

Girls and Boys Space

Designing for equitable outdoor environments to increase the quality of urban life



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I. Introduction

In February 2020, through the Urban Shelter (ABAN11) class at Lund University, I participated in a study trip to Manila in the Philippines. During the study trip, I visited several housing areas for low-income families where I met a lot of people, did interviews, and made observations. Visiting the different housing areas, the first thing that came to my mind was the lack of quality outdoor space. The outdoor spaces in these areas were often located in the streets or in the semi-private hallways. These areas were the only place for kids to play and adults to meet and discuss daily life. Thus, common for all the areas, was that they often included one designed outdoor space: a basketball court. Basketball is the national sport of the Philippines therefore these areas were always crowded; although generally by boys aged between 8-18. Seeing this, and listening to architects talk about how new areas will develop no differently than this, I can't help asking myself; where do the girls go?

The quality of urban life goes beyond comfort, satisfaction and the right to good commodities. The quality of urban life is about human rights such as the right to exist, think, express, be free, and practice democracy (Hall et. al., 2000). As we are facing human rights challenges all over the world, I believe we need to increase our knowledge and be more aware of how to design diverse outdoor spaces. These spaces need to accommodate and help all people flourish, no matter age, gender, ethnicity, and background, this is crucial for increasing the quality of

urban life (Hall et. al., 2000). In societies where there is limited indoor space, a quality outdoor environment is of considerable importance. At the same time, the competition regarding outdoor spaces is getting more and more explicit in step with the growing population of the urban poor (Hall et. al., 2000). Keeping that in mind, the aim of this paper is to investigate how architects and urban designers can design for more equitable outdoor spaces with a focus on children's biological gender. The reason behind this is to discuss the issues that were identified when visiting Manila and seeing the restricted outdoor spaces. The need for equitable outdoor space is crucial for the quality of urban life and the sustainable development of Filipino society.



Basketball court in Bistekville 4, Manila



Basketball court in NGC, Manila

II. Literature Review

In this section, I seek to convey different aspects that hopefully can tell something about 1. what equitable outdoor environments mean, 2. why the outdoor environments are designed as they are in Manila, and 3. what can be done about the outdoor environments in order to be more equitable.

Equality and Equity

First of all, I would like to clarify the meaning of the two concepts; Equality and Equity, both linguistically and substantially alike. For me, there is a fine line between the two concepts, where one does not exclude the other. I will hereunder convey my interpretation of the two concepts and how they will be used throughout the paper.

The concept of equality is about making sure that everyone has access to the same rights and opportunities. Trying to achieve the same thing, no matter where you come from and what you actually are compatible with. This concept, therefore, is about sameness in one way. Linked to the context of this paper; girls and boys, therefore, should get one basketball court each in order to reach equality. They all get the same.

But equity, on the other hand, is for me more about fairness. The meaning of this concept is that everyone gets what they need, in order to achieve the same thing in the end. If girls and boys get one basketball court each, they both generally will be occupied by boys because of underlying social and cultural structures. This means that the result is not fair for boys and girls because of the simple fact that girls still feel they have nowhere to be. Equitable spaces mean spaces for both girls and boys, where they want to be and feel that they can do so without being forced into specific structures. It is not about quantity but yet about the quality of the space.

Manila and urban growth

Inequalities and exclusion are becoming an urban issue all over the world. Today the socioeconomic gap is the highest it has been for 30 years (UN habitat, 2016). In 2020, most of the people in the Philippines live in urban areas and the country is struggling with rapid urban growth. Manila is the capital and the biggest city of the Philippines, with a population of almost 14 million in 2020. With a population density of almost 111 000 people per square mile, Manila is now the most densely populated city in the world (World population review, 2020). The Philippines has a young population, where more than 30% of the population is under 14 years old (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). This argues for the importance of quality spaces for children and young adults, something that is easily forgotten in a world where inequalities and exclusion are getting more explicit. Women and children

are both marginalized groups and the needs of these groups are often not heard when it comes to planning and building our future cities (UN habitat, 2016).

