensions of resolving city decay depending on the form of problem(s) at hand and the target or expectation of the facilitators or campaigners. It is important to state that flagship projects facilitators could be in the category of city boosters, urban elites or politicians but seldom government agencies. The motive of each category of facilitators which is bound to be differ, will in turn determine from which perspective flagships take effect in solving urban problems. Although, some schools of thought on flagships, observed that the improvement of quality of life for low income earners of urban centre is not the priority for this method of economic development but could possibly solve the problem of impoverishment along the line. In other view, flagships have capability of repackaging a decayed city to attract local and foreign investors (Douglas, op.cit.). Consequently, flagships projects are usually being implemented to achieve desired motives on the following grounds:

i. *Need for Urban Policy Modification*

The quest for paradigm shift in urban policy and ideology necessitate the application of flagship model for city regeneration in the UK and USA (Lang, 2005). Many provincial or local governments considered the monotony of redistributive strategies tailored towards economic growth, property-based regeneration and entrepreneurial method of urban governance as clogs in the wheel of rebranding the decayed cities for substantial functionalities. In this way, it was acknowledged that flagship projects that hinged on property-led and commerce-driven regeneration will mitigate urbanization problems such as; unemployment, housing and infrastructural deficits, insecurity, inter alia (Bianchini, et. al. op.cit; Kearns and Turok, 2000).

ii. *Substantial Returns on Flagship Projects*

It has to be noted that the benefits of flagship projects could be pecuniary or non-pecuniary. In a clear term, to the government it might not be direct financial return but to individual investors, the pecuniary aspect of the project takes precedence. However, its common benefits to the entire classes of people in the city cannot be overemphasised in most cases. Consequently, flagship projects is been adopted as the most pragmatic and speedy method of achieving physical transformation of the dilapidated and deserted portion of the city and subsequently assigning such city a new role within a specific region or territory (Boelsums, 2012). For example, flagships can stimulate tourism especially for cities that have instincts for historical locations and cultural heritages that can attract tourists from other parts of the world. To justify this, Bianchini, et. al. op.cit. note that the England Film and Television Museum in Bradford, which served as the first flagship project for this city attracted more than three million tourists within five years of its establishment. This transformation did not only augment investment and development, which provide jobs for the unemployed citizens but equally promote admiration and superiority of the city.

iii. *Revamping City Functionality and Image*

In the beginning, individual city has its identity and specific role which are found to be the basis of attraction for the influx of immigrants. The lost of these attributes through overburdened facilities robbed the city of its image and functionality, hence the need for feasible measures of revamping the dying city. Against this scenario, the city elites, political gladiators, city administrators, etc, many at times consider adoption of flagship projects with a view to scaling down the deflated industrial images and rebranding for global market attractions that will woo private investors, affluent residents, governments, among others, to invest in tourism and cultural heritage, specialized services, and entertainment promotions because the city can no longer function as the centre of production but rather of consumption.

iv. *Incomparable Alternative to Flagship Regeneration*

Flagship regeneration is been adopted in the UK and USA simply because many provincial governments considered it as mainly available alternative to attract resources from the private and public sectors all over the world in order to remain in the scheme of development. It is getting more obvious that most governments are losing revenues, battling economic depression, and job loss in addition to uncontrollable unemployment problem; therefore, the only alternative at their disposal is to encourage flagship projects with a view to ameliorating urban problems by drawing private investors to participate in reimaging and promotion of the city upon the identified or conceivable potentials (Hubbard, 1996).

