

# A Catalyst for Creating Identity

## The Hybrid Landscape as a tool for the Making of Place



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### Introduction

This paper will address the issue of identity and space. The phenomenon is common all over the world so my focus and examples in this paper will come from the city of Metro Manila in the Philippines. As many developing countries the Philippines are having big issues with informal settlement and all the problems that comes with it. Due to the ongoing trend of increasing urbanisation, the city cannot provide adequate housing for the many immigrants. To add to that problem, people arriving to the cities have lost much of their identity. It is often closely linked to a physical space and community, which they have left behind. They are put into a new context where they have to find a new identity. Without any connection to the land or the social context of that space, this can be very hard for many. This poses the question of what it is that makes us connect and identify ourselves to a certain space? And can planners influence the process of identification? To try to answer these questions and I have looked into different theories, such as *The Making of Place* (Sime 1986), *The Hybrid Landscape* (Quayle et al 1997) *Planning policies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century* (Jenkins et al 2007). Added to those theories are my own observations while being in Metro Manila.

## Point of Departure

The organisation Habitat for Humanity relocated a big group of families from the waterways of Pasay City in Metro Manila. In an effort to enlighten the inhabitants of the importance of the local environment, they encouraged each household to acquire ten plants to look after and maintain. The plants were placed in the public space and maintained by the inhabitants. In a short period of time there was a well-functioning social community. The plants acted as more than just an educational tool, they brought the community closer together and connected the community to the physical surroundings.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by this example I wanted to look more into what the common flowerpot or pot<sup>2</sup> can give to people in the sense of identity. Can it be used as a tool in creating identity?

## Identity and the Making of Place

Jonathan Sime (1987) writes about a paradigm during the 1970's when architectural theory reacted against architects' fixation with the physical aspects of architecture and the disregard for other aspects. They feared that this structuralistic design development would lead to alienating spaces, where people would feel foreign and disconnected. By examining different architectural theorist of the day such as Christian Norberg-Schulz, Christopher Alexander and Kevin Lynch, Sime tries to understand the growing trend in leaving the conventional urban planning. The conclusion that Sime makes is that architects and planners should be more concerned about of creating *places* instead of *spaces*. By the term place, Sime borrows the Aristotelian notion of *Topos*, meaning a space or a location where people feel a sense of belonging. (Sime 1986:49-52) Continuing on Sime's train of thought, the German philosopher Heidegger writes about the importance to dwell. To dwell, is for Heidegger to be at peace with the surroundings in a protected place. A sense of belonging in architecture. Through linguistics, he finds that the German verb *bauen* and the English verb *to build* originate from the same word, *buan*. So does the word dwell. *Buan* is also the rot for the German verb *sein* and the English *to be*. In this way one can say that: to build is to be – I build therefore I am. The conclusion Heidegger draws is that

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<sup>1</sup> Study visit to St. Hannibal Community in Pasay City, 2014-02-27

<sup>2</sup> In this paper the word *pot* means a container holding soil with plants in it.

there is a strong link between identity and the physical environment. (Leupen et al 2011: 15-21) The term *place*, used by Sime, implies a strong emotional tie between a person and a certain space. This tie can be for a short duration of time or a longer lasting one. He concludes with saying that the “best” architecture should be about *place-making* instead of *space-making*. (Sime 1986:49-52)

*“An individual, in creating a place, is involved by definition in the appropriation and personalization of a physical place through thought and action.”*

(Sime 1986:60)

This quote shows that the process of place-making is in large parts a mind process. It is also a subjective experience. The user defines place by interacting with a certain space through thought and actions. (Sime 1986:60) This process can be divided into three major components: activities/actions of the individual, the “taming” of the physical environment providing security and a common meaning, conception, symbol or identity for the people dwelling in that space. (Sime 1986:55)



Figure 1: The Place-making process according to Sime.

