

Gender, Environment and Development

A part of the population underestimated

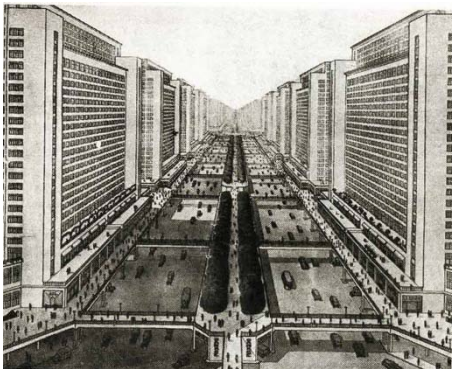


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1 Urban Shelter Design Development

During the last century, the world has changed a lot. The industrialisation in the early 30's metamorphosed the urban face. The cities started to grow and to modernise in the most advanced countries. The "North" with the colonies transmit some of these ideologies to the "South". With the World wars, the goals of the European cities changed, the purpose is now to reconstruct as in the rest of the world it is to urbanise. Thousands of people have to be relocated, fast and easily. Lot of different urbanism theories emerged trying to find new solutions to the urban situation. In Europe the functionalism is the new model of planning. The urbanists and architects are united around one common idea, rationalise the cities and organise it by functions. This creates in France the "Grands Ensembles" with Le Corbusier's "cite radieuse". These ideas are a total disaster that we can observe now. The people that are living there (most of time low incomes earners) are far away from the center of the city, excluded and turn into themselves. This kind large scale, high rise concrete buildings without any context and surrounding emerged everywhere in Europe in the 50's and the effects (Suburban crisis) are visible since a few years. This was in general linked to the new economical model the Keynesianism.



Le Corbusier – La ville Radieuse
Paper project¹



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In Europe in the 60's a huge crisis start to be visible, the post war generation does not agree with the old generation. The movement grows and grows to

¹ <http://hida35.blogspot.fr/> Mai 2012

² <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr> Mai 2012

explode in May 1968 at the same period as the economical crisis (petrol crisis 1973).

This leads to the liberation of the colonies (the decolonisation from the early 60's). From this period, the cities started to evolve very differently in the "South" and in the "North".

In the 70's, the "South" had to readjust economically and socially. At the same period, the world economy is falling. The conjuncture is hard and the priorities of the "South" countries is not in the development of the cities. At the same time in the "North", the automobile invades the cities which are readapted to that new way of circulation. The petrol, textile, and metal crisis questioned the model of the functionalist cities. The optimisation of this model seems not effective anymore.

The post colonialism changed also a lot the cities in the "South", continuing to use the western master planning model and trying to adapt them at their new society. During the inter-war and post-war periods, master plans were usually prepared by foreign planners ³. The model is often not well adapted to the climate and society and they function really poorly. "As in Western Europe, master planning activity here peaked in the two decades following the second world war. This was linked to the need for reconstruction (...), the redistribution of population related to partition and decolonisation, the creation of new capitals for the newly independent countries, and as a response to rapid population and urban growth."¹

The urban growth is an important issue in urbanisation, it has been slowly admitted in the "Northern" countries but in the "Southern" the peak has been really fast. "UN projections suggest that over the next 30 years virtually all of the world's population growth will occur in the urban areas of low- and middle-income countries."⁴ The development of the cities in the developing countries has been quite fast and the authorities had to deal with the overpopulation and the lack of dwellings. The rural families moved with the hope for better opportunities that most of time they did not find. The number of informal settlements increased a lot during the last decades and the cities now reached a breaking point. In Metro

³ Planning and Housing in the Rapidly Urbanising World, Paul Jenkins, Harry Smith and Ya Ping Wang

⁴ Task force : Improving the lives of slum dwellers, a home in a city, millennium project

Manila, the situation is barely livable, the traffic is present everywhere, the informal settlements are almost half of the city. The authorities, because of partnerships, prefer to build everything in concrete rather than to search for new innovations and techniques that could cost less and be more effective. Economical goals are holding the residents in hostage. The early ideas of self-build housing are promising but not developed enough and not accepted everywhere.

