

Space for Public Life

The need for strategic planning of urban space



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1 Introduction

Metro Manila is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. In February 2017 I visited the metropolitan area for a three-week study trip. When visiting different low-income residential areas in the region I noticed how people used the, often narrow, streets as a social platform that I assume reflects the lack of sufficient public space. In many planned areas there was one big open space, supposed to serve the needs of social activities but it seemed to me that people tend to use the small space in front of their buildings more than the space actually programmed for public life. Visiting the high-income residential and business township of Bonifacio Global City my impression was that a lot more space and money were allocated to public space. This township is owned by a private company and is therefore maybe not the best example but that case among others gives me an overall impression that income of the residential as well as financial interests of a strong private sector has a positive impact on public space. Residents with low, or no, income are left to live in an environment lacking public space. While back in Sweden I read the magazine *Arkitektur* (Architecture), issue 2 2017, that focused on public space and its relation to capitalism and the financial and private market. Public space is a planning issue that concerns all cities in the world in different ways. There is a need for realistic long-term planning especially in fast-growing metropolises as Metro Manila to prevent insufficient public space. In this paper I will discuss the problems of public space in Metro Manila in relation to guidelines and statements from the organisation UN-Habitat and the ideas of well-known architects and theorists as Jan Gehl and Charles Correa.



2 Literature Review

2.1 Ideas of planning in a historic perspective

In *Planning and housing in the rapidly Urbanising World*, Jenkins, Smith and Wang writes about different approaches to planning and housing in what they entitle the developing and the developed parts of the world. Planning initially developed as a local factor but gradually became more of a high political strategy as states increased their power and the way we live became more complex.

Historically the approach to planning have changed back and forth between an individualistic view and a collective view. After the second world war planning in the idea of master planning grew strong in the in some parts of the world, in the need of reconstruction of destroyed cities but also had an effect on new city building. This type of planning also came to effect developing countries in the way that planners came from other countries and planned hole cities. This type of master planning, often of new capitals, was a way of addressing the rapid urbanisation and redistribute newly independent country after decolonization.

Though there are very few examples of successful master planned cities in the developing world. Part of the critique against this kind of master planning is the to big focus on the plan as a product and less on the effects of the actual planning.

Based on western norms and with no attention paid to spontaneous activity within the area this plans often became non site-specific and disconnected to social and cultural context.

In the 1960th a new approach to planning, called Action Planning, were developed by Otto Koeningsberger. Action planning aims to identify key issues and take immediate action to effect them, instead of making extensive master plans. This method have been used in developing countries, often in combination with large-scale urban planning projects, but few projects have carried out action planning as a whole strategy. The idea of action planning is to use small scale projects, driven by problem solving, to get fast and sustainable results but the method fails in having a long-term perspective and in practice there is a risk of disregarding the mayor strategic problems. (Jenkins, P., Smitt, H. & Wang, Y. P., 2007).

2.2 The planning of houses and it's relation to public space

Our cities are not always planned so that they fit the way that we use them as Charles Correa points out in his book *Housing and Urbanisation*. One of the problems is the balance between built closed structures and open-to-air space he claims. Correa categorise open-to-air space as courtyards or terraces, front doorsteps, the water tap and principal open space for the whole village, sort of layers of privacy from what is closes to the home to the public space. In warm climates the open-to- air space can be used for several daily activities such as cooking, socialising with friend and family etcetera. In Correas example he claims that in India, about 75% of the daily activities can take place in the open-to-air space during at least 70% of the year. There are cost of built environment such as construction costs and cost of materials and there are cost of the open-to-air space such as cost of land and services. Correa means that if the view on housing as only a closed built structure was reconsidered, a more efficient way off building could be more open-to-air space and less close structures. In projects of low cost housing we often se a maximised number of houses on a site were the houses might not be related to the actual need of the residents. Instead we should change the division of built structure and open space to reach better living conditions at a low cost.