Going back to the example of St. Hannibal one can see that these initial requirements were met. The plants created a social activity. They provided a sense of security in the appropriation and dividing of the public space into smaller spaces. In the end, the plants gave the neighbourhood a clear identity.<sup>3</sup>

A common failure of architects is to not acknowledging behaviour patterns and experience which give buildings and physical environments meaning to people. Even though the user defines places, architects still have an important role to fill in making this happen. Sime makes two suggestions how this can be done. The architect should create structures and spaces in a way so that the inhabitants can use them in a flexible way, in this way allowing personalisation of the spaces. Secondly, the architect should make the features of the design favour the creation of place instead of emphasizing space. (Sime 1986:60)

### Paradigms within Planning Policy during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The development of city planning during the twentieth century can be seen as three different phases or paradigms. As the name suggest, the three different eras can be seen as paradigms to one and another. This is due to their nature and chronological order. The subsequent principle was a reaction to the previous one. Even though the different policies developed in a chronological fashion they did not supersede one another. They co-existed and also merged with one another. The policies developed where industries and the economies were strong, the so-called *Core Countries*. The developing world followed in its footsteps either by receiving polices from a colonial government or as a direct import by the independent country itself. In chronological order they are:

- The *Design based planning*: to command and control. It was planning through the "objectivity" of blueprints and master plans.
- The second is planning through *Structuralism*. Rational decisions based upon large quantities of data. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Study visit to St. Hannibal Community in Pasay City, 2014-02-27

<sup>4</sup> This paradigm was not widespread throughout the developing world and will therefore not be described further in this paper.

- Lastly, the third can be summoned up as the *user-participatory* process where planning is considered a democratic process. The users themselves should have an insight and a saying in the process of what is to be planned.

(Jenkins et al 2007: 129)

It is a generalisation to see the different policies as opposites. They are intertwined and thus related to one another. It is seldom that we see them carried out in their purest ideological form. The first paradigm was that which modernism brought along. Modernism as a movement had a very strong focus on the creation of a “better” future. Through rationality and objective decision-making, a better and improved future state could be developed. The tool for creating this future was considered to be extensive master-plans. The benefit of the master plan was the inscribing of a desired future. To carry out these master-plans, decision makers turned to planners who were considered to be “neutral” experts. They had the ability to see the greater picture, which ordinary people could not. Based on the notion that planners were neutral, all decision-making were considered to be objective and therefore for the greater good of society. The result was a rigid system of long term, static plans concerning land-use and the future development of the built environment. The main critic against this principle lay in the obsession of the physical and its disregard of social and economic factors. Another problem was the inflexibility of the long term planning, especially in city areas where development was moving faster than anticipated. Core countries have in large part abandoned this planning principle but it is still widely used throughout the developing world as a strategy in urban planning. This mainly for the benefits in controlling land and land-use.

(Jenkins et al 2007: 130-133)

### User participatory design and action planning

Master planning showed its flaws when it was applied onto the cities of the developing world. Through an increasing urbanisation rate, the respect for zoning and land management was ignored by the immigrants. Informal settlements started to appear and this was not accounted for in the master planning. Its static flaws had begun to show. A master plan in itself was literary foreign to the people

it was supposed to order. It was apparent, that master planning was an elitist and technocratic way of ordering the built environment. As a response to the long term and static master plans the more local and small-scale planning also referred to as *action planning* arose. Instead of focusing on long-term goals it addressed more urgent key issues and problems which could be sorted out by direct action. The process is democratic in its roots, stating that planning is a political process, decision have to be made and the users should be involved in that process. This leads up to the community action planning where the future neighbourhood community gets to participate in the planning and execution of the building process. In developing countries this strategy is often done used by aid organisations and is not a formal part of urban planning. The modernistic planning by design is still the formal policy in most developing countries. (Jenkins et al 2007: 149-152)

To summaries, the development in urban planning has gone from a technocratic top down approach to a more democratic and bottom up approach. The benefit of Design based planning is the speed of the process, fast and reviewable results and easy to control. The downside is that it is very vulnerable to sudden changes in the demography or social system. People also feel alienated due to its technocratic nature. The participatory process is in many ways the opposite. It is effective and dynamic in local problem solving. It is democratic and people feel satisfied with being a part of the process. The disadvantages are that democracy takes time, thereby making it a slow process. It is hard to apply this principle to big scale project - thereby losing the overall grasp and long term goals of city planning. (Jenkins et al 2007: 129-152)

## Hybrid landscapes

As a response to bridge the gap between the two leading planning paradigms, the design based and the participatory is the *Hybrid Landscape*. The term Hybrid Landscape as defined by Quayle and Driessen van der Lieck (1997) is closely related to Sime's place-making theory. In contrast to Sime, they give very concrete suggestions into what makes people connect and dwell in their neighbourhood. They base their solution on two principles, the first is that

planners have a unique expertise in how to structure and arrange the physical environment on a larger scale. The second is the recognition that inhabitants have a unique insight, memories, experience and more knowledge about their living space than any planner. In combining the two principles, the outcome would be a more custom fit solution (Quayle et al 1997:100-101)

