

# Shouting Spaces: Reclaiming the Public Space in Slum Areas

Rethinking slum upgrading processes by the design of collective spaces with community interventions



*Gaudy Orejuela*

Architecture Student, UCSG - Ecuador

## 1 Introduction

By 2030, it is expected that the major world population lives in cities. According to Blanco & Kobayashi (2009), if the projections on population are correct, the urban population will reach 5 billion from a total of 8.1 billion people; those from which 2.67 billion could lack of an appropriate place to live. Everyday becomes hardly that people can access to the adequate living conditions, and the cities becomes most of the time a problem than an opportunity. Consequences can be rapidly identified, inequality and inequity grows and the challenges they brings with, too.

Ever since in many countries; Slums, are the more reactional response to this phenomena, this settlements has become part of the city. The incomes of slum dwellers are mostly too low for formally regulated markets to provide them with any kind of permanent housing. (UN-Habitat, 2003) They have developed in a way they can survive until they are recognized, relocated, and most of the time, ignored. As UN- Habitat establishes in the report “The Challenges of Slums” (2003), in the developing world, slums are in fact the dwelling places of much of the labour force in their cities, they provide a number of important services and

are interesting communities in their own right. Probably, this could be one of many reasons to change paradigms according the way this kind of dwellings are faced and how much they can give to the city itself.

Slum Upgrading has become though, the way of take care these challenges by not just providing the infrastructure, housing or facilities; it has provided livelihood, as a base of people's development. It is a complex process depending also in the socio-political context and the approach it has. All of these could make a difference rather if it is top down or bottom up approach, if it involves different actors or not and how the community appropriates or not the project. There would be conditions that make each intervention unique, regarding geographical conditions or qualities of the dwellers. (Mercado & Uzín, 1996) Although, an important place in which most of the living activities take place is the public space, which most of the times for slums is minimum or inexistent.

Taking this into account *this paper focus in the moment on the slum upgrading process in which the treatment of this public space, that has a lot of potential, could be a resource for finding answers for the community.* This public space could be the place where people can express their really needs, propose, debate, choose; making it where they can take the decisions for their own living. The place where the *actors meet for the first time.*

## 2 Literature Review

### **SLUM UPGRADING – “What you call a slum, I call it home”**

UN-HABITAT (2007) defines a slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following criteria.

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1. Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions.
  2. Sufficient living space which means not more than three people sharing the same room.
  3. Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price.
  4. Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people
  5. Security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.
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*Table 1 Definition of Slums, Un-Habitat (2007)*

Out of the 10 slum dwellings in the cities of developing countries, which 3 or 4 are located in areas prone to floods, landslides, hurricanes and earthquakes. As Blanco & Kobayasi (2009) establishes that urbanization process has been reshaping the cities not only in a physical level, it is possible to identify in the urban dynamics, how people live and how segregated has it become.

Due to the absence of a coherent city-wide set of urban policies as the basis for public regulation, urban interventions that address the issues of slums are frequently triggered only by external factors, such as land development and speculation, and health and safety threats to the wealthy, and are therefore mostly reactive, rather than proactive. (UN-Habitat, 2003) Based on surveys realized by the World Bank (1999-2001), since the ending of the last millennium there has been a high level of demand and strong support for urban upgrading approaches. (Calderon, 2008) The best way to explain how the slum upgrading process work in developing countries now a days is to show one that goes with the approach of the involvement of many different actors among a city trying to get rid of social exclusion.

An example in developing countries to take in consideration was Integral Urban Plan (IUP) in Medellin, Colombia in the 90's. Medellin is the second most populous city in Colombia with approximately 2 million inhabitants with an approximate area of 3806 ha. IUP is a program from the municipality and the

involvement of many institutions in the socio-spacial and socio-economic revitalization, while promoting inclusive patterns of urbanization. (Blanco & Kobayashi, 2009)

IUP of the “Comuna Nororiental” has an area of influence of approximately 130 hectares with a total population of 200.000 inhabitants affected in a part of the city that was considered one of the most marginalized areas of the country. According to Calderon (2008), the IUP’s main objective is to implement a decentralized model of intervention based on three components: a physical component, based on architecture and urban design projects, a social component, which is based on the participation and appropriation of the projects by the community, and an institutional component that coordinates the existing institutions, agencies, and programs. (Calderon, 2008)

The next chart can give an overall view of the project with its aims and how do they try to achieve it with concrete actions.

