

Shared Activities – Shared Spaces

Using Collective Housing Ideas



Emma Noresved

Student, LTH

Lund, Sweden

Introduction

This paper is about sharing activities and spaces in low-income areas in the Philippines. What can we achieve by providing spaces for neighbors to do their daily activities together? What do we want to achieve by doing that? My focus is on spaces that are mostly outside, inbetween the houses and can be appropriated by the neighbors. Spaces that can be used by the residents of the surrounding buildings, but not by the public. Spaces inbetween private and public space.

Problem/Question

After a studytrip to Manila in the Philippines I started thinking about the lives of the residents in some of the re-settlement areas we had been visiting. One scene got stuck in my mind and it was in St Hannibal Housing Project that I saw three women sitting on the ground, underneath a roof, washing up clothes. They were talking to each other and seemed to have a quite nice moment there in the shadow despite their uncomfortable positions on the ground, bending their backs and lifting heavy tubs with wet clothes and water.

What struck me afterwards was: why isn't there more spaces planned in these areas for people to meet eachother and share their daily activities? It is a country where the community and the family are very important, you stick together within the neighbourhood and help eachother. In some squatter sites and other crammed housing areas people didn't

have space inside their home for cooking, doing laundry or watching TV so instead they used the street outside for these activities. That meant that they were sitting next to their neighbor, working, chatting and perhaps lending tools from each other. At the same time they got to know each other and the other neighbors, they had their eyes on the street all day and they would know right away if trouble was coming. What happens then when you try to give them a better place to stay in, a bigger apartment with their own washing machine, and their own kitchen inside? The streets will be empty and the residents won't know their neighbors and won't know when trouble is coming.

Why not share spaces for daily dues to save space and create a better neighborhood feeling? Which activities is it possible to do together with your neighbors? And which are too private? How much smaller can you make the own space if you provide common space instead? How collective can you make a housing project without actually making a collective housing project? These are questions that popped up in my mind and I won't be able to answer all of them, maybe not even one of them, in this paper but I will start to investigate the subject.



Women doing laundry in St Hannibal Housing Project, Manila.

Method

I have studied earlier work on collective housing and other similar projects, mostly in Sweden, to learn more about sharing activities and spaces. I'm also going to use my own experiences from fieldstudies in Manila in the Philippines.

Definitions

Collective - I'm going to use it with the meaning shared, but not with the public only with a smaller group, for example the neighbors in one block. I wanted to make a difference between the term collective and common, since common also can mean for everyone.

“Gemenskap” - a Swedish word that is hard to translate to English and still keep the same meaning. It can be understood as community feeling or fellowship. It means something like a feeling of that you belong together with a group of people.

Housework - for the work that usually takes place in the home. In the term housework I include cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, doing the dishes, taking care of children, etc. It might be more correct to use the word reproductive activities instead but since that word is too unfamiliar to me I choose housework instead.

Functionbased spaces - with functionbased spaces I mean spaces that have one or more specific functions and that are designed in a way to fit these functions. For example a kitchen is a space based on the function of cooking.

Collective use of space

Collective housing and the middle way

The collective housing is today seen as something outdated that hippies and communists were into in the sixties and seventies. They were large families that shared everything, they shared the housework, they shared opinions and they shared bedrooms. This is off course an exaggeration but people still think it is kind of strange to live in a collective housing.

But in its simplest form the collective housing is a multiapartment building with private apartments and collective spaces, among them kitchen and dining area. The residents do not belong to any specific category but are so called normal households. They have some collective organisation, among them some kind of foodpreparation. (Palm Lindén 1992 s 15)

The positive things with collective housing are many. From an economical point of view it is more efficient than individual housing since it is possible to reduce the sizes of the private apartments in favor for the collective spaces and the collective spaces can be used

more effective than if they would have been private (Woodward et al 1989 s 41). The residents can also save money and time since they share the housework (in earlier collective housing there were staff doing the cooking and cleaning etc but since the seventies and eighties that has changed (Palm Lindén 1992 s 15)).