Even if the situation is most of time getting better and the developing countries are starting to rethink the cities, the inequalities are still more than obvious and the standard of living is really low.

The new criterias of good planning and housing are now sustainability and quality. The difficulty is that, most of time, sustainability costs a lot but as long as a design is good, it is at my sense always sustainable because it allows comfort of living without increasing the resources needed. With those goals, the emergence of the “Habitat Agenda” tries to focus on sustainability and urban development but also on urban poverty and slum eradication. “The re-emergence of global conferences in the 1990s reflected the changing global political and economic context. (...) The two principals emerging themes of this normative agenda at the turn of the millennium were a renewed focus on alleviating poverty and the role of establishing human rights, including in the human settlements sector.”³

With these conferences, an alliance between governments is created with the same goals and hopes. Considering these goals, they defined targets to reach within the next few years. They are called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). “The agency UN-Habitat has published two recent reports on how it interprets the MDGs in relation to shelter and human settlements (...) and these represent important summaries of current dominant approaches to planning and housing from the international perspective.”⁵

A lot of new goals and worries have emerged during the 1990s and continued into the new millennium. It shows that people start to be conscious and aware of what’s going on and what are the issues. This could lead to new masterplanning and I think it is the role of our generation of architects to resolve these problems.

⁵ Planning and Housing in the Rapidly Urbanising World, Paul Jenkins, Harry Smith and Ya Ping Wang

2 Factors Shaping Urban Shelter Design

From my studies and my social environment I am used to think a lot in terms of social aspects. I think that if a community is working, the people can do great things together. The only thing they need is the possibilities to do so and some help. In Metro Manila, the women in low income families are most of the time not working for salary and are raising the children at home. In my idea, their potential is underestimated.

“Since the late ‘80’s the link between Gender, Environment and Development (GED) has emerged as an area of special interest for researchers, policy makers and activists”.⁶ To give a clue of what is the link between these three “words”, we should start by defining them. “The term of *Gender* as it is used here, refers to culturally and historically specific concepts of femininity and masculinity, and the power relations between men and women (*Schrijvers 1993*).”⁴ Gender has to be differentiated from sex. It has to be connected with the social construction of sex roles and relations between the sexes. Gender could say that if women are actually more involved in taking care of plants and environment, it is not because it is in their genes but because it is how they have been told. Men and women all over the world have their own spheres of interests and their own attributed tasks.

The term *environment* refers to natural resources and could also be covered by the term of ecology.

The term *development* refers to “economic, socio-political and cultural processes of change in human societies (*Schrijvers 1993*).”⁴ In this essay the term development is associated to the development of the way standard of living and to the income of the family. At the larger scale it is linked to the enrichment of a neighbourhood and a district.

“The literature shows that three strongly interrelated factors are important to explain why gender, environment and development are so closely connected. These are the sexual division of labour, the “feminization of poverty” and gender ideology”.⁴ From sexual division of labour, especially in poor rural environment, the women are the ones taking care of the land, they are the ones having the

⁶ Gender Environment and Development, a guide to the literature, Heleen van den Hombergh

knowledge and they are more able to protect the land. Also because of the feminization of poverty, women and especially single mothers need to produce food as an additional source of income. The gender ideology can explain also that the women are conditioned to stay at home to raise the children so they are close to the land around the house and can make this duty at the same time as looking after the children.

