Meeting the other one

Enhancing the sense of security in an urban context

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1 Introduction

The city is the place of great possibilities, providing activities for income generation, education and amusement. Therefore, many people around the globe today are moving into the cities, seeking for a better life. At the same time, the city also contains the home and shelter of many people, meeting the individual's need to create its own safe space in relation to the public and urban city spaces. The sense of security is stressed to be important for enabling every person a full worthy citizenship, being able to move freely in the city and thereby being able to evolve themselves and their life quality (Björkemarken, 2009).

An increasingly common way of making ones safe space in the city, is the *gated community* (as it will be further explained later), where there is limited access into the neighbourhood. This is repeatedly seen in Metro Manila, Philippines, where field trips were conducted in a wide range of residential areas. Many people moving in to Metro Manila, will have to build makeshift shelters in informal settlements, because of lack of land and resources. A big number of low income households are thereafter involved in relocation programmes where new communities are created over a short period of time. Many middle income households also move into newly built residential areas, with the need to integrate into completely new neighbourhoods. Surrounded by the fence, residents of gated communities believe that they are thereby secured from outside the gate threats. Looking at experience in Metro Manila and acknowledged theories, this paper aims to discuss how planners can support the sense of security in an urban context, such as Metro Manila, and to what extent gated communities contribute to a safer city.

Fig. 1 Informal settlement in Metro Manila, along Philippine National Railway. Source: Wikimedia 2015

2 Planning theories for safer cities

Factors shaping the sense of insecurity

It is important to recognize the difference between *perceived* and *actual* insecurity. Studies show that fear of crime does not often correspond to actual crime ratio and that the concern is often bigger than actual experience. Perception of insecurity can however evolve into an actual insecurity, hindering people of leaving their homes and increasing polarisation of society. The absence of people will decrease informal social control whereafter crime may increase (Björkemarken, 2009).

The sense of insecurity is related to our instinct of survival and a fear of what many theorists call *the other one*, a representation of what is unknown to us. The other one is easy to blame and a collective fear can be a means for bringing people together against other people (Wikström & Olsson, 2012). Thereby, culture, personal experiences, memories and social and physical belonging will affect our perception of security. Media and social context also influence people's sense of security, by what is and what is not told to them (Björkemarken, 2009).

The social control approach – Meeting the other one

Several authors emphasize the importance of meeting other people in an informal way in our everyday lives. It is in the contact with the other one that we can build community, culture and collective conceptions about society and each other. A vivid environment of many people will increase the informal social control; and thereby, also the sense of security (Wikström, 2012).

To enable people to meet, the city needs public spaces available for everyone. Jacobs (1961) claims that public trust is created by a big number of smaller sidewalk contacts. Although small in size, together they will form a network of public respect and trust. Jacobs stresses four important qualities for a dynamic city life. She believes that the city should consist of smaller blocks with good connections, buildings of varied age with mixed use and with a high concentration of people. Thereby, the community is provided with *eyes on the street*. It is however the eyes of locally known as well as unknown people, meeting one another in the most informal way, without any demand for further engagement.

It is equally stressed that people in the city needs privacy, where one has the possibility to choose how much to share. This means a balance of private and public spaces with a different degree of extended private life (Jacobs, 1961). Gehl (2011) believes that a desired social structure can be supported by a corresponding physical structure, with common spaces on several levels. Gradual transitions from private to public spaces will enable people to move from small spaces to bigger ones and possibly extending their private life very far. These public or semi-public spaces might then be perceived as a part of their community, enhancing their sense of security and trust.

Gehl further explains the qualities of such spaces, transitions and borders; and propose that the transitions are soft and have flexible borders. Physical elements can ease an entrance or exit as well as hinder contacts. Well designed borders can thereby offer a visual contact instead of blocking ones way. Connections between places are preferably short, of low speed and should interweave a series of motives for actually moving to a public place.

