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George Washington Karani is a PhD candidate at the Technical University of Kenya. He is a leading figure in Kenya's interior design industry and is currently serving as the President of the Interior Designers Association of Kenya (IDAK), President of the African Council of Interior Architects/Designers, and Executive Director of Africa Interior Design Week. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Design (Interior Design) Degree and a Master of Arts in Design (Interior Design) Degree from the University of Nairobi. Passionate about education and maximizing student learning opportunities by integrating multidisciplinary teamwork as a learning tool in the development and promotion of professionalism in the interior design industry in Kenya and, by extension, Africa Karani also established the Kenya College of Interior Design based in Nairobi offering specialized Interior Design courses. Karani advocates for industry regulation and is a key member of the steering committee for the Built Environment Practitioners Bill, playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of interior design in Kenya. As the Director and Principal Consultant of Interiors Intelligence Ltd. Karani is a workplace design strategist with extensive experience in commercial, retail,

residential, and hospitality interiors. In 2023, Karani initiated the Africa Interior Design Week, a groundbreaking annual event fostering unity through interior design.

The Economic Importance of Interior Design

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Abstract

I am a trained professional designer who taught the Department of Design and Creative Media, the Technical University of Kenya. I have only a second-hand experience of European Colonialism; this means I only hear that European systems were not designed for Africans; the systems and products were out of tune with 'design for all'. I am a product of post-Independence Kenya with sizeable experiences in professional work in Kenya; I draw on my professional in Interior Design to generate text for this article; I believe that professional Interior Design is still largely for Kenyans who can afford it rather than design for all. We must now consider placing 'design for all' at the center of Interior Design. In so doing, we challenge the concept of 'design for life at the outskirts of national economy'.

Key words: *Interior design, design for all, economic progress*

Introduction

Interior design is a professional and holistic discipline that is focused on designing indoor spaces that address, safeguard, and meet human requirements (Obeidat et al. 2022). In doing this, interior design employs methods and approaches that are geared towards enhancing the functionality, health and safety of users of the interior spaces (Hick, 2022). In most construction projects,

interior designers have been assigned a peripheral role and their input is often invited at the tail end of the project implementation, when the structure is already erected. This scenario is largely informed by the misconception that many professionals in the construction industry and the society in Kenya have held for long about what interior design really is. In most instances, interior designers are dismissed as interior decorators despite their academic qualifications, which delineate them from decorators who do not need any such credentials. However, as suggested above by the definition of interior design, interior designers need to be engaged in a construction project in all stages including the pre-construction stage (planning and design), construction stage and post-construction stage.

This misconception is a significant inhibitor to the many economic benefits that can be reaped from interior design as country, affordable housing included. This paper takes a critical look at the economic value that is associated with an investment characterized by engaging interior designers right from the outset of a construction project.

Improved Quality of Life

Arguably, improved quality of life is the major contribution of interior design to economic development of societies considering the adage that health is wealth. Interior designers play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for users of constructed spaces (Hicks, 2022). The problem-solving skills and attention to detail that interior designers bring to a project has a direct impact on the comfort, livability, sustainability, universal design, safety, and health of a

project (Falcone, 2019). Interior designers contribute to physical health well-being by creating spaces that promote effective functionality and also optimize health and safety for the users (Obeidat et al. 2022). In this way, interior design contributes to improved quality of life, enabling users to be productive in the spaces they occupy and avoid accidents and injuries that may interfere with their productivity. Interior designers also contribute to the mental and emotional health of users by creating space that evoke positive emotions, relaxation, and comfort and this, in turn translated into reduction in healthcare costs and improved productivity (El-Zeiny, 2012).

Enhanced Market Appeal and Property Worth

Interior design significantly contributes to the worth of a finished construction project. A property, whether commercial or residential, that reflects carefully planned and skillfully implemented interior design decisions invariably becomes more attractive and desirable to buyers or users who may need to lease or rent it (Obeidat et al. 2022). Investment in the enhancement of interior design translate into substantial returns in the lease or selling markets, thereby creating a competitive edge in the fiercely competitive real estate market (Celadyn, 2019).

Falcone, (2019) conducted a study in which the involvement of interior designers in the construction of single-family residences was examined, with specific regard to economic benefits. The study established that including interior designers as primary stakeholders in the construction process substantially impacted the economic prospects of the project. More specifically, the study found that

professional interior designers contributed to higher sales prices per finished square foot by an average of \$54.67 as compared to homes constructed without input of interior designers. The increased value in this case was associated with the expertise, education, and experience that interior designers bring to a project.

Another contributing factor towards market appeal and increased property worth of construction projects that have involved professional interior designers is associated with the selection and use of sustainable material. Interior designers have significantly contributed to the creation of beautiful and environmentally responsible interior spaces by guiding the adoption of sustainable practices and material (Leung et al. 2013). This does not only enhance the appeal of properties (Obeidat et al. 2022); it also gives them a competitive advantage in the real estate market, which potentially leads to higher property values and demand, especially amongst environmentally conscious clients (Celadyn).

The adoption of green design and sustainable materials is essential for transitioning towards a circular economy in which resources are reused and recycled. In this regard, interior designers contribute to this transition by incorporating sustainable material and practices in their works, thereby reducing waste, and simultaneously creating economic value through the efficient use of resources (Falcone, 2019). The creation of memorable and aesthetically pleasing spaces enables businesses to charge premium prices for their products or services, thereby boosting their revenue and profitability (Obeidat et al. 2022). Effectively designed interiors generate positive word-of-mouth and online reviews, which widens

the customer base of the said property (El-Zeiny, 2012; Kariuki 2012).