Another positive result that comes out of the collective housing is the community feeling. Sten Gromark writes in his critical report *Boendegemenskap* from 1983 about the importance of the community feeling within the housing area. He argues that the lack of community feeling is a problem for the whole society and that if you encouraged community feeling it would save money for the state. A better community feeling among people would reduce the psychosocial problems that come from isolation and the state wouldn't have to provide as much psychological treatment as it is forced to do today. (Gromark 1983 s 30)

There are different ways to maximize the community feeling in a neighborhood. One way to secure *gemenskap* is to let the residents be involved in the building process from the beginning, in that way they would feel like they have accomplished something together and they would have something in common and a common goal to strive towards. (Gromark 1983 s 102)

Another way is to create possibility for income generating activity in the neighborhood for the residents, it creates an activitybased *gemenskap*. The same applies to social production, like housework, even though it doesn't generate income directly, because the collective social production has a value of it's own since it results in both a household economic and a society economic value. (Gromark 1983 s 102)

The Middle Zone

Consequence and Function

The middle zone is a term translated by me from Karin Palm Lindéns Swedish term *mellanzonen*. She defines the term as the space between the private, the collective and the public space. She points out that it can also be applied on the urban environment to describe spaces that is between the private front door and the street, for example the collective backyard, the front porch or the collective path leading to the entrances. (Palm Lindén 1992 s 24) This application is the one I'm going to use since I focus mainly on the collective space outdoors, such as the backyard. I'm also going to use it even if the spaces might have specific functions; which is a contrast to the definition she gives.

Jan Gehl has also discussed the middle zone in his work, but he calls it “kantzonen”. He says that kantzonen has four different functions, as connecting line, contact space, hang around space and storage space. He means that if there is a softer transition between the private and the public space, if there are places to hang around, it increases the use of the outdoor environment and that is important for the social life. He also argues that a rich middle zone environment results in people bringing their private activities out and enrichen the public space. (Gehl 1982 s 436)

The middle zone can also be seen as a space for supervision, hallways, stairs and galleries direct the right people to the right places. It can work as a lock, to let the residents in and keep unwanted guests out if it is supervised by the residents. (Palm Lindén 1992 s 32)

The middle zone can be seen as a positive connection between people, as a transitional space between the private and the public and as a room with own possibilities where the character of multifunctional space is important.

Collective functions

BIG list

Karin Palm Lindén also discusses some guidelines developed by the BIG-group¹ on how to design a collective housing. Many of these guidelines and criteria's I think is possible to adapt also to a normal housing area. They developed a list of functionbased spaces that should be collective in a collective housing:

- Dining area and kitchen
- Room for smoking
- TV-room
- Laundry rooms
- Sauna
- Guest room
- Hobby room/Workshops
- Hallways, entrances and communication spaces

¹ The BIG-group was a group of women architects and scientists formed in 1977. They had a suggestion on how to develop collective housing that was suitable for the families of that time. (Palm Lindén 1992 s 49)

This list is from 1982 and developed for the Swedish housing market. The situation in the Philippines and in Manila is of course different. But I think some of the spaces could be important there as well.

A collective dining area could be necessary, it could be a place where the neighbors meet and eat together, maybe not everyday but at least occasional and at holidays. It could be used also when some families have guests and they don't have enough space to eat inside their own apartment they could use the collective dining space. The space could be designed so that it can be used for other purposes as well. It can be outside if it is shadowed and protected from the rain with a roof or something similar.

I think it is important for everyone to have their own kitchen in the apartments, as it is even in Swedish collective housing. Though it can be good with a collective kitchen for preparing larger dinners or collective feasts. A thing that often came up when we visited housing areas in Manila and interviewed residents was a wet kitchen outside. That could be collective and used by all neighbors. They could use their own kitchens inside for breakfasts and smaller meals that are easier to cook and the outside collective wet kitchen for messier stuff. They still need to be able to do the dishes both in their apartments and in the collective wet kitchen.

The TV-room is a good idea since the Filipinos from my own observations and interviews like to watch TV, movies and sing karaoke together with their family, friends and neighbors. It is difficult for them to make room for all in their small apartments so it would be good with a collective space for this. This space could also be at least half outside if shadow and rain protection is provided.

Space for doing laundry could definitely be collective. As I described earlier they already do some laundry outside, next to their neighbors. But it would have to be designed in a good and ergonomical way. This space needs of course also to be shadowed and protected from rain.

Guestroom could be a good idea since the apartments are quite small, but it wouldn't be economically defensible if the space would be empty all the time except from when there are guests. If there could be another use for the same space it could work.

Workshops are necessary for the neighbors to meet and learn from each other and others how to maintain the area, how to do a certain craft, growing vegetables or fix things. These activities might also provide some extra income for the residents. Spaces for workshops could be very multifunctional, they could be used for different activities and also

be meeting places for organisations or groups in the area as well as spaces for larger events. Depending on what activities there will be it might have to be indoors. It could be difficult to have spaces like this in every block but I think there should be at least one central space like this in the area.

When it comes to hallways, entrances and communication it should be designed so that the residents have to pass through a collective space to get inside their own private space. It could be solved by having entrances and communication in the backyard. But you still have to think about not having a “dead” facade, without doors or windows, towards the streets.