The total control approach – Fear of the other one
Another view on security emphasizes the need of closing oneself into a safe space. This is often expressed through gated communities, which was defined by the European Network for Housing Research Conference in 2011 as follows:

> [...] a group of houses, surrounded by fences or walls, from which the adjacent streets are closed off by gates, which may be either electronic or guarded. In between the houses, there is an inner network of streets as well as dead-end streets, the latter in order to prevent through-traffic. Residents have access to various services (such as security guards, maintenance, a school,

playground, leisure facilities, etc), which facilitate their complete isolation from the surrounding environment. People living here often go to work by car, hence their lives are basically confined to two locations: the workplace and the residential park (disregarding the car in between) (Csizmady, 2011, p.1).

Conversely, Csizmady's definition of the gated community does not fully apply to the context of Metro Manila, as it will be discussed further on.

Fig. 2 Gated community in Bignay, Valenzuela. Source: Google Maps 2015.

In the early 1990's the phenomena of gated communities became popular among privileged people with high status. The idea of the enclosed community was to provide a comfortable milieu and a safe haven in what was seen as a foreign environment (Csizmady, 2011).

It is commonly known and agreed upon that people are in need of defining personal territories. By closing oneself in with physical borders and guards, one might believe to have total control over ones safety as strangers are locked out (Wikström, 2012). Björkemarken (2009) expresses that a positive and secure environment is often associated with a well integrated, but at the same time homogenous community where few persons are considered different or frightening. Gated communities correspond to this idea, as they are often actively targeted to specific groups of equal income, ensuring that the future residents have common interests and norms. It is thought that therefore, conflicts can be reduced in the community (Csizmady, 2011).

Theorists, who argue against gated communities, criticise its segregating effects. The gated community is repeatedly compared with functionalism, which

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is criticised for fragmenting the urban fabric at city level, increasing distances between people and reducing public spaces and possibilities of contact (Gehl, 2011). It is stressed that when people does not meet they begin to categorize people and turn each other into intimidating strangers. This will furthermore start a circular process of continuous segregation, as shown in figure 2.2. Segregation of people is commonly a response to an already existing fear, where the physical and social separation is made to protect us from each other. Sense of insecurity is however enhanced once again, when segregation as such increase fear even more, when exaggerating differences of people (Wikström, 2012).
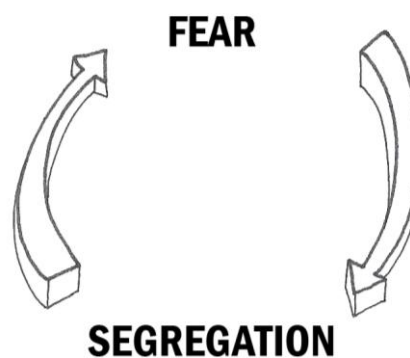
FEAR

SEGREGATION

Fig 3 Circle of fear and segregation. Source: Elaborated by the author, 2015.

It is also important to understand fear as a relational phenomenon, where one usually has a sense of security in comparison to another situation. Wikström and Olsson (2012) explain the gated community as a way to avoid the problem of insecurity rather than counteracting it. The gated community will increase the perception of security among included individuals, while it will decrease among those who are excluded. Therefore, it is common that the introduction of one gated community is soon to be followed by another more, when neighbours have discovered their fear and perceived need of protection. Studies of areas with a high crime rate have shown that the introduction of gated communities sometimes lead to an initial decrease of criminal activity. However, in some cases criminal activity increases later on again (Csizmady, 2011).

3 The gated community and the segregated city

To what extent do gated communities contribute to a safer city? It is likely that such a question could be answered in actual figures by a thorough analysis of crime ratio and the forming of gated communities, alongside an analysis of

different practices. There have been situations when the gated community has been a successful solution for decreasing crime and there have been situations when it has not. However, such an analysis would provide us the number of crimes but not measure the level of trust and fear in a society. The main argument of this paper is that gated communities do not contribute to a safer city in the long term, because of their many negative effects which are explained through three following critical factors.