Similarly, the trending competition for recognition, which extended beyond regional and national boundaries among the cities of the world, had left the city administrators and elites with no option other than to embrace flagship regeneration as the only renowned proactive measure that will continually keep their cities "head to head" with their contemporaries and entrench the desired growth for the benefit all and sundries (Thornley, 2002).

c) Problems of Flagship Projects

As it is certain that there is no any positive rewarding policy or measure that has no negative effect no matter how minute, so also is flagship regeneration. Some schools of thought criticise flagships from the perspective of the indigenous residents while other schools base their argument on the viewpoint of political

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economy. Nevertheless, the bottom-line is that flagship regeneration has its shortcomings as follows:

i. *Inconsistent Foresight and Vague Idea of the City*

The reimaging and repackaging initiative of flagship projects tailored toward regenerating and promoting the declined city might not be a true reflection of city characteristics, and eventually turn out to be inconsistent with the foresight and idea of the city residents. In other words, the promoters of flagships usually fail in assessing, engaging and embracing the primary interest of the city populace at the conception stage, and as such, they end up portraying the city with vague ideas in contrary to the authentic quality of the city that would have yielded enormous benefits if painstakingly corroborated. This is the scenario emphasised by Philo and Kearns (1993) when measuring the impact of flagship influenced by culture and history. They observed that the frequent conflicts associated with the manipulation of culture and history is as a result of failure to understudy, understand, and infuse the local culture and history in which the city populace have been having daily encounters prior the commencement of flagships.

ii. *Flagships as Distraction Strategy*

Since flagships regeneration cannot proffer all inclusive solution to urban problems and as well its benefits cannot meet the needs of all classes of city residents, the non benefiting local population therefore perceived and criticised this policy as a strategy to turn away their minds from deteriorated municipal facilities, insecurity, housing deficits, etc, which have constituted day-to-day challenges without realistic solution within a specific time horizon. It is on this note that some authors conceive flagships as projects which always portray city as being prosper or economically vibrant and capable of receiving capital investments from outside world but veneering abjectness and unimaginable decline (Harvey, 1989; Philo and Kearns, 1993; and, Eisinger, 2000).

iii. *Indistinctive Replication*

Some recent studies on flagship regeneration observe that most of the projects replicate each other from cities to cities and regions to regions. It is a frequent occurrence for the promoters to embark on flagship projects base on borrowed ideas and mindset of profitability without due consideration for domestication of their proposals or deep concern for localised factors that will ensure win-win situation. Sequel to thoughtlessness of this limitation, it has been so difficult for the flagship projects developing around the world to have distinct features or dissimilar identities that will perceptibly draw the attentions of local people and prospective outsiders' interests to investing their ideas with a view to complementing the existing projects (Searle, 2002).

iv. *Divergence of Socio-Economic Status*

Another criticism against flagship regeneration is its imbalance and schism of socio-economic status among the various classes of city residents. Apparently, flagships are being masterminded by the city promoters and indigenous businessmen with their focus on middle income class and prospective external patronisers as opposed to direct intervention on poverty alleviation and promotion of unbiased social values. It is in the assumption of flagships promoters that the underlying urban problems such as; socio-economic disparity, unemployment, poverty, housing and infrastructure deficits, etc, will gradually fissure from the construction stage to the period when the projects will attain optimum operational levels (Bianchini et al, op.cit.; Hubbard, 1996). Similarly, priority of flagships is to create wealth with less concern about distributing it. It is assumed that prosperity will ultimately pass through the elites down to the destitute but only the time lag could not be determined. Therefore, it is unusual for individual investor to develop flagships regeneration with the priority of wealth redistribution or with the motive of eradicating diverse social status and economic imbalance (Barber and Hall, 2008).

v. *Spatial Dichotomy*

Although it is an allowed concept to have designated areas when designing public residential layout as such that there will be line of demarcations between high income blocks, middle income blocks and low-income blocks but with unpronounced or thin separation in term of available facilities and services. On the contrary, flagships regeneration is considered to be in the vanguard of discernible segregation between the affluent and the poor communities within the city (Seo, 2002; Smith, op.cit.). Macleod (2002) considered flagships as tool that discreetly lay emphasise on site demarcations by encouraging the ideology which put the vulnerable and indigent population in confinement and hide their neighbourhoods from being publicly noticed or observed as part and parcel of the city. This makes the buoyancy of economic activities and provision of social services to be lopsided in favour of the few city elites and probably the middle class i.e. economically viable enclave is inspired and created within the city. For instance, Eisinger, op.cit., and Seo, op.cit., asserted that Inner Harbour regeneration of Baltimore was one of the frontline flagship projects that were expected to stimulate and entrench best standard of living of entire populace of the city. In contrary, the project segregated Baltimore by creating and concentrating the business development, cultural and tourists centre on one side, while adjacent community occupied mainly by the poor stays aloof and characterized as urban blight on the other side. This situation can instigate future displacement or dislodgement of the largely populated destitute from

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their current settlement as in the case of Moroko Sand-Fill Area of Lagos State, Nigeria when there was need to develop waterfront investments and extend Victoria Island basically occupied by the city elites in 1991.