<b>PUI: Integral Urban Project</b>		
Components	Actions	
<b>Institutional Coordination</b>	Interinstitutional Coordination	
	Intersectorial Coordination	
<b>Social</b>	Community Participation and Communication	Identification
		Validation
<b>Physical</b>	Public Space & Transport	Participation
		Education
		Construction of New Public Spaces
	Housing	Improvement of existing Public Space
		Ordering of the Public Transport systems
		New Housing Construction
		Housing Construction
Public Facilities	Housing Improvement	
	Housing Legal Tenancy	
Environment	Improvement of Common Facilities	
	Construction of New Facilities	
		Environmental Recovery

Table 2 Components of the Integral Urban Project in Medellin, Blanco & Kobayasi (2009)

This is the way of facing a city in order of what exists; it is a reinterpretation of what the city needs. The project is considered successful for the acceptance of the people and that can be also found in how the general dynamics have changed in the urban life, but it also has affected the socio-political context that also improved this part of the city. Facing still processes of gentrification in many cities in developing countries, much conciliation have to be taken as measures and the effects that it could bring to the community lifestyle shouldn't be taken for granted.



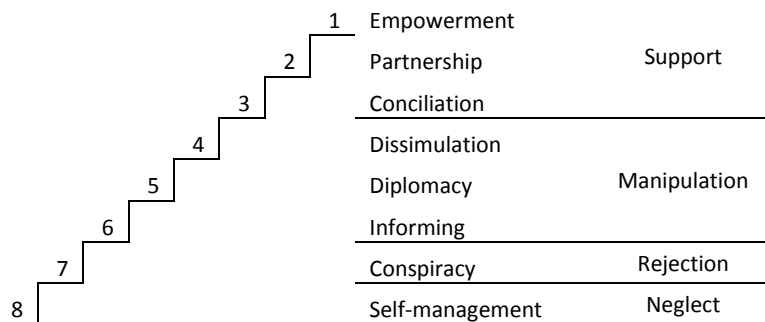
Figure 1 Comuna Noroccidental- Medellín, Colombia

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION -*Opportunities and Limitations-***

Since 1960, the community involve has developed as a new paradigm of planning and management, that had lead the community to provide their own solutions, due to the lack of effectiveness of the general planning in the projects executed. This community participation could appear in different moments of the process, depending on the interest of the community itself or the organization that helps them to develop. This ‘self-help’ housing paradigm introduced by the English architect, John Turner, who assisted self-build projects for the Ministry of Public Works in Peru; establishes that housing users know their needs better than government officials and can access and utilise resources in more effective ways than conventional housing solutions. In 1970, the World Bank promoted a range of self-help housing projects across the world, but the lack of commitment by many governments, arguably linked to lack of interest in socio-economic groups made this not considered a priority (Jenkins, et al., 2007)

As Choguill (1996) says, *“there are two main objectives of a community organisation: one is to build or up-grade, by mutual-help, physical or social infrastructure or houses in their neighbourhood, the other is to influence*

*decisions in the political arena.*” This approach can have weaknesses if it is not well supported by strong organizations either in the project or in the side of the ones that approve if it can be done. Choguill also express in the same research, *“there are two main problems to consider when analysing this issue: one is whether community participation is practised at all, the other is how”*. The next chart made by Choguill explains the levels of involvement in the decision making process composed of the following rungs: empowerment, partnership, conciliation, dissimulation, diplomacy, informing, conspiracy and self-management.



A ladder of community participation for underdeveloped countries

Table 3 Ladder of Community Participation, Choguill (1996)

Some of the conclusions of this research emerge also into the fact that in cases where initiatives exist to improve the living conditions of low-income communities be they top-down or bottom-up, it is obvious that they may lead to very different results, depending on the governmental attitude towards the community. Whether to see the community driven practices as the only way, the real question is how people wants to get involved, which are the motivations, the common interests, and how to make them participate when all this neoliberal influences in developing countries make people believe that they are better alone.

## **RIGHTS & PUBLIC SPACE-*Human scale matters-***

Jan Gehl (2010), probably one of the men which have done much of his work focus in how public space can achieve his “cities for people”, in both social and physical aspects. The books starts with one of the strongest statement that might make the whole book based on it, the human scale. He details what human scale is and how you can find out about it. It talks about movement, about motivations and perception of the space just being a human. Taking this statement as a way to start defining what is important to consider when it is talked about public space, and then it comes how you can actually make an intervention in developing cities that are not into this debate yet.

It is also good to consider that these studies have served as the inspiration since 60’s to develop so many strong theories about public space, one of this is the urban acupuncture. It is coined by Jaime Lerner, an architect who was famously the three-time mayor of the city of Curitiba in Brazil, “Urban Acupuncture” describes minimal, relatively low cost interventions at strategic locations on the urban body in order to get the whole economic and social systems functioning again without pain, illness or major surgery. This can only happen if the people and the communities themselves are directly involved. (Allsopp, 2012)

Probably in terms of special qualities that has to have the public space that describes this theories, it’s better to see how it has motivated the different approaches in the time of making an action, both from top down and bottom up approaches. This paper makes first a reference in this intervention and how actually they can be apply in an informal context, such as slum upgrading process in developing countries.

