

Planning For a Global Society

Investigating housing strategies for the transnational family in the Philippines.



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1 Introduction

Migration has been a constant factor throughout history when talking about human settlements. In contemporary society the focus has been the flow of people from the country side to the city, creating a situation of unprecedented urbanization in human history. Today we see that within this context the globalized economy and increased possibilities for communication has meant that the migration of workers between cities and nations is becoming more common, especially in developing countries. In many nations the export of labour has become one of the main contributor to the GDP and is involving a large part of the population. The Philippines is one of the countries where this development has gone furthest and there has been a lot of studies which investigates the situation of Philippine guest worker families.

Purpose

This essay is meant to investigate how transnational families can be used as a target group when planning for housing in the Philippines. Why it is desirable and how can it be done? The investigation is based on chosen literature as well as observations and interviews made during a three week study trip to Manila. The trip was a part of the Urban Shelter course at Lund's University in February 2016. The goal with this essay is to find strategies for how to improve dwelling conditions for the transnational family by discussing the following questions.

- How does work related migration effect the Philippines and why is it important when considering housing development?
- How does a transnational family work in the Philippines and what are the specific needs connected to their dwelling?
- In which way can these needs be considered when planning and designing housing and what are the societal benefits.

2 Literature Review

Work related migration in Philippine society

The phenomenon of export labour is as diverse as the labour market itself and can effect both highly educated professionals and workers in the informal sector. This is heavily dependent on the countries involved. The tendency being that more skilled labour and domestic work is exported to the west while more physical labour, in for example the building industry, is exported to the Middle East. This also implies that migration is highly dependent on both class and gender. Some receiving countries tend to attract migrants in male respectively female dominated professions. (Parrenas Salazar, 2001) Over all it's becoming more common with female guest workers. In the Philippines the women now outnumber the men among the workers that gets deployed abroad every year. This means that if one parent is left behind taking care of children it is increasingly the father. (Madianou & Miller, 2012)

In the Philippines about 8 million people or 10 per cent of the population was estimated to work abroad in 2009 but the real figure is probably considerably higher. Some sources state that it is probably closer to 15 percent of the population. If you consider the family members that are left behind it becomes apparent that almost everyone in the country is affected directly or indirectly by the situation. The flow of remittances sent from abroad constituted 10 per cent of the total GDP in 2012. (Madianou & Miller, 2012) This sector becomes extra important when the domestic economy is struggling because it is not effected, instead its influence grows since the exchange rates becomes more favourable. (Yang, 2008) It is not strange that the OFWs (offshore Philippine workers) are hailed as the heroes and heroines of the economy. The way that the state

systematically encourages and sponsors the phenomenon makes the Philippines almost a unique case. (Madianou & Miller, 2012)

The transnational family

The main reason for the formation of transnational households from a macro perspective is to maximize resources and opportunities in the global economy. Legal barriers mean that the migrants don't have the same rights as citizens in the receiving country and cannot be protected by the domestic country while abroad. This can be referred to as a state of partial citizenship. When trying to reclaim a sense of citizenship, the Filipino migrants often emphasize the legal membership in the nation state of the Philippines and this is what is perceived as home. (Parrenas Salazar, 2001) The domestic country is also the main place where the economic benefits of migration is invested often by buying land, investing in the dwelling or by putting children through college. (Madianou & Miller, 2012) It has also been shown, at least in other South Asian countries, that remittances can finance businesses in the domestic country which often is connected to the international network of the migrant (like businesses that manufacture goods for export). (Erdal, 2014) At the same time, the economic benefits of having a transnational family means that the part of the family that is staying in the Philippines don't have to rely on local sources for income. This can happen to the extent that some villages in the Philippines have become the left-behind segment of a transnational population. (Madianou & Miller, 2012) It's therefore essential to provide an environment that encourages development instead of stagnation. When achieving this, policy making but also physical planning should be considered.

There are essentially three legal ways to get employment abroad in the Philippines. The first is directly through the government that has deals with other governments that regulates annual deployments of a fixed amount of workers. The second is through private agencies and the third way is to be directly recruited by a foreign employer. The cost of migrating can vary a lot depending on type of recruitment and destination. Hidden fees are common since it is forbidden by law to charge more than one month salary by the employee for the recruitment. It is

common that it takes several years for the migrant to repay money borrowed to cover these costs and often debt to extended family is created. (Madianou & Miller, 2012) This makes it hard for the migrant to dissolve the connection with the community in the domestic country. It also tells us something about the role of personal contacts and social networks when migrating. Beside the financial aspect, social relations and relations to institutions (like for example a church) play a major part when considering the possibility for an individual to work abroad since the social networks can provide access to a community or an employer in the receiving country. In addition to this, the practical problems of raising a family with one or both of the parents not being present, combined with increased economical possibilities leads to closer ties with extended family and creates a need for collective solutions. (Madianou & Miller, 2012) At the same time it is concluded in several studies that prolonged separation of the family causes emotional stress for both children and parents.

