

Urbanization and Segregation

What can bridge inequalities in urban life?



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1 Introduction

Honestly, I had not really an idea what to expect when we left Copenhagen on February 15th heading to Metro Manila. Lonely Planet describes the metropolis as a true Asian megacity: *‘Skyscrapers pierce the hazy sky, mushrooming from the grinding poverty of expansive shantytowns while gleaming malls foreshadow Manila’s brave new air-conditioned world’* (Bloom, 2012). Once we arrived in Manila I was overwhelmed by waves of experiences, by the contrasts of urban life, by its people, its dynamics and segregation.

Contrasts in life hard to describe and hard to face. Contrasts that make me speechless first and not really able to process what I see. A lecture by architect Grace Ramos at the University of Philippines helped me to understand Manila as a city of coexistence, a city with two lifestyles – two faces – being separated and at the same time dependent on each other. Although living immediately next to each other the heterogeneous groups are separated from each other socially, economically and spatially.

In this paper I want to explore how urban development contributes to the existing inequality of lifestyles in Mega Cities like Metro Manila and how we, as architects and urban planners, can reduce the incoherence.

2 Urban Shelter Development

The phenomenon of different lifestyles within an urban society is nothing new. Extreme inequality between different groups existed to almost the same extent in the European cities of the 19th century. In that time industrialization and working opportunities caused an increased movement from the countryside towards the cities and led to crowded working class districts with problems of hygiene, illnesses and space.

While urbanization in European and other industrial cities (Chicago, St. Petersburg...) was happening concurrently with increasing labour supply and economic growth, urbanization processes in the developing countries today happen often without economic growth and have more complex reasons. Globalization and inequalities on the world market made many developing countries dependent on mono-agriculture and destroyed traditional lifestyles of peasant farmers. Further climate hazards, a lack of infrastructure (education, health, rescue facilities...) as well as armed conflicts push people from the countryside to the cities. For many people a life in the city is a promise of a wealthy future and better chances in life. (Greve, 2012)

In contrast to the urbanization of the 19th century cities in the developing countries of today are not only growing because of migration but also because of natural reproduction what leads to a growth 'with a speed unpredicted in human history'. The mega cities of today (Dhaka, Lagos, Kinshasa) are growing with a speed more than ten times faster than London in the 19th century. (Davis, 2006)

Parallel to the faster and more complex process of urbanization today, spatial segregation and fragmentation is increasing. Factors influencing segregation are complex and vary from place to place. The complexity starts with the fact that segregation can be coercive or in other cases sought by marginalized groups. Chosen segregation can happen either in order to strengthen their community (groups of immigrants) or because of fear from violence (gated communities). Further aspects reinforcing segregation are: gaps in income, obsolete legal frameworks and stigmatization of an area. (UN Habitat, 2001)

Looking at it from an urban planning perspective I would assert that one of the main factors stimulating segregation today is, that property development is mainly driven by market prices. It is not architecture or planning that shapes the cities, it is the commercial oriented and networked construction market. The value of a city is not its function as a living space it is the amount of money that can be squeezed out of every single bit of land. Decision-making is based on the commercial value of urban ground and led by corruption. This development of exclusiveness where the public money is used for private investment leads to highly segregated city structures where the cities elite consume all resources and the poor majority of citizens live in poverty. (Greve, 2012)

In Mega Cities like Metro Manila incoherence can be measured on income levels and prices for housing on the one hand, but also with differences in access to education, health care, drinking water, food, sewage, electricity and transportation. (Greve, 2012) The demand of housing and the price of land are high. This leads to high income development in the central areas with high land value and low income relocation sites far off from any infrastructure in the peripheries of the urban hub. Placed in the outskirts of the city, citizens in low income groups have poor access to public transport, good education, health care, markets, livelihood etc., because of this people rather choose to live in informal settlements surrounding the high income townships.

The importance of the factor of equality in access is also stressed in the concept paper of the seventh World Urban Forum (WUF 7) 2014 in Medellin: *'In these unequal cities the poor have less chance of finding a job, their life expectancy in birth is lower; children are less likely to enrol in school; and their occurrence of ill health is noticeably more frequent [...] the poor in general are also excluded in cultural, social and political sense.'* (World Urban Forum 7, 2014)

The significance of spatial segregation in urban development has increased in the last years. Today Inequality is seen as a universal concern, having a major impact on all aspects of human development. The coexistence of poverty and visible signs of wealth causes a risk for social tensions and political instability. Rising

inequality is considered as one of the top 'global risks'. (World Urban Forum 7, 2014)

At Istanbul+5 in 2001 UN Habitat published an information leaflet concerning spatial segregation. It is mentioned that *'in policy terms it might be more effective to eliminate quality of life differences between neighbourhoods rather than aiming to achieve social mix by changing the regulatory framework.'* Further it is not possible to have one single public policy route to improve life chances for the poor. Therefore it is considered as important that *'minority can partake in local political discussions [...] Civic life require settings in which people meet as equals, without regard to race, class or national origins.'* (UN Habitat, 2001)

WUF 7 brings equity in the centre of development, seeing it is conceptual framework and guideline for decision making, a tool needed to restructure urban policies in order to ensure shared prosperity.

The Conceptual Framework for Urban Equity in Development of WUF7 works with grouping policies into six areas: political, economic, social, spatial, social inclusion and environment. This grouping responds to the challenges faced and enables understanding what can be done on local and national level. Most relevant from the design perspective is the spatial policy group. In this group slums, gated communities, traffic congestion, gentrification and different access to public goods and services are defined as the major challenges. (World Urban Forum 7, 2014)

To sum this up, segregation is a complex problem, and it is not possible to find one general solution. As discussed at the WUF 7 the problems and the challenges are the point of departure in finding solutions. It is necessary to aim for a change in the market driven property development and work with different areas of policies. Architecture and planning is only one of many factors influencing segregation, however there is an influence and so there are possible solutions or at least improvements to be made.