There are *many ways* in which the public space becomes an important place for the urban living of the people. They help build a *sense of community, civic identity and culture*. Public spaces facilitate *social capital, economic development and community revitalization*. (Project for Public Spaces, Inc, 2012) It has become a concern for many organizations as UN-Habitat, which in 2011 with Project for Public Spaces (PPS) developed “Transforming Cities through Placemaking & Public Spaces”, to harness the power of public space for the

common good. They talk about the power of ten and develop a template with different experiences in which people adopt for their own public space projects.



*Figure 2 Kounkuey Design Initiative transforms impoverished communities by collaborating with residents to create a low cost, high impact built environments that improve their daily lives. Kenya. Project for Public Space (2012)*

With the same idea but with a top down approach, there are many interventions taking part in many cities with short-term perspective solutions in the public space, Tactical Urbanism, DIY Urbanism or Guerrilla Urbanism. The main idea stands for making interventions by people initiatives in which you can take the space in a temporary way and develop a specific activity that can allow new ways of social interactions. (Lydon, 2011) In the third publication of Tactical Urbanism regarding the study cases in Latin-American, an upstanding quality of this kind of interventions is the way people start to reclaim what is of theirs, their rights and do something about it, like taking a complete street to make it just for bikes and pedestrians on Sundays, in Bogotá-Colombia; even taken an open space and present movies for the whole community like it is happening in Chile.



*Figure 3 El Cine Vino, Guanaqueros-Chile. Lydon (2011)*



### 3 Argument, Critique or Discussion

After having analysed in the second part of this paper the slum upgrading process, understanding how the neighbourhoods are organized in this kind of practices, what are the priorities in the actions taken, and also digging into the community participation in these decisions and study the *public space* as one dimension that can combine this two into one integrated ideology regarding its importance in people's life; it is time to enhance this argument with the reality that as students we faced in Philippines on February 2015 when as a part of the architecture course Urban shelter of Lund University we visited Metro Manila.

It's becoming often the interventions to improve the living conditions in cities, as it was presented in the projects for public spaces or the urban tactics, so it is not new the introduction of this in the context studied. As an example of that, the use of recycled materials for the structures needed, as plastic, wooden parts become the resources as many examples presented in slums areas and the placemaking in Nairobi. In the other hand, many of the cases presented in the tactical interventions prove how the creativity and how the lack of resources makes this challenges something worthy to take as an advantage. Although, creative rethinking of the regulatory framework for urban activity can be as important in promoting public life as spatial design and also the neighbourhood decision of being part of that. (Southworth, 2013) It it's a matter of initiative and organization, and what gathers people together is a common interest, the task will be in how to make this people meet in the same place.

Philippines is a country where all kind of developments are taking place, the public space represents sometimes social economical access and for slums dwellers it becomes part of their living. Now, public activities often occur in privately owned and managed space, under the control of private regulations and security. (Southworth, 2013)

That's why when it comes to talk about common spaces in slums areas it is important to point out three aspects: *responsibilities*, *security* and *ownership* in terms of who and how are the space being used and who is taking care of it, since the moment it is developed and then maintained. In the community of Saint

Hannibal, there is a strong atmosphere in the common spaces of this area, there is the evidence in just not the actual maintenance of this place, it occurs in the way the neighbours speak to each other. They developed their own system of common responsibilities in taking care their greenery and perhaps it has to do with that.<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 4 Saint Hannibal, Philippines Study Trip Lund University, Gaudy Orejuela (2015)*

The importance of public space in such dense settlements become very significant and in such a colourful context, public spaces in informal settlements are public in terms of ownership and accessibility, but are communal in terms of use and attachment. They play an important role in the physical and social dynamics of the settlement, however, the improvement and the consolidation of such spaces may not be realised for many years. (D'cruz, 2014) A Street, a park, an empty site could become an extension of their daily life, the place for drying their clothes after laundry or the improvised court for the afternoon basketball play. Such a complex space could become a bad place for their neighbourhood or could become a real upstanding quality of it.

Many slum upgrading processes in developing countries integrates as part of its aims, the revitalization of the public space, but it is more common to maintain the process in terms of regulations, physical infrastructure and finance restructuring as priorities. (Mercado & Uzín, 1996) If it continues to happen, some generic

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<sup>1</sup> As part of the course Urban Shelter, we visited different kind of projects in the Philippines doing interviews to people, communities and also actors involved in the realization of these projects.

solutions for collective spaces could provoke the rejection, the bad maintenance or another social problems in this collective spaces, because they assumed the same features for every community.