My statement is that the role of women in Metro Manila is underestimated and they could be an important source of income for the families. “To some extent, the factors mentioned above: sexual division of labour, feminization of poverty and gender ideology are also important for the relationship of Northern women to the environment. In the industrialized countries, as well as in the South, women are responsible for caring and feeding, they are overrepresented in the low income categories, and underrepresented in decision-making bodies.”⁷

At the first world conference on women, 1975 in Mexico-city, the « women and environment » issue was brought into public consciousness by the indian physicist Vandana Shiva.⁸ She reported the Chipko community exemple in the Himalya. This story became after one of the major leading exemple in term of “Gender and environment” theories. “. The Chipko women tried to protect the trees of the woodlands they owned in common against commercialization and destruction by embracing them. The wood was their reservoir of nutrition, materials for house building and for small goods. Governmental and industrial interests denied the Chipko people their traditional right to the commons and tried to expropriate them.”⁶

This proves that in allowing a community life by the design, it is possible to make much more. One people alone can do a few things but if more people are united with the same ideas and the same goal they can have a way bigger impact and maybe leave a foot print in the world for many years. This kind of movement of women has been during the recent decades more and more common. This is

⁷ Gender Environment and Development, a guide to the literature, Heleen van den Hombergh

⁸ Research on Gender, the Environment and Sustainable Development Studies on Gender Impact Assessment of the Programmes of the 5th Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration

also linked to the feminist movement and especially the “Eco-feminism”. My goal here is not to understand why women are more involved in environment protection and taking care but to state this aspect and to think how it is possible to emphasise it. The difference between the male and female sexual organs seems to be a reason for centuries of social construction of gender. If women are indeed closer to nature because of that, a good idea could be to think about it in the design.

In the process of building low income housing, the women shouldn't be forgot. By involving them in the neighbourhood life, they can allow the entire neighbourhood to upgrade. Since decades, sustainability and ecology are at the center of all preoccupation and especially in architecture. By creating urban agriculture in low income housings, the families can improve their income by selling the products or keeping them for the use of the family. However, this practice can't be isolated and has to be part of a bigger movement and ideology.

3 Design of Sustainable Shelter and Neighbourhoods

“We must first eradicate poverty before we can worry about the environment!”

“On the contrary: environment degradation is the major cause of poverty in the first place!”

“Once we realise that “the environment” actually means soil- to grow food; water- to drink, wash and irrigate crops; and air to breathe, and a host of natural food and medicinal products, it becomes clear that preserving “the environment” actually means safeguarding food production; sustaining livelihoods and preserving health. Poverty reduction, economic growth and the maintenance of life-supporting environmental resources are therefore inextricably linked.”⁹

Considering that preserving environment is not just another hipster movement, authorities should be a lot more conscious about the goals behind this. Urban agriculture should be introduced in the developing countries, allowing the families to increase their income. At the same time, the community could organize

⁹ Poverty-Environment-Gender Linkages, DAC Journal 2001, Volume 2, No. 4

infrastructures where women can take turns in children's supervision. That organization can allow more time for the women. Also by involving the children in the activities, they can be introduced to the basis of agriculture. The laundry is also an activity that women are doing together if they can. By building facilities where they can buy common washing machines with their capital, it will save money, electricity and space. An outside space should also be provided. The rain water should at the same time be collected in order to reuse it for urban agriculture and laundry rooms. Allowing more space for community living can have a big impact on the standard of the neighbourhood.

4 The Role of Architects

The role of architects is to provide good quality of living for the population. Every country is different and the population have different criterias of what is a good quality of living. The future inhabitants should be more involved in the primary design of the neighbourhood, it is a good way to know what is important or not. During a field trip with the studio Urban Shelter 2012 of Lund University in the Philippines, I observed that some offices (TAO Philippines) were working with the population, making workshops and conferences. People should be taught how to take care of the environment and how to take advantage of reusing water, composting and practicing urban agriculture at the same time. In one of the project we visited (St Hannibal), the inhabitants, before moving in, had to sign a chart saying that they will have to take care of plants. In doing that, the population started getting interested. After the construction, every month, or almost, conferences are held in a common room inside the neighbourhood.

In France, most of time the population is not involved in the design and authorities think that they do not need to learn about anything. However, I had the occasion last year to be involved in an interesting project. It was a creation of an elderly house for feminist women. Because of legislation, it took some time for the authorities to accept such a community but the result is quite interesting and the old women participated a lot. Involving the population is always the beginning of a bigger scale dynamique and that can have a lot of influences on the every day life.

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