First of all, the core of feeling secure is in meeting people and meeting *the other one*. Gated communities constrain the very possibility of meeting people, simply by gating them in. The border to the private sphere is so physically strong that people are more likely to stay at home. However it does not only hinder contact between people, but even polarise society in the long run. Gehl (2011) states that when physical security has been increased, minorities have commonly become focus of blame and people's differences are often exaggerated. Thus, people become strangers to one another and are more likely to be afraid of each other. The gate and the guard so very clearly tells us who is, and who is not to be included in the community, indicating a phenomena of "we and them". A gated community in Metro Manila often consists of a homogenous group of residents who are most likely to only meet equal people, in terms of socio-economical factors, and turn away from the surrounding society.

Secondly, separation of functions also diminishes the number of places to meet. Public spaces are not seen to be needed when the gated community offers a rich life, or even quite a little extent of community life. One might then prioritize the gated and semi-private common space, where one believes to have total control of the place. Meeting people in the public space is however very important for building tolerance and trust of one another. The public space is a place for democracy and theorists stress that social conflicts must be addressed rather than suppressed, since it is in turn related to violence (Wikström, 2012).

Thirdly, the functional segregation increases actual distance between people. It thereby complicates people meeting, if there would be good places to meet and a desire to do so. Disregarding the need of social interactions, people are still in need of travelling to workplaces and other everyday services. Even if creating a perfect private sphere, one will have to leave it time to time and travel within that other sphere of fear and insecurity.

Experience of sense of security in gated communities in Metro Manila

As mentioned above, Csizmady (2011) explained the gated community as a privileged way of living. On the contrary, as seen in Metro Manila today, the gated community has become a widespread phenomenon for high-income residence as well as for social housing. The Filipino gated community differs from Csizmady's definition in that gated communities in Metro Manila often consist of fewer functions, providing only housing, parking and scarce community space.

It is important that one does not overlook the existing situation and local culture. For it is people themselves, neither the planner, nor the theorist who possess the real feeling of security or insecurity. In February 2015, field trips were conducted in Metro Manila, looking into the current housing situation of the city. A number of different residential areas were visited, ranging from high-end living, built by private actors, and social housing, provided by the National Housing Authority. During interviews, residents were asked whether they felt safe in their area. The common answer was that they felt secure in their area, because of the presence of a guard. Residents also replied that they felt secure in relation to a previous situation, which had been worse, or because of a good relation to neighbours. Their previous situation might have been living in an informal settlement with bad accessibility and safety, as in Saint Hannibal with criminal activity, such as drug dealing, surrounding the community. The latter shows that households were very aware of their security and insecurity. Therefore, neither residents nor professionals could relate to the idea of eliminating the structure of the gated community in Metro Manila.

Depending on income level, community spaces in different neighbourhoods consist of sport facilities, green areas and a club house with pool in more luxurious subdivisions. Although expressing a feeling of safety in ones area, people spent little time in their common spaces. People were often involved in every day indoor chores, such as watching children, cooking and doing laundry. In communities such as Smokey Mountain and Commonwealth, many people were however seen outdoors. In comparison to other neighbourhoods, these areas were bigger in size, consisting of multipurpose halls and many business spaces in the street, attracting many people.

Fig. 3.1 Occupied public space in Smokey Mountain. Photo by: Manon Dol, 2015.

4 Urban Shelter Design

As posed in the introduction, how can the sense of security be supported in an urban context, such as Metro Manila? Two opposite approaches to overcome insecurity has been discussed, the social control approach and the total control approach. The latter is in the extreme case expressed through the gated community, which is argued not to be the best solution. Gated communities might have a locally positive effect on the sense of security for included individuals. However, in a larger context it does not contribute to a safer city. This paper emphasizes that the sense of security can foremost be enhanced by the social control approach, which happens in meeting the other one.