One explanation on why so many inhuman projects with a monotonous repetition of houses have developed is the housing demand that grew due to urbanization during the industrialisation and after the first and second World War. Before that cities had been growing more organic with less planning. Correa

promotes development done by small agencies rather than big companies or governments, which he think would create a more divers city.

Today the distribution of space in the cities, especially in cities with high density in the developing countries, are often depending on the economy of the citizen which mean that poor families live on less space per person then economically strong families. Correa means that this situation is unequal and undemocratic and that allocated space should not be totally depending on a persons income level. (Correa, C., 1999).

2.3 Strategies for planning

UN-Habitat have published several reports about or partly about how to plan for public space. In *Urban Planning for City Leaders* they write about urban planning strategies and important questions for decision makers. They claim that in times of urbanisation and when density of people is high it gets more important to plan in advance. When an area is already developed it becomes more difficult to make room for public space. Density of people is important while planning cities.

Though what is seen as high density is related to the social and cultural context, what is seen as dens in one culture might not be seen as dens in another. High density often leads to low cost of infrastructure because the systems are more compact and costs are distributed over a larger number of users. If the density however is extremely high and the cost of the land is high it might be the opposite. Infrastructure gets expensive and it has to be renovated often. In those cases a high pollution and loss of vegetation and green areas is often the case.

In *Urban Planning for City Leaders* the authors also argue the importance of mixed use areas. This was common in the early 1900th before the fast increasing of car use began. The idea of a mixed use city disappeared and left us with single use areas where one live at one place, work at another and shop at a third place. The benefits of mixed use areas are many, according to UN-Habitat. In mixed use areas services are close to a great number of people which leads to more people on the streets all day long which makes the area safer. There are also economical benefits since businesses get a grater number of clients if they are situated in a mixed use area. If people can work in the same area as they live they don't have to commute which can lead to less car traffic and more possibilities to walk and bike. In the long run mixed use areas leads to an attractive city and healthier people.

At least 50% of a land area should be public space, divided in 30% streets and 20% other public space. According to UN-Habitat the streets are the most important public space. Functioning infrastructure is the basis for communication and a prerequisite to development of an area.

Another important element in the public space is vegetation. UN-Habitat refer to recommendations from the World Health Organisation that argues that one should never have more than 15 minutes walk to a green area and minimum 9 square meters of green area should be planned per person living in the area. Vegetation has several positive effects on the city climate, better air quality and less pollution, less solar radiation, reduced risk of urban heat island effect (a phenomenon where urban areas gets warmer than surrounding rural areas caused mainly by dark ground surface solar absorption and waste heat from energy usage) and a positive effect on air movements.

UN-Habitat also raises the question of safety and claim that public space of quality can lead to crime reduction by creating a feeling of ownership and identity in an area. Here maintenance also have an important role since an area with good maintenance have a lower risk of vandalization and damage which in the long run leads to less crimes. (Vaggione, P. 2004).

2.4 Guidelines for public space planning

In *Global Public Space Toolkit* UN-Habitat gives further guidelines on how to design public space. They point out 5 principals of sustainable urban spaces, the first being an effective street network with at least 18 kilometre street per square kilometre. Secondly, high density with at least 15 000 persons per square kilometre. The third is mixed land use with at least 40% of the land allocated to economic use and the forth being social mix with different price ranges and forms of tenure, 20-50% of the land being low-income housing and no form of tenure to exceed 50% of the units. The fifth and the last principal is to reduce land use specialization and one function blocks. By following this five principals Un habitat mean that a city will achieve a vibrant street life better walkability and affordability. (Garau, P., 2015).

2.5 Analysing the public space

Jan Gehl is a Danish architect working mainly with public space projects. Gehls public space agenda started to get its form in the 1960th when urban growth was

strong and modernization as well as large-scale thinking grew strong in an urban planning context. As well as some other critical voices such as Jane Jacobs, William H Whyte and Christopher Alexander, Gehl took a stand against the current norms and argued for a human scale and importance of public space. In his book *How to Study Public Life* he defines public space as streets, buildings, squares etc. but separates public space from public life which he means should be seen in a broader perspective as everything that happens between building. Public life is according to Gehl not only café life etcetera but can be banal and ordinary, its daily errands and transportation. Public life doesn't happen by itself, it's related to the physical framework which should partner with daily life rather than fight against it. Good architecture is according to Gehl good interaction between public space and public life.