The tendency for a transnational family is that it is a temporary situation. The working migrant is either aiming to return to the Philippines or to step by step bring the rest of the family to the receiving nation, in both cases reuniting the family. (Parrenas Salazar, 2001) At the same time, the situation when the family is separated is beneficial for both the domestic and receiving country and they enforce it by time limited contracts and regulations preventing the migrant to bring his or her family. In reality it is common that the time spent abroad gets prolonged and it's not uncommon that the migrant never returns to the Philippines and the state of transnationality continues with the next generation. The reasons for staying can vary. Often the economic benefits of working abroad makes it hard to go back since that would mean that it would be hard to maintain the improved economic situation of the migrant and his or her close and extended family. It would also mean that the social status and freedom that comes with the role as the provider of the family is lost. One aspect that enables a prolonging of the situation of the transnational family is the development of new communication technologies (cell phones, internet, etc.). In recent years it has become much easier to maintain relations in a transnational family. (Madianou & Miller, 2012)

3 Discussion

Why consider the transnational family?

The fact that international labour related migration plays such a central role in the economic and social aspects of society in the Philippines makes it impossible to ignore. From a physical planning point of view, a group that constitute such a large portion of the population have to be provided for with suitable housing. If you consider the efforts a society can put together in order to provide adequate housing and public functions targeting other groups that are relatively small in comparison, it would seem appropriate to take into consideration the needs of the transnational family in the same way. For example the transnational family group can be compared to a group like students which in most societies are considered in the planning process.

The decision to take into consideration the specific needs of the transnational families can be motivated both politically and economically. From a political point of view one could discuss if the situation for transnational families are desirable at all since it is connected with emotional stress for the families, a state of partial citizenship and in extreme cases can lead to stagnating production in the domestic country. But in the case of the Philippines the choice has already been made. By actively encouraging labour related migration it has become one of the major sectors in the economy. The international connections are already made and even if other economic sectors are prioritized, it is unlikely that people will stop to seek work abroad. From an economical point of view the transnational family can contribute a lot because of the foreign capital they bring back home. This could be compared to the way that the planning of townships such as bonifacio global city channels foreign investments into the society of Manila. The difference being that when planning for the transnational families, the flow of money can be directed downwards straight into small businesses on a community level. There is of course a risk of economic stagnation and unemployment in areas that receives their money through remittances from abroad as mentioned above. And this is where I believe that the role of physical planning and architecture can play an important part. By attracting transnational families to an area it is possible to create economic benefits for other groups that resides there. This has to be done

by providing housing that takes into consideration the specific needs of families that earn their main income from abroad. Also by doing this distinction between groups that earn money locally and from abroad it is possible to maximize resources such as land because people earning money from abroad are not dependent on street level for their income and could as well live in a vertical development.

Transnational families as target group

So what are the specific needs of a transnational family compared to other groups in the Filipino society? Through the investigation of the transnational family I have come to identify two things that seem relevant when talking about architecture and urban design. The first is the need for flexibility. The situation for a transnational family is often uncertain since it is temporary. The economic situation can change quickly when a contract ends and a family member have to return home. It can also be the goal for the family to join the member or members that are working abroad in the receiving country. This move is often done incrementally.

When conducting an interview at a visit to the social housing area Commonwealth in Manila, I found an example that can illustrate this problem. There I met Evelyn Cea who is currently living in an apartment building on the second floor. Her situation can be seen as luxurious in comparison to the other people living in the area. Not only is she living by herself in an apartment designed for a whole family, she is also renting it for a cost over three times what the owner pays. Her husband is currently working in the U.S. and she seems uncertain of the future. She hopes that she will be able to move to him, but while waiting she rents the apartment.

If the need for flexibility is considered when planning and designing the dwellings for transnational families, it would be beneficial for both the society and for the families. For society since it means that valuable building area is not kept unused and for the family since they don't need to spend more resources than necessary for their dwelling.

