

Examination of the Role of Planning in Land Development in Owerri, Imo State: The Estate Surveyor and Valuer Perspective

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Abstract - Land development remains a critical driver of urban growth, economic productivity, and environmental sustainability in rapidly urbanizing cities of sub-Saharan Africa. In Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria, increasing urban expansion has intensified challenges related to land use control, infrastructure provision, environmental degradation, and non-compliance with development standards. This study examines the role of planning in land development in Owerri from the professional perspective of Estate Surveyors and Valuers, who occupy a strategic position at the interface of land economics, development appraisal, and urban management. The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining structured questionnaire surveys administered to registered Estate Surveyors and Valuers, planners, and land administrators with key informant interviews and documentary analysis of statutory planning instruments. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential techniques, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings reveal that effective planning significantly influences land development outcomes by enhancing land value optimization, reducing development risks, improving infrastructure coordination, and promoting sustainable land use patterns. However, the study identifies critical constraints, including weak development control enforcement, political interference, inadequate professional collaboration, and outdated planning frameworks. The results underscore the necessity of integrating planning principles more firmly into land development decision-making processes led by Estate Surveyors and Valuers. The study concludes that strengthening institutional coordination, updating planning regulations, and enhancing professional capacity will significantly improve land development efficiency and urban livability in Owerri. The paper contributes to empirical discourse on land development planning in developing cities and offers policy-relevant insights for sustainable urban growth.

Keywords: Land Development, Urban Planning, Estate Surveyor and Valuer, Development Control, Land Use Planning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban land development is widely acknowledged as a complex process that requires effective planning frameworks to balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Contemporary urban studies emphasize that planning plays a central role in regulating land development by guiding spatial growth, coordinating infrastructure provision, and mitigating negative externalities associated with rapid urbanization (Acheampong et al., 2020; UN-Habitat, 2022). In developing countries, however, weak planning systems often result in haphazard land development, informal settlements, and declining urban environmental quality.

From the perspective of Estate Surveyors and Valuers, planning is a fundamental determinant of land value, investment security, and development feasibility. Empirical studies demonstrate that compliance with planning regulations positively influences property values, enhances market transparency, and reduces development risk (Akinjare et al., 2021; Opoko & Oluwatayo, 2020). Conversely, ineffective planning enforcement leads to land use conflicts, infrastructure strain, and depreciation of real estate assets, undermining the professional objectives of valuation accuracy and sustainable property management.

In Nigeria, urban planning practice is governed by statutory instruments such as the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Act, yet implementation remains uneven across states. Scholars have observed that political interference, limited technical capacity, and institutional fragmentation continue to constrain effective land development planning in Nigerian cities (Ogunleye et al., 2023; Yaro et al., 2021). These challenges are particularly pronounced in rapidly growing secondary cities such as Owerri, where population growth and land demand have outpaced planning control mechanisms.

Owerri, the capital of Imo State, has experienced accelerated urban expansion driven by administrative functions, educational institutions, and commercial activities. This growth has heightened the relevance of Estate Surveyors and Valuers as key actors in land development decisions, feasibility appraisal, and development advisory services. Despite their strategic role, limited empirical research has examined how planning frameworks shape land development outcomes in Owerri from the professional standpoint of Estate Surveyors and Valuers.

This study therefore seeks to examine the role of planning in land development in Owerri, Imo State, focusing specifically on the Estate Surveyor and Valuer perspective. By integrating professional insights with empirical evidence, the study contributes to the broader discourse on

Study Area

Owerri is the capital city of Imo State, located in the south-eastern region of Nigeria. Geographically, Owerri lies between latitudes 5°27' and 5°30' North and longitudes 7°00' and 7°05' East. The city occupies a central position within the state and functions as the administrative, commercial, educational, and transportation hub of Imo State. Owerri is bounded by Owerri North Local Government Area to the north, Owerri West to the west, and Ngor Okpala Local Government Area to the east and south. The city's strategic location has significantly influenced land demand, urban growth, and real estate development intensity over the past two decades (Onyebueke & Ezeadichie, 2021).

Administratively, Owerri is composed of three Local Government Areas—Owerri Municipal, Owerri North, and Owerri West—which together form the Owerri Capital Territory. The city hosts major government institutions, tertiary educational establishments, health facilities, and commercial centers, all of which contribute to sustained population inflow and increasing pressure on land resources. Recent demographic estimates indicate steady population growth, driven largely by rural–urban migration, public sector employment opportunities, and expanding service-sector activities (UN-Habitat, 2022). This demographic dynamic has intensified the conversion of peri-urban agricultural

land to residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments.