In *How to study public life* some studies on public space is collected. One of them being Donald Appleyard and Mark Lintells study in 1969 on how traffic is related to the space set aside to motor vehicles. The study gave the result, that might seem obvious to some, that traffic is increasing when more space is directed to roads, parking etc.

In 1998 and following up in 2000 Gehl Architects made a small study in Aker Brygge, Norway. By doubling the amount of benches they wanted to know if people were more likely to sit down. And as expected the result given was that two years later the amount of people that sat down at the place had almost doubled.

In a third study made in 2012, Gehl architects and Camilla Richer-Friis tested how many people one person have to have in his or her visual field to feel that a place is lively. The result they get was that at least 14-20 people had to be in that visual field but that this number was effected on where people stayed. If many people walked or stand in the edges of the place the area felt less lively than if they stick to the middle. Since most people tend to keep to the sides this shows the importance of scale. The study was made in Arendal in Norway and its possible that the result might be different in another country or urban context (Gehl, J., Svarre, B., 2013).

In the book *Cities for people* Gehl strengthen his arguments about public space. With the example of San Francisco he means that less roads and parking space have lead to less cars and that there is a strong relationship between the possibility to walk and stay in the public space and how many people that tend to do this,

here with Venice as an example. Gehl also claims that it always will be economically sustainable to invest in public space since cost of problems with health and infrastructure due to inadequate public space will exceed the cost of such investments, this he means is applicable in all parts of the world. (Gehl, J., 2010).

3 Argument, Critique or Discussion

Metro Manila has been highly effected of the colonial period in terms of urban design. The Philippines were a Spanish colony until 1898 and then an American colony until the independent in 1946. After the Spanish-American war that lead to the American colonial period, Metro Manila was in need of reconstruction and the America architect Daniel Burnham got the mission to create a grand plan for Manila. Metro Manila is at least partly planned with the approach of master planning and with an American as the leading voice (Tomeldan, 2017).

Metro Manila had a population of 12, 877, 253 people and a density of 21 000 people per square kilometre in 2015 and the same year the population increased with 1,58%. The metropolitan consists of 17 independent municipalities (Philippines Statistics Authority 2016). From talking to people that worked for the National Housing Authority in Metro Manila or at the municipality of Quezon city my impression is that not many long term visions and strategies exists. The Philippines have presidential elections every sixth year and ones a new president is elected many important decision makers are replaced which leads to new directions in the urban planning. The mission of the National Housing Authority is therefore not totally stable but varies and risk to be changed with every new president. The fact that some of the officials are hired on political terms makes processes vulnerable and their role should maybe be strengthen to achieve better conditions for decision-making.

The importance of a clear and strong vision for the city's urban planning as UN-Habitat claims in *Urban Planning for City Leaders*, seem highly relevant to me in the case of Metro Manila (Vaggione, P. 2004). If stakeholders and decision makers can agree on a long term vision for the city's development single decisions on how to plan will be easier to agree on and implement.

Staying in Metro Manila for three weeks I really had the chance to experience the traffic situation. I was almost chocked by how big the impact of the motor vehicles are in the metropolitan and I realized that not only did the traffic situation

effect my stay in the city but it forms the life of every inhabitant in Metro Manila. By interviewing people that lived in different parts of Metro Manila I learned that people spend several hours in traffic commuting to work or to school every day, sometimes seven days a week. A lot of people that I spoke to also pointed out the traffic as a big problem. One of them was Daniel Cocjin at the National Housing Authority. When we asked him “What makes Metro Manila a unique city?” he answered “the traffic”. It surprised me that the strategy of solving the traffic problem seemed to be increased space for cars, staff at the National housing Authority thought they should design their projects with more parking space. It seemed clear to me that everyone could agree that the traffic in Metro Manila is not sustainable but maybe the strategy for solving this problem should be reconsidered.