Comparison density/square mile (World population review, 2020)

Manila	111 000 people
Mumbai	73 000 people
London	14 500 people
Stockholm	13 000 people

Reading numbers like these, showing that Manila has a population density almost 10 times bigger than the capital of Sweden, leads me to understand the cruciality of quality spaces within the city. The structure and order of outdoor spaces will be one of the most tangible democratic educations for many inhabitants (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006).

Governance and the housing sector

Cities are places that offer both opportunities and risks, obscene inequalities and extraordinary opportunities depending on who you are and where you come from (Hall et. al., 2000). The land value is becoming more expensive, this will over time more or less force people to take part in informal societies because regulated land will become too expensive. There is a growing risk of creating informal communities all over the world, with a lack of security, services, and quality spaces (UN habitat, 2016). These societies start to foster themselves, developing values and understandings that risk being beyond democratic rules (Hall et. al., 2000). Everybody's right to the city on equitable terms becomes even more explicit when the economical gap and human overpopulation are increasing (Hall et. al., 2000) To understand this phenomenon, we first need to understand what kind of politics and financial keynotes that frame the housing sector all over the world, including Manila.

In the past 30 years, we have seen a transition from societies that are governed by a central government, towards a society based on governance. This means that the government has taken a step back in favor of private actors and initiatives in all forms of welfare projects (Hedling et. al. 2009). Today more problems are solved in the private sector than ever before, with no exception in

the Philippines and Manila. This includes urban development and means that housing projects today are much more complex than they were decades ago (Hall et. al., 2000). Solving the housing shortage is accurate, but since the private sector is driven by economic success, the main goal of many actors today is to support the market, meaning that every project has to be profited. Financial growth risks to be more important than equity and quality of good spaces (Hall et. al., 2000).



Informal housing along a river in Manila.



Informal housing along a busy street in Manila.

Lack of space affects everyday life

The Filipino government has protracted the question of governance where the housing market is, to an extent, left for the market to determine. This, of course, has an immediate effect on everyday life in the cities. In incredibly dense cities like Manila, we tend to build more dense and cheap than ever before. This leads to a housing market where the indoor space per person is descending, many people live on a maximum of 5 sqm/ person (Agnes Agay, 2020). When people share such small indoor spaces, the quality of the outdoor space becomes even more important. The outdoor environment should be a free space, crucial for democratic values in our societies. In these spaces, children see each other and learn about values, tolerance, responsibility and understanding of society as a whole (Betsy, 2017). Due to the lack of space in the cities the outdoor environments often end up competing with other activities in the city, usually the ones who are seen as

economic generators. Equitable outdoor environments that everybody can use, and feel that they are eligible on the same terms as anybody else, are getting more and more infrequent (UN habitat, 2016).

Rapid development all over the world has changed the land use of every city. The space is limited and the result goes by itself, the more buildings - the less open space. The space that is left in the city is often the street, which becomes an important social interactor in the city. The streets, as it is today, are often programmed for different kinds of vehicles since this is the absolute purpose of it. When people use these spaces, they have to do so in the conditions of the vehicles (Ekawati, 2014). The physical elements in the street are therefore not designed for social interaction or children's play and stimulate neither. To stimulate children's creativity the spaces they play in require freedom and safety (Sener et. al., 2008). The street offers none of this and therefore becomes a problematic space for children to claim (Ekewati, 2014). The few spaces that are designed for stimulating children's play, therefore require a high quality to enable all children's possibility to develop and grow into democratic adults (Betsky, 2017).



Children playing in the street in Camarin Residences, Manila.



Playing games in the semi-private hallway in Camarin Residences, Manila.