To encourage people to meet, and thereby decrease fear of one another, the three argued critical factors must be considered. Firstly, this means softening borders between private and public spaces, for enabling people to connect easier. More in-between semi-private spaces will decrease the contrast of being inside or outside a community, providing a new possibility of contact and a space for people to appropriate.

Secondly, the city must provide public spaces, which are the very places to meet. In Metro Manila today, public functions are sometimes located on private grounds, which might be accessible only during day time, but not during the night. The meeting with the other one cannot happen in a private space, but only in a public space which is for both locals and strangers. The private space is already allocated for a certain group of individuals which hinders the other one to participate.

Thirdly, the city must not be functionally segregated, but of mix use with shorter distances between places and people. People will be closer to important city spaces and to possibilities of meeting other people, instead of pulling them away from each other.

These are the design strategies considered important when planning for a safer city. However, this paper argues that a good urban design of such borders, spaces and transitions is not enough to enhance the feeling of security. What many theorists, as well as this author, believe will enhance the sense of urban security, is not believed to be the solution when asking inhabitants of Metro Manila. There is a significant gap between theory of the safer city, the urban design of Metro Manila today and people's own perception of a safer city. Proposed strategies and the dissolution of the gated community will not enhance the feeling of security, if one does not consider how to do so.

This paper stresses that one must work with the people concerned, in their everyday life, to enable a change of mind and enabling the open community work. There is inertia in the everyday routine and culture, and allocation of space is not sure to be followed by use of that space. People will also not trust each other and feel secure, only because they are told to do so. The feeling of insecurity and everyday habits can however be affected over time, if one pays great attention to actual needs and interests of people. By providing a series of motives for going somewhere, people are encouraged to use the public spaces and forced to meet the other one. If these motives are of an everyday character, it will provide a frequent contact with other people and start a process of building public trust, as expressed by Jacob's sidewalk contacts (1961). Finding common points of interests or just overhearing a conversation will expand the vision of the other one.

Allocated space shall also provide a possibility of individual appropriation, so that such spaces will continue to meet people's needs and encourage people to protect and take care of that place over long term. Trust cannot grow out of formalisation, but happens in places which allow individuality. If a space encourages individual appropriation, attachment can grow to that space, and social control and safety will increase for both locals and strangers. Presence of people attracts even more people, and together they increase the eyes on the street, if the space is there for them to care about (Gehl, 2011).

5 The Role of Architects

What is the role of architects in trying to enhance the feeling of security in Metro Manila? There are two perspectives on the matter, which on the one hand is how to improve safety locally and on the other hand how to enhance it on a city level. Locally, architects can affect quite specifically in actual design of space. To enable a community to evolve their sense of security, this paper proposes the use of community architects. The community architect does not decide how to design a neighbourhood, but it is a facilitator of a process driven by people themselves. Future inhabitants are thereby empowered and given space for discussions, which aim to understand and identify common problems and needs. When participating in such a process, conflicts may arise, but in the end the process offers the possibility to connect different people and create a feeling of togetherness. Thereby, the architect and residents acknowledge that trust is built over time, and the sense of security is being built up from the early beginning.

Looking at the city, other actors seem to affect the development of Metro Manila even more. The Philippines is a country with widespread corruption and housing development is led by both private actors, nongovernmental organisations and the government. There is a big lack of housing and furthermore lack of a holistic approach on how to create a safer city. The very scattered development contributes to a fragmented and segregated city. A holistic approach with continuous binding elements would benefit security in the city as a whole, rather than a scattered security area by area. The architect has an important role, because of the knowledge which he/she possesses and which he/she can share. However, if the city is to change, there must be political will to do so.

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Pictures and figures

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Figure 2.1. Google Maps (2015). Available: http://www.google.se/maps (2015-05-01).

Figure 2.2. Elaborated by the author (2015).

Figure 3.1. Photo by Manon Dol. (2015).