I believe that the results shown in for example Jan Gehls projects and research, that less space dedicated to cars and more space to pedestrians and cyclists leads to less car use, is relevant in a strategy for Metro Manila (Gehl, J., Svarre, B., 2013). The metropolitan has an extremely high density and land is expensive. By giving cars less space, more space could be set of to public space as space for pedestrians, squares and vegetation in the urban context. Though there has to be an alterative to cars, Metro Manila is not just a city with high population density it’s a metropolitan that covers 613,94 square kilometres. Often planned in one use



areas where people live in one area and work in another, that might be situated on the other side of the city. Today commuters that doesn’t own a car have to rely on public transport which in Metro Manila is mostly the local, jeepneys and

tricycles¹. There are also trains but they are often overcrowded and covers only a small part of the city. When interviewing people from low income families the most frequent answer on how they get to work was ether jeepney or tricycle. The

¹ Jeepney is an old military jeep from the colonial period that is rebuilt as a small bus. Tricycle is a motorcycle with a small sidecar that can carry around 2 to 4 persons.

idea of planning for more parking space might be related to a thought that everyone should have the opportunity to buy and use a car. A family that lives in a low income area and have a developing private economy might want to buy a car one day, then they need a parking space which might not be available in an area were planners assume that the residents can't afford a car. If Metro Manila developed the public transports to a well functional and efficient way to travel in the city, more people, independent on economy or class, might choose to use the public transport instead of cars. If the public transports were developed even more so that it reaches other cities and areas in the region this could maybe even lead to a decrease in the rate of urbanization, if people could live outside the metropolitan and commute easily to work.

In the private owned township of Bonifacio Global City its free to ride the bus, and busses are modern and run by a regular timetable. Even if the roads are wide there are plenty of space for walking with wide pavements and walkways. For every development project in this area money has to be set aside for public art and vegetation is a frequent element in the public space. Without knowing the prices of the apartments there it seems quite clear to me that only wealthy people can afford living in the township.

According to staff at the National Housing Authority regulations in Metro Manila says that at least 30% of a land area has to be open space. This is just enough for roads which are mainly for motor vehicles. In *Global Public Space Toolkit*, UN-Habitat point out that at least 30% of the land should be used for roads to create an efficient street network. I think that the design of the roads becomes important here to regulate the traffic speed and maximise the space for pedestrians. Even if the price of the land in Metro Manila is high and the density of people require efficient land use my opinion is that the percentage set aside to open space



should be increased in the regulations. One can't discuss the quality of public space if there isn't any public space. In new development just as well as upgrading projects there has to be public space no matter the income of the residents.

Metro Manila is full of shopping centres. Malls are by some seen as a public space, they are like indoor streets, open to anyone and one can argue that the city therefore have lots of public space. But the shopping centres is there to serve one purpose, to make us consume and therefor they will always address the affluent buyers. I consider a public space a space that is as welcoming to anyone and can therefore not see a mall as a public space.

Both the quantity and the quality of public space is important to achieve a democratic and sustainable city which gives possibility of a thriving urban life.

4 Urban Shelter Design

4.1 Strategic planning

Metro Manila is in strong need of strategic planning of urban space both in quality and quantity as I see it. I think that the municipalities of the metropolitan is in need of an agreed overall vision that create a basis for further planning. This vision should be connected in the social and cultural context of the Philippines and aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the population as well as environmental growth. It should also address questions of equality and seek a more democratic division of space. This vision should result in common development goals and strategies of improvement. To implement this kind of structure in the urban planning I think that municipalities just as well as

organisations and companies have to work with communication between stakeholders as well as with the population and apply a system for planning, realizing and follow up projects to secure an efficient and economically sustainable process. Though this kind of vision has to be



completed with effective measures. Work might have to be done on every levels of society, from the state level to the community level and there should be a collaboration between those levels.