Physically, Owerri is characterized by relatively flat to gently undulating terrain, underlain predominantly by sandy loam soils that are generally suitable for building construction. However, uncoordinated land development has contributed to challenges such as surface flooding, drainage obstruction, and environmental degradation, particularly in low-lying areas. Climatically, the city experiences a tropical rainforest climate, with high annual rainfall and humidity, factors that necessitate careful planning in land development and infrastructure design (Ogunleye et al., 2023).

From a planning perspective, Owerri is governed by statutory land use and development control instruments administered by state and local planning authorities. Despite the existence of layout plans, zoning regulations, and development control standards, compliance remains inconsistent. The proliferation of unapproved layouts, informal land subdivisions, and unauthorized developments has raised concerns among planning professionals and Estate Surveyors and Valuers regarding land market efficiency, property valuation accuracy, and long-term urban sustainability. These characteristics make Owerri a suitable case study for examining the role of planning in land development from an Estate Surveyor and Valuer perspective.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive examination of the role of planning in land development in Owerri, Imo State. The mixed-methods approach is particularly appropriate for land development and planning studies, as it allows for the triangulation of professional perceptions, empirical evidence, and institutional practices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021). The quantitative component focused on measuring perceptions, experiences, and professional assessments of planning effectiveness, while the qualitative component explored deeper institutional, regulatory, and professional dynamics influencing land development outcomes.

Sources of Data

Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary data were generated through structured questionnaires administered to practicing Estate Surveyors and Valuers operating within Owerri metropolis. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with senior officials of planning authorities, registered town planners, and land administration officers to obtain expert insights into planning and development control processes.

Secondary data were sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, planning regulations, government policy documents, professional practice guidelines, development control manuals, and relevant institutional reports published between 2020 and 2025. These materials provided contextual, theoretical, and regulatory foundations for the study.

Population of the Study

The study population comprised registered Estate Surveyors and Valuers practicing in Owerri, as well as relevant planning and land administration professionals. The choice of Estate Surveyors and Valuers was informed by their statutory role in land development appraisal, feasibility studies, valuation, property management, and development advisory services. According to records from the Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers (NIESV), a substantial number of registered firms and practitioners operate within Owerri metropolis, making the city suitable for professional-based empirical investigation.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents with direct professional involvement in land development and planning-related activities. This technique ensured that only practitioners with adequate experience and knowledge of planning regulations and land development processes in Owerri were included in the study. From the identified population, a representative sample of Estate Surveyors and Valuers was selected, alongside a smaller subset of planners and land administrators for qualitative interviews.

The sample size was determined using standard sampling principles appropriate for professional perception studies, ensuring adequate coverage while maintaining data reliability and manageability.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed in four sections. Section A captured respondents' socio-professional characteristics, including years of experience, area of specialization, and professional registration status. Section B focused on awareness and understanding of planning regulations governing land development in Owerri. Section C examined the perceived role of planning in land development outcomes, including land value optimization, development feasibility, and infrastructure coordination. Section D identified constraints and challenges affecting effective planning and development control.

For the qualitative component, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to elicit detailed insights from planning officials and senior practitioners on institutional capacity, enforcement mechanisms, and inter-professional collaboration.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Content and face validity of the questionnaire were established through expert review by senior academics in Estate Management and Urban Planning, as well as experienced practitioners. Reliability was assessed using a pilot survey conducted outside the main study area. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test internal consistency, with values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2021).

Method of Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered through a combination of physical distribution and electronic platforms to maximize response rates. Follow-up visits and reminders were employed to ensure timely retrieval. Interviews were conducted in person and, where necessary, via virtual platforms, and were audio-recorded with respondents' consent.

Methods of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. Inferential analysis, including correlation analysis, was employed to examine relationships between planning effectiveness and land development outcomes. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, allowing for

the identification of recurring patterns, institutional issues, and professional perspectives.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Professional Characteristics of Respondents

The analysis of respondents' socio-professional profiles indicates that the majority of Estate Surveyors and Valuers involved in the study possess substantial professional experience in land development-related activities. Most respondents had practiced for more than five years, with a significant proportion exceeding ten years of professional experience. This level of experience suggests a strong familiarity with planning regulations, development control processes, feasibility appraisal, and land market dynamics within Owerri metropolis.