Therefore, interior design is effective for addressing the environmental challenges related to building deconstruction, refurbishment, and demolition. The incorporation of adaptive reuse of reclaimed or salvaged building materials and products into interior design result in resource efficiency characterized by reduced waste production and minimized energy consumption. Interior designers recommend the use of reclaimed materials and products, which significantly maximize the use of existing resources, and this in turn, reduces the need for new materials, thereby, cutting down construction costs. The recommended reuse of reclaimed material lead to cost savings in waste disposal, potentially generating revenue through the sale or reuse of materials that would otherwise become waste (Celadyn, 2019).

Cost Effectiveness in the Use of Spaces

The users of sustainably designed interior spaces benefit immensely in terms of reduced operational costs and minimized negative environmental externalities (Kariuki 2012). This is because sustainably designed interiors are associated with reduced consumption of resources such as energy (Obeidat et al. 2022). For instance, interior designers advise on proper use of space that maximizes the use of natural light, thereby minimizing the use of electricity in buildings at daytime. This invariably translates into reduced electricity costs. Interior designers encourage their clients to assess what is truly essential regarding the facility they want

constructed and, in this way, they help them align with a more sustainable and cost-effective lifestyle (Falcone, 2019).

Cost Saving in Construction Projects

Interior designers are credited for streamlining the decision-making processes in construction projects. Their recommendations on the use of space and selection of material ensure that builders, subcontractors, and suppliers adhere to the construction schedule and within budget. This efficiency is essential for all stakeholders involved in the construction process (Falcone, 2019). In cases where interior designers are involved from the outset, they give specificity to the material required in the construction of the interiors based on the space they have designed. This eliminates the cost associated with subsequent damages to the constructed structure, which the interior designer may require if they are not involved in the pre-construction stages.

Optimized Performance and Productivity

In the retail sector, well-designed spaces enhance customer experiences, which in turn contribute to increased revenues for businesses, enabling them to compete and expand their operations (Leung et al. 2013). Interior designers provide technical advice that lead to the optimization of operational efficiency of working spaces. This leads to improved layout and functionality of spaces, reduced costs and the overall enhancement of customer experience (Kariuki 2012). By recommending minimalism and selecting durable, long-lasting materials, interior designers help their clients reduce expenditures on frequent replacements and promote cost-effective lifestyle (Obeidat et al. 2022).

Interior designers provide their clients with insights on constructing adaptable interior spaces, which is important in addressing changing needs such as creating home offices or gyms. This becomes cost effective to the clients so that they do not need to incur additional costs for renovations and extensions (Obeidat et al. 2022).

Business Opportunity and Employment Creation

According to Celadyn (2019) the adoption of green building by interior designers is growing exponentially and this is providing businesses in the construction chain with opportunities to innovate, grow, and remain competitive in the industry. In this way, the incorporation of sustainable materials and practices is leading to business growth and financial gains not just for interior design firms but other affiliated construction businesses as well.

As a sub-industry within the gigantic construction industry, interior design generates a substantial number of jobs which are handled by interior designers themselves, architects, project managers, and a host of interior decorators including artists, and carpenters (Obeidat et al. 2022). In making specific recommendations for the optimization for particular spaces in terms of functionality, health and safety, interior designers invariably call for the skills of varied workers required to realize particular recommend interior designs. Besides, interior designers also create jobs for associated traders who supply material that are used in creating particular interior spaces.

The construction and/or renovation of residential properties and commercial spaces such as hospitals, hotels, restaurants etc. often require interior designers to collaborate with various trades and industries. This translates into the creation of jobs in construction, carpentry, plumbing, electrical work etc. (Falcone, 2019). Besides, it also boosts manufacturing enterprises that are related to furniture, textiles, and décor. These associated businesses benefit due to the increased demand for their services.

Furthermore, the economic ripple effect of interior design extends to retail whereby consumers investing in furniture, decor, and materials in a bid to personalize their working and living spaces (Celadyn, 2019). This has contributed to job creation in retail, manufacturing, and distribution. Additionally, the growth of local economies in some cases is attributed to interior designers who recommend and, therefore, promote the use of locally sourced materials created by local artisans (Leung et al. 2013).

Enhancing Brand Equity of Enterprises

Businesses that depend on customer traffic rely on effectively designed interiors to attract and retain customers and increase their sales and revenue. This is evident for businesses such as supermarkets, hospitals, education institutions, hotels and restaurants (Obeidat et al. 2022). These businesses, therefore, rely on interior design to create a strong brand that is associated with a robust customer experience. Effectively designed interiors convey brand identity and values of businesses, thereby reinforcing customer loyalty and trust (Celadyn. 2019).

Conclusion

In summary, interior design plays an integral role with regard to economic development and growth of any country. This is explicit considering how interior design contributes to enhancing the quality of life of human beings in the built environment. It also enhances market appeal, sustainability, cost-effectiveness, job creation, and brand enhancement of construction projects. Therefore, it is important for people with construction projects to involve interior designers from the early stages (pre-construction) of the projects to maximize these economic benefits. However, it is now important to spread the benefits of Interior Designer to include majority of Kenya living at the periphery of the economy.

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