Gender as a construction

According to the European Institute for Gender Education (EIGE), gender is a cultural and social construction that can be perceived differently in different cultures. What girls and boys should and could do will, therefore, be affected by the prevailing culture in the country. The perception of gender and its possibilities is inherited from generation to generation (EIGE, 2020). The Philippines have a long history of colonization, which may be the reason why Manila is a social urban conglomerate today and one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world (World population review, 2020). At the same time, the Philippines is a highly religious country, which has shaped the culture and the perceived roles of girls and boys in society. Only 1% of the Filipino population is non-believers according to the Central Intelligence Agency (2020). The view and division between gender here is more distinct than in other less religious countries like Sweden. In the Filipino society, children's play is often transmitted through family members, neighbors or classmates. Gender issues and structures are often manifested in early childhood interactions and the construction of gender is, therefore, something that is reproduced from generation to generation during the formative period of children. For example, studies show that young girls learn how to play from their older sisters and female cousins (Lanuza, 2011).

Children's play and gender education

The whole perception of society starts with the children's play. If we want to develop democratic, responsible and equal citizens we need to consider how the environments for children's play are formulated. Children's play is one of the earliest and most crucial lessons where children learn how to be around others and how to act and interact with other people. Children often play together, disregarding gender, although different aspects of togetherness and distance between girls and boys are visible from an early age (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006). Girls and boys play together and therefore they learn gender perspective (Betsky, 2017). Even the youngest children highlight power and different roles in the play for girls and boys (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006). Children learn, develop and understand their gender identities in relation to others such as playmates, teachers and parents. Therefore lies hidden cultural, social and historical structures of femininity and masculinity as part of children's understanding of the world. Children are highly dependent on the expectations and possibilities their

environment gives them. Adults, such as teachers and parents have a defining role over the learning situation and if they reach a bigger awareness, the children's own understanding can take a bigger part in playing (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006). Studies show that from the age of seven, girls start to play differently to boys, and at the age of 18-19 80% of the sport-rinks are being used by boys only (Blomdahl 2012).

(...) play is like a language: a system of communication and expression, not in itself, either good or bad. (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006)

As we can read in the quote above, the play fosters and frames the children, either we want it or not. It is something that we need to observe and try to shape in order to let children learn values that are accurate (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006). The outdoor environment is often seen as a neutral space of freedom, because its natural materials do not have social structures explaining gender disassociation. This means that the play in the natural outdoor environment could end up formulating gender-equal as well as gender-unequal structures (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006). The outdoor environment can be seen as a context-free environment, which makes it a blind spot when it comes to children's gender education. Thus, it does not mean that the natural environment has a lack of power structures, rather that the children get to explore the environment and its structure for themselves (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2006).

How is it done in reality?

To further explain the importance of the issue of equitable outdoor environments I now will present two different examples. Both of them are situated in Sweden and both of them are implemented in reality. The emphasis of the examples is that they have both been focusing on the participatory process but in different ways.

Rosens röda matta

In the entrance to Rosengård (Malmö, Sweden), one can read "you can take a boy from Rosengård, but you can never take Rosengård from a boy", once said by the world-famous football player Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Björnson, 2014). By putting it there this tells us something about how society thinks of Rosengård as a place for boys. As a result of this, there was a lack of space where the girls could be and

play, which was the reason the municipality decided to focus on what the girls wanted and needed. In 2013, the municipality of the city of Malmö, together with local actors, developed an activity-based space in the suburb Rosengård, called Rosens röda matta (carpet of the red rose). In that time, a necessity arose to tie the fragmented city together with different activity-based spaces, where Rosens röda matta played a central role. The initial aim was to develop a design that the target group girls could support. Therefore, the process was based on 13 girls aged 16 - 19, who during one summer got to work with and explore the design of the space. The knowledge that they gained was that the girls wanted physical activities of a cultural character. Music, performance and dance were central all the way and became the main strategies in the design. A former parking lot is now a place designed by, and for younger girls. The project has gained a lot of publicity where the girls are held as designers (Björnson, 2014).