The other thing which should be considered when planning and designing residential areas is the importance of social relations for the transnational family. The opportunity to migrate is often provided in the first place through personal contacts and during the period when the family is separated, the relationship to extended family or neighbours have to be developed in order to manage the everyday life. The challenges of managing a transnational family leads to a demand for collective solutions. The most obvious situation where the family becomes reliant on help from outside concerns childcare. This was something that several people I met in Manila were talking about and I will try to illustrate it with an example below.

During another interview in the area Commonwealth, I spoke to a woman who had been working in Saudi Arabia for 8 years. She had only been home 4 times during this time. Meanwhile, her husband was home and taking care of their 3 children. He was working as a construction worker and the children were home alone during the days. At the time of her departure they were all under the age of ten. This made the family very dependent on neighbours and relatives.

By considering the role of social relations that the transnational family is dependent on in the planning and design processes, not only is it beneficial for the family itself but it can also create job opportunities for other groups by providing services for the transnational group.

4 Planning And Design Strategies

Now that we have discussed why it is important and beneficial to consider the specific needs of the transnational family in the Philippines and what these needs are, it's time to discuss how this information can be used in practice. How can you specifically plan and design housing that can meet the needs of the transnational family and how can this group contribute the most to society?

Social interaction through mixed communities

It has been stated that the transnational family is relatively rich in comparison with people belonging to the same class that earns their money from a local source. At the same time there is a risk for a stagnation in production of services

and goods within this group since their money comes from abroad. Because of this it is essential that housing targeting transnational families should be combined with housing for other groups that rely on local income. The closer these groups live together, the greater is the benefit. The transnational families benefit from better service and the people earning money locally can benefit from the purchasing power of the transnational families. This works basically the same way as mixing income groups in general but in this case the groups that are mixed often have a similar background. To mix these groups can also help the transnational family to still be a part of a local community. The increased dependency on extended family and/or neighbours is also something that should be considered in the architecture for a housing development targeting this group. Facilities for public functions like day care centres are essential for attracting the transnational families. Also commercial facilities that targets the transnational families, like for example internet cafés, should be considered in the planning. Institutions like churches and community meeting facilities also play an important role in creating social networks that both transnational families and families with a local income source could benefit from. These functions should be placed in a way that makes them accessible for both groups, preferably at ground level with access to the street. When trying to maximize social interaction the size of the communities is of great importance. If the goal is to create personal relations it is preferred to keep communities small so that it is easy to keep track on who lives there. Commonly maintained semi private spaces like courtyards could also be a good platform for social interaction.

A flexible dwelling situation

In order to provide for the transnational family's need for a flexible dwelling situation, the form of tenure can be a powerful tool. Rental dwellings are in many ways more flexible compared to owned ones for the transnational family. By renting an apartment, you can find a place to live that suits the family's temporary needs during the time when some family members are abroad. And when the state of transnationality ends, the family can find another dwelling that better suits the needs when all members are home. The benefit of a rental apartment is even bigger if you consider to build vertically, because when all family members have

returned and need to find a local source of income they become much more dependent on access to the street.

The experience learned from Manila was that many transnational families belongs to the informal settler group that could be beneficiaries for social housing. The way that the social housing is organized today means that you have to buy an apartment when relocated. Then you make monthly payments on the house/ apartment until it is completely paid for. If you move before the apartment is completely paid for you can't sell the apartment and all the invested money is lost. This does not suit the transnational families and to be able to rent an apartment would be a big improvement.

Another way of dealing with flexibility is to plan the apartments in a way that allows subletting. In Manila, housing developments targeting the richer part of the population like for example Bonifacio Global City this is already implemented. If you buy an apartment there, it is often designed to allow a part of the apartment to be rented out independently in order to get an extra income or to keep as a dwelling for servants. This kind of apartment could also benefit the transnational families. While family members are working abroad it could be possible to rent out a part of the dwelling to for example a student or a commuter that needs somewhere to stay during the weekdays. In this kind of arrangement the flexibility is very much an architectural question. The layout of the apartments needs to be carefully considered for this situation so that both parts of the divided apartment have good access to water, toilets and cooking facilities without disturbing each other.

5 The Role of Architects

One of the main concerns for the architect is to consider who you are designing for. You could argue that it is the developer and the government that chooses who to build for and the architect that proposes how this should be done. Then the role of the architect would be very reactive to the political and commercial interests in a society. If architects want to stay relevant in the process of developing a built environment that adjusts to the rapid changes today, they must be active in the development of ideas for politicians and developers to consider. This would

include considering new target groups for housing. The Architect should by visualising ideas work as a mediator between the market and the developer.

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