Room for smoking and sauna is not needed, if they don't want to smoke inside they can go outside, and the sauna is not needed because of the climate.

Revised list and design criteria

After going through this list I changed it and created my own list of collective functionbased spaces that could be used outside, in each block, in low income housing areas in Manila.

- Sitting area, with seats and tables, used for dining, watching TV, etc.
- Wet kitchen, for more extensive cooking and dishes.
- Laundry space
- Garden plot
- Multifunctional play/sport space

All these spaces should be made as flexible and simple as possible. The sitting area needs to be shadowed, protected from rain, provide seating and tables and it need to have some electricity connection for good lighting and the TV. For security reasons it could be a good idea if the TV is movable and can be locked in somewhere when it isn't used.

The wet kitchen needs to be simple, easy cleaned, ergonomical, have water, sewage and electricity connection. A possibility is also to have grey water filters connected to both the wet kitchen and the laundry facility so that the water can be used again for watering the garden plot. It might be expensive today but it is a good investment.

The laundry space needs to be shadowed, protected from rain in some degree, have water, sewage and grey water filter connection.

The garden plot should be used by the residents to grow crops, either divided so that every household get a small plot or they use it collective. The garden plot doesn't have to be on the ground occupying space, it could be integrated in the rest of the environment and every surface that is left over could be used for gardening. Walls and roofs can be used as well as railings on stairs and galleries. Only the imagination sets the limits since the climate is good for gardening almost anything will grow anywhere.

The multifunctional play/sport area is what it says it is, a space designed to encourage play and sports in any kind. Since the Filipinos are especially into basket ball and pool, providing possibilities for those sports could be a good idea. You don't need a big basket ball court in every block, all you need is a place to put up the basket and some free ground space in front of it. This free ground space could be used for different plays as well. It should be at least partly shadowed and it is good if the shadowing device also can be integrated in the play, if it provides possibilities to hang swings in or to climb up in. The pool table needs to be covered by a roof to protect it from the sun and the rain. If the pool table is moveable and/or foldable it is easy to put it up when you use it and then put it away again. If not the residents have to decide if they really want to give space for it or if they can do without it. It is not as flexible as other activities.



Pool table in Damayang Lagi, Manila.

Conclusion

When designing the collective outdoor space in low income areas there are a number of things to take into consideration. What do we want to achieve? We want the residents to spend time together, get to know each other, give them a social network within the neighborhood that can be useful both for them and for others. We want to avoid isolation and social psychological problems from lack of social contact. We also want to build up a feeling of trust in the neighborhood which will help the residents to feel safe and be safe.

At the same time we want to do this with as little expensive as possible, in the simplest way as possible and as space effective as possible. This because the income group we address has to be able to afford their housing, they have to be able to if not be part of the building process of the area so at least be part of the maintenance of it and whatever company or municipality is going to finance or produce the project has to be sure of that it is a good investment.

How can we achieve this? I think that if the number of things I've discussed earlier is taken into consideration at an early stage in the planning process this can be achieved. There are definitely some thoughts in the collective housing idea that is useful in other types of projects as well. In collective housing projects the middle zone has been more thought of as important than in other housing projects. In Manila we saw that the middle zone, or what could be used as a middle zone, was often not thought of at all. There were the private spaces inside the residents apartments and then there were the public outdoor space, almost nothing inbetween. In some projects there were communicative spaces that worked as a middle zone but they were poorly designed and lacked functionality other than just the communication function. This led to bad maintenance and a feeling of unsafety.

I think that the middle zone is important in all housing projects and especially in low-income areas. But it must be useful, there must be functions to make it economical sustainable and also social sustainable. If we can provide collective spaces we can minimize the private space, although it would still fill the basic needs. We don't want to force the residents out of their homes because their apartments are too small, we want them to choose to use the middle zone instead.

I finish by quoting a piece of Karin Palm Lindéns report on collective housing and the middle zone:

“The middle zone should therefore be a multifunctional, non-controlling and non-forcing room.” (Palm Lindén 1992 s 198)

References

Gehl, Jan

1980 *Livet Mellem Husene. Udeaktiviteter og udemiljøer.* Arkitektens Forlag, København.

Gromark, Sten

1983 *Boendegemenskap.* Göteborg Chalmers Tekniska Högskola
ISSN 0281-2215

Palm Lindén, Karin

1992 *Kollektivhuset och Mellanzonen.* Byggnadsfunktionslära, Arkitektursektionen, Lunds Universitet.
ISBN 9177400437

Woodward, Alison, D U Vestbro and M-B Grossman

1989 *Den Nya Generationen Kollektivhus.* Byggnadsfunktionsrådet, Stockholm
ISBN 91-540-5081-2