Rosens röda matta has during the years received a lot of critique, mainly charged for not being diverse enough. The space serves a specific purpose, which is to answer the demand for physical activity of cultural character. Some of the items in the space, such as the stage, could be interpreted as a flexible space that can be used in many different ways. Although the stage is placed in a way that the one entering the stage is very exposed which can make it hard for young people and kids to take that space in the public sphere. Rosens röda matta is often charged with being a dull and unused space, which is the opposite of what the initial target was (Björnson, 2014).

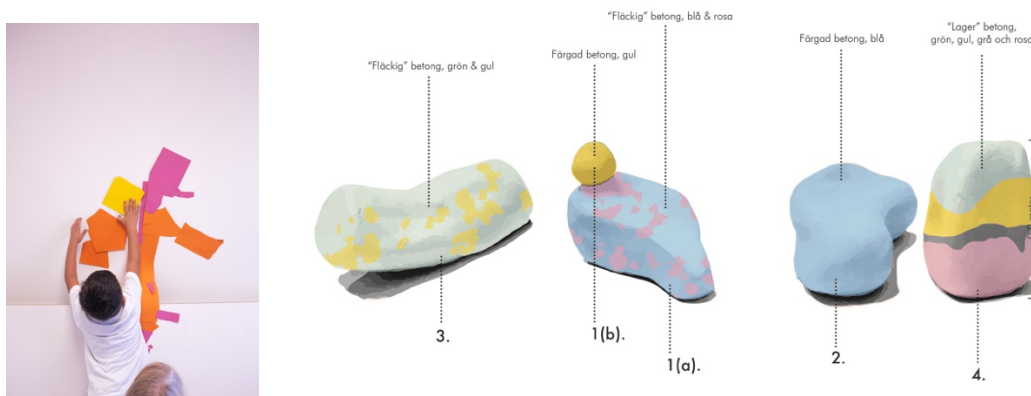


Rosens röda matta. Illustration plan by Anders Dahlbäck, Malmö city.

Designlab Rosenlund

According to the research collective Dis/order, children, girls and boys included, are the ones that use the neighborhoods' immediate surroundings the most. Thus, children are a diverse group of individuals that have different needs and prerequisites and therefore cannot be seen as a homogenous group. Designing for children is often something made by adults, not including children themselves in the specific process (Dis/order, 2019). During a couple of workshops in 2018-2019, Dis/order together with the children of Rosenlund's preschool (Jönköping, Sweden) explored terms such as shape, spaciousness and color. This was to achieve the aim of the project; to develop a public art constellation that was made by and meant for the school's children (Dis/order, 2020).

Normally, discussing architecture and design in specific terms is dependent on education, which children often do not possess. Dis/order, therefore, wanted to explore how the design discussion can be led by the creating and the making itself and initiated the workshop with 1:1, full scale temporary installations. The process was led and developed by the children themselves where their different needs all became implemented in the design itself. In this way, the participatory children gained a sort of empowerment of their environment, learning and understanding the democratic values that they actually can affect the cities environment (Dis/order, 2019). The workshops resulted in 4 cement constellations, without a specific purpose or order. The project was one of many, stating that the children of today will be the adults of tomorrow. According to Dis/order, it is crucial that this specific group take active participation in our design process in order to invest in democracy and in our future society as a whole (Dis/order, 2019). Democracy is something that we all need to learn, starting from playscapes, not something that is static over time (Betsky, 2017).



Children's participation and the result on the right (Dis/order, 2019)

III. Urban Design Discussion

Use urban design to change traditions

When I was walking the streets of Manila, it was truly remarkable that the outdoor spaces are something that is not considered in the design. During our visit, the children often played in the streets, where they were neither free or safe. Reading the literature review, this is not a sustainable solution and we really need to do something about this phenomenon. The open spaces are getting less and therefore, we need to act on this question now. I strongly believe in participation processes where the inhabitants are able to affect the design themselves. In this way, the area will be designed by the people living there, which means that their needs are being heard and the neighborhood will be better for all of them. Not only for some. Additionally, the design will this way also be easier to adapt to since the inhabitants themselves have participated in the process. Most probably they will thrive better in this area and live there for a longer time than if they were not able to participate in the process, something crucial for future sustainable development.