In the light of the foregoing and in as much that the flagship projects are basically profits oriented rather than instilling all inclusive benefits or solving urban problems, locational factor will always take pre-eminence. In essence, the promoters of flagships will continually consider and prefer city centres where there is ease of accessibility, high profitability, and dignity when siting their investments regardless the pressing and urgent need for regeneration of the lowly prioritized neighbourhoods (Vicario and Monje, 2003). This notion of dichotomising the city spatial configuration serves as one of the major weaknesses of flagship projects, as it creates more urban problems instead of solving them (Cook, 2004).

IV. Prospect of Flagship Projects for Solving City Decline in Nigeria

Nigeria as the Africa's most populous country has aptitude to regenerate its declined cities from the "deep south" to the "far north". The diversity of culture, historical heritage, socio-economic base, human and natural resources, unique ecosystem, and above all auspicious climate could be perceived as the providence divinely bestowed upon the country. With these amiable attributes, flagship or prestige projects could thrive and address the subsisting or envisaged urban drawbacks as well as capable of controlling the envisioned influx distress, but however subject to expediency of exploratory initiatives and tactical manipulations of interwoven factors.

a) Potential Locations for Flagship Projects

The propensity of flagship projects to ameliorate the urban problems emanated from city decay in Nigeria, hinge on the preponderance of the potential locations that can accommodate such developments. It is quite obvious that most of these locations are yet to be discovered or exploited due to various reasons. It is no longer in the news that the economy of this country myopically rested on oil exploration, while other viable resources that could augment and generate intense socio-economic growth were jettisoned. Among the untapped endowments is the potentiality of developing flagship projects for the regeneration of major cities in twilight stage of decline.

Going by the memory lane, flagships developments had not been too alien to planning strategy in Nigeria, especially in view of city resuscitations and expansions but the pronouncement is being lowly ebbed with little or no attractions. For instance, Race Course was constructed in late 50s to attract developments in and around the neighbourhood of new Lagos, the economic nerve of West Africa. Similarly, Cocoa House and Liberty Stadium were developed in early 60s to reimage Ibadan city as the political headquarters of Western Region. In subsequent era, projects like Agbowo Shopping Complex was developed in late 70s with a view to decongesting the clumpy parts of Ibadan metropolis and servicing the grocery or household needs of premier University which was established as University College in 1952. This project momentarily fosters increase in neighbourhood property values and economic turnaround of the city at large. Tafawa Balewa Square (TBS) and National Stadium, Surulere in Lagos, were developed to serve as sources of economic revitalization and social development. Against all progressive motives, the aforementioned projects amongst others could not neutralize the menace of urbanization beyond short period after their developments due to lack of managerial clouts and foresight, inconsistence of successive political will, and incessant discontinuity of investors' inclination.

Succinctly, table 4.1 suggests couple of locations where flagship projects could be considered for wealth generation and distribution at various geopolitical zones in Nigeria. It also gives the opinion of project approach, purpose, description, and possible promoter of suggested flagships development.

Table 1: Some Suggested Locations for Flagships Development in Nigeria

S/N	Potential Flagships/Project Location	Project Description	Development Process/ Suggested Approach	Project Target/Purpose	Prospective Promoter/Investor
1.	i. Osun Osogbo Festival, Osun State ii. Olojo Festival, Ile – Ife, Osun State iii. Arugungu Fishing Festival, Kebbi State iv. Eyo Traditional Festival, Lagos State v. Inriji Yam Festival (Igbo Cultural Festival), Eastern States of Nigeria	Cultural/ historical heritage facility	Development interventions with mixed processes Cultural/heritage industrial driven approach	**Target:** Inner city/urban historical sites and suburban **Purpose:** i. To restore historical buildings; ii. To renovate the outdoor spaces; iii. To rehabilitate socio-economic structure; and,	International organisations (e.g. UNESCO), city elites/politicians, private investors, governments, etc.