*"...in a new form of public landscape called the hybrid landscape because it integrates the two diverse place making processes that traditionally generate public spaces and individually shaped private ones. The result is a landscape that has communally accepted structure and rules while displaying the richness and diversity that only comes from the creativity of many individuals."*

(Quayle et al 1997: 100)

In this statement the inhabitants are given the responsibility to plan their local environment while the architects functions more of a supervisor, giving the neighbourhood a physical structure. The hybrid landscape is therefore a fusion of two planning processes, the architect's overall structure and the inhabitants personalised on a local scale. The planner's landscape usually fills the functional requirements of the neighbourhood while the community's fill the social. By giving the dwellers influence over their environment, it is easier to appropriate public space, making it their own. A place-making process, as suggested by Sime earlier. By appropriating public space in the close vicinity of one's home, the dwellers will increase the sense of security and the sense of belonging to a physical environment. (Habraken 1998:126-128)

In relation to the hybrid landscape Marilouise Jonas has studied how hybrid landscapes have developed in Tokyo. By observing micro gardens, consisting of only pots, she has discovered how they play a vital role in the place-making process and identity of that community. The neighbourhood is a hybrid landscape that consists of planned infrastructure and housing. On the local level its main feature is the *potscape*, a coherent green landscape of plants in pots, made by the inhabitants. Due to the planners insisting on hard surface material, all gardens has

to be kept in pots. According to Jonas the potscape fills many functions and benefits:

- As a recreational garden.
- As a catalyst for human interaction.
- Providing a sense of security and privacy.
- A friendly reminder to dwellers and visitors to keep the streets clean.
- The pots create and display the richness and diversity of the community.
- Low in cost and maintenance.

(Jonas 2007: 18-20)

Jonas shows many examples of how the pots acts as actors in appropriating space, creating an overlapping systems of private, semiprivate, semi-public and public spaces. Taller plants hide the interior of a dwelling by blocking the windows, but still the dwellers can have a clear view onto the street. The pots can create small walls that direct movement in and around the entrances of the dwelling, giving the dwellers the control over that specific space. The street in itself is divided into smaller spaces by the orientation of the pots, making the interior spaces of the dwelling come out into the streets. There is overall a strong sense social control and the neighbourhood has a clear identity. Jonas reflects on what planners can do in order to create or encourage the hybrid landscapes to appear. She sees a paradox in planners wanting to plan something spontaneous. It is often messy, unstructured and without a plan. What the architects can do is more of what “they should not do”. (Jonas 2007:21-27),



## Case study 1: Habitat for Humanity – St. Hannibal in Pasay City



1. The main courtyard of the St. Hannibal neighbourhood. Overlapping appropriated spaces from the private dwelling onto the public courtyard. The neighbourhood started as relocation project for informal settlers living along the local waterways.

The housing units and the overall planning was design by the organisation Habitat for Humanity but in large parts built by the inhabitants themselves. The public space consists of a large courtyard at the entry point of the neighbourhood and then the space is divided into smaller streets and alleys. All the housing units' entrances are oriented to street. The outdoor space is divided into smaller spaces by front porches on access balconies and alcoves created by projecting walls on the ground floor. These front porches are clearly marked as territory by pots and greenery. On the access balconies the pots are hanged on the railings, not to block the passage and on the ground level the pots are located on the ground close to the entrances of the dwellings creating a semi-private sphere around the entry. The plants mainly for leisure, they are chosen for their aesthetics. Very little food production if any. All the plants are in pots due to the hard surfaces covering all outdoor space.



2. Appropriated public space in close vicinity to the dwellings. The access balcony and the projecting walls dividess exterior space into smaller spaces making them easier to appropriate.

The pots in themselves showcase a great variety of materials such as plastic bottles, pots in plastic and clay, plastic buckets, plastic bags, metal trays and concrete hollow blocks. One can also spot that the different pot gardens show diversity in character. Some are more planned with more elaborate plants and neatly positioned pots in the same materials. While others are more messy and chaotic in organisation. In these cases there seem to be a more progressive “you take what you have”-approach in the choice of plant material and pots. In the end this shows the wide spectrum of personalities that live next to each other.