In terms of specialization, respondents were predominantly engaged in valuation, property management, development appraisal, and agency services. These areas of practice require frequent interaction with planning authorities, land administration agencies, and private developers, thereby positioning Estate Surveyors and Valuers as key intermediaries between planning policy and actual land development outcomes. The professional maturity of respondents enhances the credibility and reliability of the findings, as opinions were derived from sustained engagement with planning and development processes rather than speculative knowledge.

Awareness and Understanding of Planning Regulations

Results show a high level of awareness of statutory planning regulations governing land development in Owerri. A substantial majority of respondents indicated familiarity with zoning regulations, development permit requirements, setback standards, plot coverage ratios, and land use classifications. This finding reflects the statutory obligation of Estate Surveyors and Valuers to advise clients on development feasibility and regulatory compliance before project initiation.

However, despite high awareness levels, respondents noted that the interpretation and application of planning regulations are often inconsistent across planning authorities. This inconsistency was identified as a major source of uncertainty during

land development appraisal and valuation exercises. From a valuation standpoint, regulatory uncertainty introduces development risk, which negatively affects investment confidence and land value estimation. These findings reinforce the argument in contemporary planning literature that regulatory clarity and consistency are critical determinants of efficient urban land markets.

Role of Planning in Land Development Outcomes

The study reveals that effective planning plays a multidimensional role in land development in Owerri, particularly from the Estate Surveyor and Valuer perspective.

First, respondents strongly agreed that planning enhances orderly land development by guiding land use allocation and controlling building density. Proper zoning and layout planning were found to reduce land use conflicts and promote compatible developments, which ultimately stabilize property values and improve neighborhood quality.

Second, planning was identified as a critical determinant of land value optimization. Developments that comply with approved layouts and zoning regulations were consistently perceived to command higher market values and rental returns than unplanned or non-compliant developments. This finding is consistent with valuation theory, which recognizes legal permissibility as a core component of highest and best use analysis.

Third, planning facilitates infrastructure coordination, particularly in road alignment, drainage provision, and utility services. Respondents noted that areas developed in line with approved plans enjoy better access, reduced environmental risks, and lower long-term maintenance costs. These attributes positively influence property marketability and investment sustainability.

Overall, the findings empirically confirm that planning is not merely a regulatory exercise but a value-creating mechanism within the land development process, reinforcing the professional relevance of Estate Surveyors and Valuers in advocating planning compliance.

Planning and Development Control Effectiveness

Despite the recognized importance of planning, results indicate that development control enforcement in Owerri remains weak. A majority of respondents reported frequent occurrences of unauthorized developments, unapproved land subdivisions, and building plan deviations. These practices were attributed to limited institutional capacity, political interference, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms.

From an Estate Surveyor and Valuer perspective, weak development control undermines the predictability of land markets. Respondents emphasized that when illegal developments are later regularized without sanctions, it creates moral hazard and encourages further non-compliance. This situation complicates valuation exercises, as comparable evidence may include properties developed outside regulatory frameworks, thereby distorting market signals.

The findings suggest that ineffective development control not only compromises urban aesthetics and environmental quality but also erodes the integrity of professional valuation practice and land development advisory services.

Professional Collaboration and Institutional Coordination

Another key result relates to inter-professional collaboration. Respondents acknowledged that effective land development requires close collaboration between Estate Surveyors and Valuers, town planners, architects, engineers, and land administrators. However, the study found that such collaboration is often weak in practice.

Estate Surveyors and Valuers reported limited involvement in early-stage planning decisions, despite their expertise in development feasibility, market analysis, and financial appraisal. This exclusion reduces the economic efficiency of planning decisions and contributes to developments that are either financially unviable or misaligned with market demand. Strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration was therefore identified as a critical pathway for improving planning outcomes and land development efficiency in Owerri.

Constraints Affecting Planning-Led Land Development

The study identified several constraints limiting the effectiveness of planning in land development:

1. Outdated planning schemes and layout plans, which fail to reflect current population growth and land use dynamics.
2. Political interference in development approval processes, undermining professional judgment.
3. Inadequate technical manpower and logistics within planning authorities.