3 Urban Shelter Design

Segregation from an urban design perspective has mainly been looked at, as residential segregation and analysed with quantitative methods looking at separation between ethnic groups, income levels, prices on the housing market etc. in different areas of a city. Ann Legeby argues in her thesis 'Urban Form and Urban Segregation' for a change of view from spatial location (residential segregation) to spatial relation, and uses the term *interplay segregation* describing if different groups are able to share public space. Residential segregation and interplay segregation are however interrelated and describe two sides of a matter. In the past there was a focus on the quantitative methods of residential segregation in the context of urban development, while one can notice a shift to methods of interplay segregation, looking rather on the relation between segregated areas than on the housing blocks themselves and the accessibility of public facilities. (Legeby, 2010)

Based on the theory of interplay segregation the spatial relation between segregated areas and accessibility of public spaces are key issues in combating segregation. It is the public facility and the access to public services which have the biggest ability to work against uncontrolled urban fragmentation. Providing equal access to public services as education, healthcare, transportation, etc. is one major step towards a more equal city. Public facilities like cultural centres, libraries and schools are important urban spaces to support the small housing units in formal as well as informal settlements. Offering a wide range of diverse activities and facilities is a key element to create a platform for different segregated groups. Concentrated diversity can cause conflicts and problems on the one side but also opportunities to interact and work together. The facilities can become a stage for public life, interweaving parallel lifestyles.

There are several projects around the globe which show the impact of public facilities and access to public transport. The following projects show the wide range in scale the interventions can have.

In Latin America investment in infrastructure projects, which tried to make hardly accessible and secluded areas of city more connected and integrated showed a the huge impact on development on a city level. In many cases this transportation projects were linked with public facilities as schools, sports centres and libraries and had a valuable influence on the cities social development.

Medellin in Columbia was the first city in South America where a Metrocable was built complementary to the Metro line in the valley of the city in order to broaden the access to public transport for the citizens. The Metrocable lines provide access to neighbourhoods located in the mountain foothills that surround the city, serving both, areas which are well-established and rapidly growing informal settlements. A further part of the government's social master plan program is a number of libraries located in problematic areas of the city. (Metro de Medellin, 2014)



Fig. 1: *Metrocable Medellin*



Fig. 2: *School, Sao Paolo*

Other examples of can be found in Sao Paolo, Brazil, a city which despite people's extraordinary ability to collectively organize themselves and their playfulness in dealing with cultural influences, get continuously more segregated and fragmented. Only by building stable public facilities the city was able to work against this process. Under architect Alexandre Delijaicov School buildings where used as urban key elements, functioning as educational building for pupils but working as socio-cultural institution for the surrounding neighbourhoods. (Delijaicov, 2008) The schools become a part of the public space of the city and enable people from all classes to become part of the urban life.

Another architect's cooperation developing community facilities in Sao Paolo is Urban-Think Tank with a GRATAO Community Centre, housing a music school

as well as sport facilities. The project is a follow up of the project Prototype *Gimnasio VerticalTM* in Chacao, Caracas, the sports centre is layering sports facilities vertically, serving as both, a landmark and a social meeting point. *Gimnasio VerticalTM* is used each month by 15.000 area residents and has had a big impact on the reduction of the area's crime rate. (Krasny, 2013)



Fig. 3: *Gimnasio VerticalTM*



Fig. 4: *Klong Toey Community Lantern*

In Thailand the Norwegian firm TYIN tegnestue Architects built together with students from different universities several small scale interventions creating libraries and places to play and study for the urban poor. One example is the Klong Toey Community Lantern in Bangkok a 1,2x12m long construction that servers as playground, basketball court and meeting place for the community. The project is part of a long-term strategy to improve the infrastructure and to combat the social problems in the area. (Krasny, 2013)

The scale of all this projects might be different, varying from infrastructure projects like the Metrocable in Medellin to a 14,4m² structure in Bangkok. What they have in common is a positive influence on the larger scale and socially engaged architects and their aim to work in an unconventional way with urban problems. This could also be described with the concept of urban acupuncture: By the understanding of the larger context these small inventions have the ability to impulse longer lasting development and establish new networks. *'They investigate how the greatest possible effectiveness can be achieved with the least possible financial investment.'* (Urban Catalyst, 2013)

4 The Role of Architects

As mentioned earlier in the context of Urban Shelter Development, segregation and inequality is a highly complex issue and there are many factors contributing to the existing situation. However, architecture one of this factors and has the ability to stimulate societal development.

The on-going discussion about equity in urban development shows the necessity of actions and change in urban planning and city development. The projects presented are meant to visualize that architecture can serve as a catalyst for social processes – that there is a range of individual architects working with different projects in the context of urban shelter design and social development. Individuals working in a different way – away from to the established mainstream role model of an architect. This ways of practicing architecture are practical and pragmatic, they are in different scales and rarely mentioned in traditional architectural education.

From my point of view there is a lack of awareness and communication that it is time for architecture to break with its role models, in order to gain relevance and influence in the formal and also informal development of our environment.

I think as architects today we have to be pragmatic and feasible, we have to understand the social and physical context on small scale and also globally, we should link our projects and our thinking with the theoretical discourses of our time and never lose our passion to create of good places and improve the life of people.

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Images:

Figure 1. *Metrocable Medellin* (2010) [Image]

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Figure 2. *School, Sao Paolo* [Image]

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Figure 3. *Gimnasio VerticalTM* [Image]

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Figure 4. *Klong Toey Community Lantern* [Image]

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