4.2 Roads and traffic

As I see it one of the most urgent problems in Metro Manila is the inefficient street network and the alarming car situation. Bad air quality due to high pollution, low walkability, the risk off accidents and not to forget, the hour and hours people spend in traffic are problems one can not ignore. Roads are often wide but give most of the space to motor vehicles to let the street life take place on minimal space. Markets, social interactions and transportation by foot is packed all together on a small pavement that not seldom is non-existent due to an extension of properties into the public space. This appropriation of the street that convert the public space to private is, according to my experience, common in low-income areas. This is probably a result of shortage of space and overcrowding areas which of course is a related problem, though to big to dig in to in this essay. I think that if more space was given to the daily life of the streets and that this space was designed to fit the needs of the people the extension of buildings into the public space would be less of a problem. Talking about the traffic another related issue is the lack of efficient public transport. In this case I think that a change in street hierarchy and form of transportation has to be reformed on a large scale. The municipalities are situated very close to each other and connections between them are important.

Another strategy that could effect the traffic and the street life is the idea of mixed use cities. By mixing residential building with workspace people would have a bigger opportunity to get a job near their home. This would lead to less commuting and less time spent in traffic, as well as an active street life all day long. Different forms of tenure and a mixed price range is also a way of getting a mix of people. In Metro Manila companies that want to build housing for middle or high income earners have to set aside at least 20% of the budget to low income housing but these houses doesn't have to be in the same area as the initial project. Here I think that the rules could be extended with guidelines on how many per cent of the built area should be allocated to housing and other functions as well as how to reach a good mix of forms of tenure and price range.

4.3 Quality of urban space

In terms of quality of public space I think that vegetation plays a big role. My impression is that green areas often are associated with high cost of maintenance and that in combination with the extremely high density leads to a lack of green space. If one chose to see the maintenance as job opportunities and cost of land etc. as investment in health and wellbeing one could easily argue for more green space. This is probably a question for the community as well as developers and municipalities. Following the guidelines of the World Health Organisation could be relevant for new development but for already developed areas that might be a big step. One way could be to implement a sort of green urban acupuncture to raise poor areas and areas with extremely high pollution and from that work continuously towards a more and more green environment.

I would also like to point out the importance in variation of spaces. From visiting several low-income housing areas I could really see the difference in how different organisations work with public space. In a typical area developed by the National Housing Authority houses are rowed up in straight lines that creates a series of identical open spaces. In the development of Saint Hannibal, made by the non-profit organisation TAO Pilipinas, houses were almost thrown out on the property which created open spaces with different scale and character. The way that TAO Pilipinas worked with outdoor corridors on the facades also created an interesting street space and in a way extended the public space in horizontal



dimension. Though this way of planning might be difficult in a city with such high density, as seen in Saint Hannibal, the organic way of placing the buildings also created very narrow streets and spaces difficult to use. My conclusion here is that there must be a

balance between the variation in public space and the organisation of buildings.

The perception on public space and related problems might be in need of a change. I think a key to sustainable planning is to reconsider investments in public space as expensive and start counting the benefits that the city and its citizens will

earn on developed public space. One will probably see that the money spent is well invested in better health, more comfortable microclimate, less ecological damage and more lively public life.

5 The Role of Architects

When the budget and the physical area is small I think that the role of the architect might grow compared to projects with the opposite prerequisites. One have to be creative and look for innovative solutions. By breaking new ground architects might also have to be prepared on augmenting for the cause of the benefits since stakeholders could se such solutions as costly and unnecessary. In every project I think its important to collect knowledge and have a local understanding, preferably in collaboration with existing communities. Though its also important to see things in a broader perspective and look at the conditions in wider terms.

Poor people and people representing a minority or a vulnerable groups might have a harder time getting their voice heard which gives the architect an impotent role of seeking a representative and democratic view on the situation. I think that architects should work in collaboration with other architects as well as other occupational groups and not to forget, the local inhabitants.



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