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				iv. To create tourism attraction	
2.	i. Olumo Rock Cavern, Abeokuta, Ogun State ii. Ogudu Cattle Ranch, Cross River State iii. Erin-Ijesa Waterfall, Osun State iv. Hot and Cold Spring, Ikogusi, Ekiti State v. Yankari Game Reserve, Niger State vi. Old Oyo National Park, Oyo State	Tourism and leisure facility	Redevelopment interventions alongside promotional strategies Community based socio-economic approach	**Target:** Inner city/urban historical sites and suburban **Purpose:** i. To enhance the commercial, cultural and recreational attributes of the identified locations; ii. To boost supply hubs and encourage demand toward tourism industry; and, iii. To promote or encourage archaeological research	City elites, politicians, private investors, governments, etc
3.	i. Adire Local Fabrics Design, Abeokuta, Ogun State ii. Local Pottery Factory, Ilorin, Kwara State iii. Traditional Fabrics (Aso-Oke) Weaving Centres, Iseyin, Oyo State	Vocational facility/tourists' centre	Development interventions and public enlightenment Commercial driven approach	**Target:** Ancient industrial sites and sub-developed communities **Purpose:** i. To rehabilitate historical buildings; ii. To encourage travel and tourism; iii. To increase functional use and exposure of local areas; iv. To boost local economic development; v. To enhance life quality of the indigents; vi. To create alternative sub-centres; and, vii. To decrease burden of urban influx and modernize the squatter neighbourhoods.	City elites, politicians, private investors, governments, etc

Source: Authors' Survey (2018)

b) Stimulating Factors for Resourceful Flagships Regeneration

For flagship projects to grow and flourish in line of achieving the predetermined goals some fascinating and enabling factors must be readily available. Among the considerable factors for the prospect of flagships development in Nigeria are:

i. *Historical Antecedents and Cultural Diversities*

Nigeria as a nation is blessed with over two hundred and fifty (250) tribes and languages that brought about multiplicity of historical heritage, cultural background, dynamic human resources, natural endowment, socio-economic scheme, to mention but a few. All these are capable of instigating flagships development where highly lucrative or beneficial.

ii. *Substantial Population and Landmass*

Population and landmass of a city is another consequential factor for flagship projects to thrive. The result of 2006 census put the Nigerians population at approximately 180 million spread across over 930,000 square meters of land expanse with dense inhabitants at major cities. This attribute is an advantage in view of local patronage and accessibility of land for flagships development.

iii. *Friendly Government Legislation*

Since the focus of various levels of government of the world has been gradually shifting from direct provision of public services to more enterprising governance, diverse steps toward encouraging private investors and elites to buy into socio-economic developments have been on the increase. Consequently, flexibility of government legislation in Nigeria has been so gracious to both local and foreign direct investments (FDI) of all categories. The steps in this direction include various forms of tax relieves like tax cut, tax moratorium, etc, and ease of development documentations, etc. Therefore, developing flagships project as succours to city decays in Nigeria could not be hindered or prone to any legal code tussle.

c) Presumable Barriers to Flagship Project Development

Following the observed factors which are bound to protrude prosperous flagships in Nigeria, it important to take due cognisance of inherent or intrinsic elements that could equally portend difficulties in adopting flagship regeneration for combating socio-economic problems of cities at large.