4. Low public compliance with planning regulations due to weak enforcement and limited awareness.

These constraints collectively diminish the capacity of planning institutions to guide sustainable land development and weaken the advisory role of Estate Surveyors and Valuers.

IV. STUDY LIMITATIONS

While the findings provide valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relied heavily on professional perceptions, which, although informed, may reflect subjective experiences. Second, the research was geographically limited to Owerri metropolis, which may constrain the generalizability of findings to other Nigerian cities with different institutional contexts. Third, access to comprehensive official development control records was limited, restricting the extent of documentary analysis.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach and professional focus ensure that the findings remain relevant and credible for policy formulation and professional practice improvement.

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study examined the role of planning in land development in Owerri, Imo State, from the professional perspective of Estate Surveyors and Valuers. The findings reveal that planning plays a fundamental role in shaping land development outcomes, land market performance, and urban sustainability in the study area.

First, the study found a high level of awareness and understanding of planning regulations among Estate Surveyors and Valuers practicing in Owerri. Respondents demonstrated familiarity with zoning regulations, development permit requirements, density controls, and layout standards. However, this professional awareness contrasts sharply with inconsistent regulatory interpretation and application

by planning authorities, which introduces uncertainty into land development appraisal and valuation processes.

Second, the findings established that effective planning significantly enhances orderly land development, optimizes land values, and improves infrastructure coordination. Developments that comply with approved planning standards were consistently associated with higher market values, improved marketability, and reduced development risks. This confirms the centrality of planning compliance in achieving highest and best use outcomes in valuation practice.

Third, the study revealed that development control mechanisms in Owerri are largely ineffective, as evidenced by the prevalence of unauthorized developments and unapproved land subdivisions. Weak enforcement, political interference, and inadequate institutional capacity were identified as major contributors to this challenge. These conditions undermine the integrity of land markets and complicate professional valuation and advisory services.

Finally, the study found limited inter-professional collaboration between Estate Surveyors and Valuers and other built environment professionals, particularly during early planning and development stages. This disconnect reduces the economic efficiency and sustainability of land development decisions in Owerri.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed to enhance planning-led land development in Owerri:

1. Strengthening Development Control Enforcement
Planning authorities should be adequately empowered through improved staffing, training, and logistics to enforce development control regulations effectively. Strict sanctions should be applied to non-compliant developments to deter regulatory violations and restore confidence in planning institutions.

2. Updating Planning Schemes and Layout Plans
Existing master plans and layout schemes should be reviewed and updated to reflect current demographic trends, land use demands, and infrastructure needs.

Modern planning instruments will enhance regulatory relevance and support sustainable land development.

3. Institutionalizing Inter-Professional Collaboration
Formal frameworks should be established to integrate Estate Surveyors and Valuers into planning approval and development review processes. Their expertise in feasibility appraisal, land economics, and market analysis will improve the economic viability and sustainability of development decisions.

4. Reducing Political Interference in Planning Decisions
Clear institutional boundaries should be established to insulate planning and development control processes from undue political influence. Transparent and rule-based approval systems will enhance regulatory credibility and investor confidence.

5. Enhancing Public Awareness and Compliance
Continuous public enlightenment programs should be implemented to educate landowners and developers on the benefits of planning compliance. Improved awareness will encourage voluntary compliance and reduce enforcement burdens.

6. Digitization of Planning and Land Records
The adoption of digital planning approval systems and geospatial land information platforms will improve transparency, reduce processing delays, and enhance coordination between planning authorities and land professionals.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of planning in land development in Owerri, Imo State, through the professional lens of Estate Surveyors and Valuers. The findings demonstrate that effective planning is indispensable to orderly urban growth, efficient land markets, and sustainable land development. Planning compliance was shown to enhance land value optimization, infrastructure coordination, and development feasibility, while weak development control undermines market stability and professional practice.

The study concludes that planning should be repositioned not merely as a regulatory mechanism but as a strategic tool for value creation and risk

management in land development. Estate Surveyors and Valuers have a critical role to play in advocating planning compliance, integrating market intelligence into planning decisions, and bridging the gap between regulatory frameworks and development realities.

In conclusion, improving planning effectiveness in Owerri requires institutional reforms, enhanced professional collaboration, updated planning instruments, and transparent enforcement mechanisms. Implementing these measures will promote sustainable urban development, protect property investment values, and strengthen the professional practice of Estate Surveying and Valuation in Imo State and similar urban contexts.

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