3. The hanging gardens of the access balconies

The planning process of St Hannibal can be related to the last of the three planning paradigms, the user participatory. The use of this planning principle was foreseen by Jenkins (et al. 2007) in that it is mostly aid organisations who apply this planning principle. In the physical context one could say that this is a good example of a hybrid landscape. The planned, overall structure was provided by Habitat for Humanity. The small scale planning and personalisation was in large part made by the inhabitants themselves. Supported by the initiative from Habitat for Humanity's on growing plants, the community could find an identity on their own. St. Hannibal is also a good example of a potscape, a coherent landscape of

pots that form small gardens for all the inhabitants to enjoy. The overall feeling when being there was that people were satisfied with their physical environment.<sup>5</sup>

## Case study 2: NHA housing in the Western Commonwealth District

National Housing Agency created these housing units to relocate informal settlers. The smallest building units consist of 40 living units distributed over five floors. The facades and the exterior tell nothing of the small and intimate scale that resides on the inside. The buildings are very closed off from their surroundings. The scale of the outside environment suited for the car. The streets are wide and the space between building and the street is considered a left over space. The inside is divided between the semi- public space of a T-shaped access corridor with good cross ventilation and the small living units. Each unit has its entrance to the internal corridor. The only contact with the outdoors is through windows inside the living unit and through large openings in the staircases. The corridors in themselves, which serve as a social space, are very clean and without any decorations. The dwellings are closed off by steel gratings creating a distinct border between the private domain and the public.

The planning principle of NHA can be seen as planning by design. The result in this case is a neighbourhood where people stay inside their own dwelling. This due to the fact that it is the only space they have managed to make their own. It is a place where they feel safe. The corridors do not allow any modifications due to the dimensions of the space. The space has great integrity; the use is limited to access. When talking to inhabitants, they usually know the neighbours but they do



*4. The leftover space between the street and the building.*

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<sup>5</sup> Study visit to St. Hannibal Community in Pasay City, 2014-02-27

not socialise with them in the public space, this happen within the dwelling. The public spaces are too mono-functional for people to feel encourage in appropriating them. The fact that the living units do not connect to the outside and the public space also creates a lack of belonging. The entrances are all situated toward the interior of the building, even in the ground floor. This gives no “natural” use of pots, as they mostly appear in connection to the outdoors. Even though the corridor is on a human scale, it would feel wrong to put pots inside this neatly cleaned corridor. Firstly because they would be in the way and irritate the neighbours. Secondly because there is not sufficient light to make them thrive and would even further emphasise them being out of place. The environment do not encourage a hybrid landscape, in the sense that the inhabitants have to adapt to the physical environment and not the opposite. The environment does not want to be appropriated.<sup>6</sup>



*5. The very clean and empty access corridor.*

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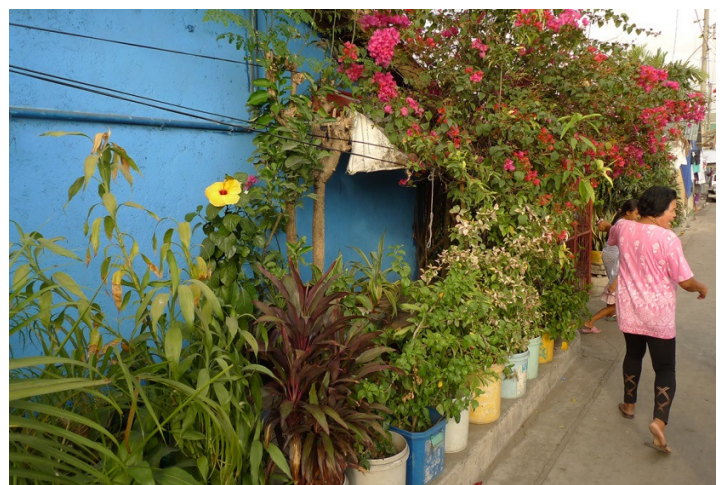
<sup>6</sup> Study visit to NHA housing in Western Commonwealth, Quezon City, 2014-02-19  
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### Case Study 3: Gawad Kalinga Village in Baseco