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i. *Effect of Economic Downturn on Flagships Development*

In view of the global and local economic recession there is high risk of insecurity of return on investment in which flagships development is not exclusive. The fundamental motive for developing flagships by the governments might not base on economic returns while reverse will be the case for individual flagships promoters. Therefore, the bad state of Nigeria economy for more than two decades may not portend friendly investment environment that could guarantee recouping of capital outlay on flagship projects.

ii. *Security Challenges*

The spates of terrorism and kidnapping for ransoms in the world over have instilled untold fears in the minds of vacationers, and only to be left with the few diehard tourists to embark on journeys probably to the less hostile tourism locations on the globe. This scenario has negatively impacted on the existing and potential tourists' centres in the north-east, north-central, south-east, and south-south regions of Nigeria. Therefore, the possibility of wooing both local and foreign flagships investors in this direction could be highly impossible.

iii. *Impediment of Fanaticized Religion Tenets*

Although Nigeria is considered as a secular state but the influence diverse religion in the context of tolerance, harmony and respect for individual belief leaves little or no room for concerted flagships development in the line of cultural and historical artefacts. For instance, some sect opined that visiting antique for leisure amount to promoting paganism or idols that have been abandoned yesteryears. Likewise, the sanctity of traditional places forbid particular gender or non initiated person to approach restricted areas which might be the most attractive location of interest to the visiting tourists. This profanation or ascription of taboo in this wise has been curtailing the modification of potential sites from attaining international tourism standard in view of flagships regeneration.

iv. *Incapability of Planning Professionals and Superficial Research*

It is important to give credence to the relevance of in-depth research in packaging flagships proposals and planning designs. Consequently, the contribution of planning professionals will go a long way in making potentially viable locations amiable to all categories of flagships investors through postulation of ideas that could stir customized planning policy formulation and implementation that will fascinate the locals to embrace and understand what concept is proposed flagships development is aiming at. Presently, there is a great doubt about the capability of the professionals to rise up to this occasion as suggested by their lethargic responses and lack of advocacy for flagships regeneration in the previously executed urban renewal projects despite the fact that Nigeria has a lot to showcase in terms of diversity of culture, historical heritage, exceptional bionetwork, amongst others.

v. *Indifference on Leisure Time*

The recent study on the disposition of Africans to travel and tourism confirms that the rate of observing leisure time or holiday is at ebb. It is not a known fact to the majority of Nigerians that "all work, no play makes Jack a dull boy". Even workers that are entitled to annual leaves use the period to source for jobs elsewhere and thereby jettison leisure in view of making additional income. Without mincing words, the indifference on leisure period is attributed to economic hardship and insensitivity of government to improve the standard of living. Therefore, this barrier could militate against the acceptance of flagships development by the locals and invariably affect the attraction of promoters as well as foreign patronage because of the possible hostility.

vi. *Inconsistent Governance and Lack of Political Will*

The ball of flagship projects is usually set rolling by the provincial governments who have insight on encouraging private investors' participations in eradicating city decays. Many governments at times sign Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with both local and foreign developers to define the scope of projects upon the basic terms and conditions. The most complicated of all Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements is Built Operate and Transfer (BOT) due to the unrealistic timeframe for investor to recoup the investment (McCarthy, 2012). Therefore, any flagship project decided on such pact is prone to untimely overturning at the instances of political interference and inconsistence of ideology or polarisable interest of the successive heads of government. This particular barrier is synonymous to Nigeria and may not allow flagship projects to blossom in achieving the fundamental objectives.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

a) Recommendations

Sequel to the possible barriers that are predisposed to undermining the prospect of flagships regeneration in Nigeria as stated in the foregoing, the following suggestions will serve as panacea for promoting enabling atmosphere that capable of captivating flagships promoters.

Foremost, there is need for governments at all levels to fashion out feasible means of resuscitating economy through domestic production and exportation of goods and services that are bound to boost the GDP and per capita income. Once there is proactive headway in recovering the recessed economy, various classes of city residents will repose more confidence on government policies, and by so doing whatever action taken towards urban regeneration will not be perceived as another tactic by the political gladiators to enrich their

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purses. Moreover, improvement of individual earnings and gradual momentum of living standard will equally ameliorate the barriers of economic downturn and indifference on leisure time against flagships development. Even by ensuring this condition, the promoters or investors will be convinced of secured investment returns.