According to EIGE, the construction of gender is a social and cultural phenomenon, passed from one generation to another. The main struggle will therefore be, how do we break these traditions? And how do we develop new kinds of constructions that promote another kind of society? A society where both girls and boys can play in the outdoor environment without being part of gender structures that exclude different groups from different places. Children are highly dependent on the expectations and possibilities their environment gives them. This is normally framed by parents and teachers, setting up rules of what is allowed and what is not. But what if the rules can be set already in the physical environment in where the children play and explore? I argue this is possible through urban design. Through setting up frames in the physical environment it is possible to teach children about structures and enable a certain form of behavior. If the environment is able to frame the children and their way of thinking, I strongly believe that we break the vicious spiral of gender construction.

Seeing the differences between girls and boys play, visible already in early age, I argue for the importance of understanding the differences in order to enable equitable outdoor spaces. Larsson and Jalakas have written about spatial planning from a gender perspective, and they argue that doing so might cause a discussion of “us” and “them”, where there is a risk of the two groups growing away from each other (Larsson and Jalakas, 2014). To an extent, I argue with them. But if we

choose not to see gender and design our outdoor spaces so that everybody gets the same, we risk consolidating the gender issues that we already are facing. Related to urban design, this means, seeing beyond quantity and instead start discussing the quality of spaces. For example, a boys' basketball court may be cheap, which probably is one reason we see it all over Manila. It is easy to maintain and in many places, it is used as an evacuation space as well and therefore have a dual-use. But a space for girls, taking examples from Rosens röda matta; a cultural performance space, may be more expensive. Therefore, it is relevant to also see the economics behind urban design and where we choose to invest our money. How can we promote spaces for everyone in the cities when it is easy to compare prices and choose the cheapest one? Especially when reality projects show that the budget often is inhumanly tight.

Children's participation - but how?

As mentioned above, I am convinced that the only way of achieving equitable outdoor spaces is to work with participatory design. Both Rosens röda matta and Designlab Rosenlund state that it is not sustainable for architects to guess the different needs of different groups when there lies an intersectional truth behind all of our belongings. There is no such thing as black and white in urban design, hence the design process can not be that either. The one thing we do know is, children are the ones that are going to build our future communities and the ones that are experts in their environments. If we think that they do not know how to design for children, who does know then. The only question is how? How can we achieve a design that is for both girls and boys and how can we let everybody speak?

In the two projects Rosens röda matta and Designlab Rosenlund, the main focus was the process and the participation where different groups were heard. Something that I think housing projects in Manila could benefit a lot from. I am aware that some housing projects we visited in Manila, the authorities have been working with different forms of participation. Even though the aim of these projects was to develop more equitable neighborhoods, it is not enough. Often the inhabitants' participation is coming too late in the process and the quality of these spaces, therefore, is not enough. Financial struggles are often something that makes it impossible for some projects to complete participatory processes. It may be hard to convince the actual result of such a demanding process, but it is crucial

for our future sustainable societies. It is important also to understand that this paper argues that there is not necessarily a need for more outdoor space, just a need for smarter and more equitable designed outdoor space.

Rosens röda matta tells us that sometimes good ambitions can turn out to be not that good. Even though the authorities have the ambition to let the marginalized group be heard the space became criticized for not being diverse enough. What we can learn is that all groups need to be heard in every project. 13 girls cannot be advocates for all girls living in this neighborhood. This simply because of the fact that all girls also are part of several different other groups than just simply girls. What we also can learn from this project is that even though 13 girls have the opportunity to frame this area, it does not take away the expertise of the urban designer. It is crucial to involve groups, giving them instruments to discuss and understand architecture, instead of letting desire be the reality straight off. It is important to include all children in the process, not only the ones that normally take much space. Cultural and social aspects might result in some groups being marginalized in these kinds of processes. The participatory design, could, for example, be including children in a school, more or less forcing everybody to participate on neutral ground. Different focus groups would make different needs visible which the architects then can form an opinion about. Beneficial would be if the focus would be on the doing and in that sense letting children discuss and create at the same time.