6. Throughfare; The scale of the car.

The organisation Gawad Kalinga target low income groups for their village projects in Baseco. The housing is built and planned by the organisation. The neighbourhood consists mainly of single story houses. The houses in themselves have in many cases been extended in the back and front. The fronts often serve as verandas where visitors are received. It is an open structure with good ventilation and transparency for the owner to observe the street. All houses open up to the outdoors and a street. The area has a system of smaller alleyways and larger thoroughfares that are intended for car traffic. In our interview we could tell that security was an issue along the main streets, where car traffic was allowed. There was also a major decrease in greenery along the main streets. One could see that there was less of appropriation in and around the dwellings. It was hot during daytime and the inhabitants felt more of living along a road than in a neighbourhood. Inside the allyway system the scale was much smaller and intimate. Along the alleys the doors were open, pots and greenery decorated the entrances of the dwellings. From the interviews we



7. Alleyway. Plastic pots with larger greenery.

could deduct that the families living here were more at peace with their surroundings. They also felt more as a part of a community. The difference in attitude was remarkable. It was as if the community was split into different neighbourhoods with different conceptions of the same neighbourhood. The alleyway system can be seen as a hybrid landscape. The overall physical structure has been provided by Gawad Kalinga and the local scale has been allowed to be altered by the inhabitants. Inside the alleyways one could say that there is a potscape, not as diverse as the one in St. Hannibal but still ever present greenery. In combination with the verandas they form a semi-private zone in the streets where guests and visitors are received instead of being inside the closed walls of their dwelling. <sup>7</sup>



8. Verandas in the alleyway system.

#### Case Study 4 – Quezon City Bistekville II



9. The front porch littered with pots.

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<sup>7</sup> Study visit to Gawad Kalinga Village in Baseco, Manila City, 2014-02-18

The Bistekville projects are an initiative from Quezon City in creating adequate housing for low income groups. The neighborhood is planned and built by the city. The housing units are single story row houses. The entrances are towards the streets and the outdoors. When visiting this area, which is still under construction, it comes as a bit of a chock when seeing all the greenery in front of the houses by the newly formed neighbors. The areas just in front of the houses are littered with pots and plants. Some are planted directly into the ground and some are in pots. What they have in common is the location, in front of the entrance. They clearly mark the front porch as a semi private space. Unlike other housing projects with the same typology of houses, the space in front of the house has been left undone by the planners due to problem with funding. This allows the inhabitants to form their own front towards the street. This has unintentionally created a small garden space. One can easily see the resemblance to St. Hannibal; the community has already come together to plant vegetable and root crops in the common green areas along the streets. Even though the scale of the street is quite big compared to Gawad Kalinga Village and St. Hannibal there is still an intimate experience. This may be due to extensive use of plants in front of the houses making for a smooth transition from the house onto the street. One could also see that the inhabitants dwell in and outside their home, on the streets during the evening. Through interviews we could deduct that growing different crops was a common conversation topic. In this case the lack of funds was something that benefitted the inhabitants in end. It created an opportunity to personalize and appropriate the public space. In that sense, it is an unintended hybrid landscape.<sup>8</sup>



10. Left: Crop growing. 11. Above: Front porch framed by pots

<sup>8</sup>Study visit to Bistekville II, Quezon City, 2014-02-19

## Conclusions

What makes us relate to a space and how can it be done?

In making people relate and identify themselves to a place, they must be a part of shaping that space. If one goes back to Heidegger's notion; in the creating of place — one creates oneself. It is vital to make the future community or inhabitants a part of the space-making process.

Can architects and planners influence this process?

There is a good possibility to do so. As seen in the St Hannibal community, it was actually the planners that introduced common activities such as house building and gardening which gave the community its foundations. In combining the different strengths that reside within a project, as the hybrid landscape suggests, it is easy to see the benefits.

Can pots and greenery work as a tool in creating cohesion between community and neighborhood? Absolutely, if the community gets to develop it in their own way. In this architects have a great responsibility not to “over” design space so that they become mono-functional, as in the NHA housing in the Commonwealth district. Other concrete strategies in encouraging potscape might be:

- Human scaled spaces in connection to the dwelling
- The dwelling's entrance should be facing a street or public space
- The possibility of subdividing a larger public space
- Entrances to the outdoors
- An open and free area in front of the house

Planners should respond to spontaneous actions, made by the community, by recognising its importance to the dwellers in terms of memories, relation and identity for the community. Not to impose rules and regulations. Give the community the responsibility to shape their neighbourhood, they are the ones who are going to live there.



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