Similarly, the security of lives and properties cannot be wished away in societal development. There is no individual that will put his or her life on the line for the sake of embarking on tourism or paying visit to historical places amidst of hostilities and insurgence. Therefore, it is highly imperative for the government to put a decisive end to precarious activities such as; kidnapping, robbery, militia, violence, rituals, etc, especially in and around flagships receptive locations for the sake of buoying up the patronage of foreigners and citizens from different zones within the country.

As stated earlier, the tenets fanaticism and miscellaneous religion fantasy in Nigeria could deter the development of flagships in the line of cultural heritage. This barrier is often linked to primitivism, engrossment and lack of awareness about making fortunes from antiquities without rupturing religion tenets. Consequently, there is urgent need for the governments, elites, local flagship promoters, academicians, etc, to intensify efforts by sensitising and craving the indulgence of uninformed populace about the socio-economic role of flagship projects in addressing the age long urbanization problems. This is with a view to soliciting for effective participation and unalloyed acceptance by all and sundry

There is much attach to concrete research for any intending flagship project, therefore, for the sake of forestalling confliction with local interests and redundancy of flagships regeneration, it is imperative to critically carryout a comprehensive study to unveil and implant the fundamental characteristics of the decayed city at the stage of policy formulation, planning, and implementation with a view to attaining state of development that will be beneficial to city indigenes and the prospective outsiders. Also, in principle, the importance of capacity building towards pursing a course of action will enhance productivity and good quality of service delivery. Hence, in order to ensure holistic approach to flagships regeneration policy planning, formulation and implementation, the planners and allied professionals must be trained and retrained on refresher courses. In a collaborative effort, the higher institutions of learning that specialised in built environment courses should develop curriculum that will give room for intellectual development and knowledge impartation capable of beaming light to the relevance of embracing flagships regeneration as a worthy alternative to other concepts of urban renewal.

Last of all, there is need to ostracise unfashionable system of governance and cuddle sense of advancement on every value-added project development embark on by the preceding administration(s) regardless of incumbent political manifestoes. Governance should not be zeroed in on showcasing of political ego but rather on continuity of purpose to lead a republic in the path of liberating the masses from all hopelessness. If this condition could be maintained in Nigeria, the apprehension of private investors engaging in PPP projects over the habitual shortfalls of political succession will be allayed. Consequently, this will be an advocating hub or a safe haven in ensuring the prospect of flagships regeneration and catalysed investors' attraction.

b) Conclusion

The benefits of flagships as stimulus of urban revitalization to developed countries are enormous especially from its cradle in the UK and USA. It has been established in this write-up that flagship projects symbolically rebrand decayed cities and assign new roles that will draw attentions and create recognition which can solve urbanisation problems and enhance sustainable socio-economic values. The gradual redirection of government resources from stack provision of public services which used to gulp the vital portion of budgets to more enterprising ventures had further made flagships regeneration to be the best alternative amongst other urban renewal models. Similarly, it is considered that different cities have exclusive attributes to attract inward investments but the onus is on government to conveniently unlock those potentials and motivate individual practitioners or investors toward financing and building flagship projects rather than solely responsible for socio-economic development of twilight cities.

The reviewed literatures laid emphasis on basic characteristics required of a city to experience possible transformation by means of reimaging and marketing of which arts and cultural background, historical heritage, unique services or entrepreneurship, etc, were identified. These elements are suggested to set up competition amongst cities of similar features within or outside their immediate regions. Consequence on this hint, Nigeria as a nation was x-rayed to determine the prospect of flagships model for tackling city degenerations and curtailing urban problems. In a close observation, it was ascertained that this model of urban regeneration could be adopted and thrive base on available factors as unravelled in the foregoing section. In spite of the classified favourable condition, some peculiar issues were envisaged to clog up the practicability of this model but however considered to be surmountable vis-à-vis the forthright recommendations made.

Although, flagships regeneration has its weakness bothering on myopic response to the multidimensional problems confronting urban centres in the developed countries, nevertheless it has capability

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of usurping this possible dilemma taking into account the antique formation of Nigerian cities and socio-cultural diversities upon which prospective flagships investors can achieve their objectives without growing gray hair about uncertainty of wealth creation and complexity of adding value to the socio-economic status inter alia.

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