## 4 Urban Shelter Design

Regarding the three major focuses of the paper *Slum Upgrading Processes, Community Participation and Public Space*, the next part includes why this aspects are important to consider in the urban shelter design nowadays in developing countries. So first, what is a *Shouting Space*, as it is mentioned in the title of the paper? Simple, it has to do with the fact of how should be the first quality of the public space in slums areas as a way of dealing with a city that is always rejected them, it should represent a strong voice to authorities and to them self too, but it



Figure 5 Philippines Study Trip Lund University, Gaudy Orejuela (2015)

is not enough if it can't be physical possible. As a way to find solutions and try to do the best for each community, to *present interventions in the public space can help to create the first contact with a community that is going to get upgraded*, and also present the resources, the technologies that can work in a project that is for everyone in order to have more confidence with the whole intervention and empower the process at all. This intervention also can happen in the post reconstruction process after disasters that are common in the Philippines context, for example. This *public space could be the place* where they can express their really needs, propose, debate, choose; making it where they can take the decisions for their own living. How this can be done will be followed up in the next chapter "The Role of Architects". The strategies below are going to be presented in a defined context, slum areas, having some another features to add, articulated in

order to the spatial design and tools criteria to take into account in a upgrading process.

## 5 The Role of Architects

Strategies to be considered by architects involved in slum upgrading processes to reclaim public space. Consider these interventions the first contact with the community.

### 1. Give the Own Character to the Shouting Space.

Discover the quality of the community and the places they have chosen as part of their daily activity, perceive the real interaction of the actual streets and open spaces. This has become a place that makes them confident and as they are going to form part of a slum upgrading process, getting to know that quality information is going to be good for both parts.

### 2. Reinvent Community Planning

It could be difficult to make people participate and get involve with the process itself but it is part of the challenge to find the way that kids, young people or elder people wants to know what is happening in their neighbourhood. A good example of how to reinvent the community planning is Block by Block (2012). It's an innovative partnership between the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the UN agency promoting sustainable towns and cities, and Mojang, the makers of Minecraft. Block by Block involves young people in the planning of urban public spaces. Minecraft has turned out to be the perfect tool to facilitate this process.

### 3. Perceive safety

It is related to the activities, how are they placed along the neighbourhood and the feeling of freedom to spend their time there without having fear of the environment. Another features in terms of space, measures must also take into account in this strategy.

### 4. Make a distinction between public and communal space and people's responsibility

Giving everyone a task makes people part of something, and includes them into the neighbourhood life in these communal spaces. But also leaving the freedom to

choose or to develop their individually in the public space makes the anonymity a character that have to be developed more in a personal level.

5. Think thermal Comfort

If there are spaces that are not adapted to the climate conditions to the city, they're going to be empty spaces. It is an obvious strategy but shouldn't be taken for granted.

6. Affordable spaces

Make spaces in where you can actually spend the whole day without making the money a part of the way to enjoy it. Remember that these places are competing with the big malls and all this consumism culture.

7. Articulate some spaces to Health and Transport

Health and transportation as part of the life of people should be integrated with the public space proposed or enhance by the slum upgrading process. These spaces should have the visual interest as any important building in the neighbourhood.

8. Learn Cultural Citizenship

Libraries, Schools become crucial in a process of slum upgrading processes. Learning by the side of academics could enhance values that can be good for the whole community. Some examples can be found in Bogota and the work of Antanas Mockus and Enrique Peñalosa, two important majors that work in these concepts.

9. Take Care and maintenance

It is a real challenge to make people wanted to take care of a space, but it probably have to do with other facts, as the sense of belonging, the attachment or the interests that they may have for maintaining it for them.

10. Get creative and reuse

After seeing many cases in which with small interventions, light materials, many actions can be taken to reclaim the public space people need just in front their doors. So it is a matter of creativity and good intentions.

## CONCLUSIONS –*Shouting Spaces*–

The architecture that don't build city is not architecture at all. A strong statement made by Manuel Delgado (2011), who refers the city as public space. The architecture itself talks about space, about time and people. As architects this two first dimensions are managed by the activities but it is the people that make a strong difference in it. As architects the fact of making tangible these dimensions and make them physical by the articulation of buildings and the life between them becomes the practice of this discipline an important decision. With this it is not supposed that they have the final decision in it, the experience with the people who the project it is for have to maintain them sensible every time they come up with an idea. *More than see the architecture as a social science, it's part of the commitment as human being from the place we stand to give an input to try to make better conditions of living.* Slums areas and the living dynamics that they bring with them are actually the best school for architects; the lack of resources makes creativity grow.

The main role as an architect is be sensible with all this dynamics, try to see the solution for the projects in the way people live, and how do they deserve to live. The places that as architects are made have to **shout** life. Have to say something with people included in it.



Figure 6 Illustration of personal Impressions in Manila and its Public Space, Gaudy Orejuela (2015)

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