This is made differently in Designlab Rosenlund, where the children frame the discussion through simply doing. Discovering architecture through room and shape in reality. A simple way for the architect to involve and let different needs be heard and a cheap way of testing the proposal before it is being built. Still the architect can frame the doing and the discussion if it's needed. With this project, I have some trouble with the actual result. Since the result of the process became quite neutral, I wonder if this might risk power structures still being passed from one generation to another? Since the design itself does not frame the education enough. Like Äremalm-Hagsér says about the natural environment such as the forest, it can turn out to be gender-equal as well as gender-unequal since the children get to explore the structure themselves.

In conclusion, I want to go back to my initial question. Where do the girls go? It turned out to be a quite hard question to investigate in the outdoor environment since most of the girls play in their homes or in the semi-private

hallways. The interviewees often talked about space for children and basketball courts in the same context. As they go hand in hand. But when I asked where the girls play, they answered something along the line with, that the girls were playing marbles in the hallway. The basketball court is evidently not for all children. Thus, what I often heard when speaking to the people in Manila, was that they had an abundance of ideas regarding things that they wanted to have in their neighborhoods, but they felt like the government and authorities did not listen to them. This is what we need to change. Our future societies depend on something as easy and crucial as the stimulation of being heard and being able to play. The production of gender in the outdoor environment can be changed to more equitable, but only if we want to.

Gender - a complex concept

Finally, I want to add that I am fully aware that the perception of gender goes beyond the conservative and biological way of acknowledging girls and boys. The construction of gender is, as we learn in this paper, social and cultural and therefore there are several discourses seeking to explain the construction and division of gender. The reason why I ended up focusing on the biological distinctions between girls and boys is; 1. because of the crucial need for anything else (!) than boys' space in the city of Manila, and 2. in discussion with my tutor, I realized that this paper should be too intangible if I should have had a more nuanced discussion of gender, other than the biological division of girls and boys. For further investigations, it would be interesting to look at the same kind of question, how we can design for equitable outdoor environments to increase the quality of urban life, with an input of the construction of gender and the discourse analysis aspect of gender. As we do know, Manila is one of the most densely populated cities in the world, I strongly believe that this kind of nuanced addition would gain a lot of broader perspective in the future.

IV. The Role of Architects

The role of architects is to advocate the quality of urban life for all citizens all over the world. Seeing through gender, culture, background, and socioeconomic status, the architects have an important job not to distinguish the different peoples' needs and their right to the city. Thus, the role of architects is more than just to advocate the quality of urban life. Architects possess a role where they

have the possibility to promote change through design (Correa, 1987). If gender is a social and cultural construction, I strongly believe that perception can be changed. How we see and perceive gender and the roles of girls and boys must constantly be something that architects consider and develop how it can be changed through design. To distinguish gender is a way of demonstrating power, which can be questioned and challenged through the way architects arrange spatial order. In order to do so, it is the role of architects to be more conscious about the significance of quality outdoor spaces and children's play. Play has to be looked at in the context of the environment in which it takes place where architects must understand how the stimulation of play can take place in that environment.

Society as a whole is changing and it is the role of architects not only to keep up but to also be the key and main actor in the change to a sustainable society. The architects should not only understand the differences in hidden codes and power constructions but also be able to promote and design for changes and equity in outdoor spaces. Learning from this paper, it is not enough to design neutral spaces, such as natural environments, and think that we are designing gender-equal spaces. It is the role of architects to give all different forms of gender, equitable prerequisites in order to live their everyday life. The architect has an important and central role in the shift for the future sustainable society where all genders have equitable rights.

At last, I want to add that the role of the architect is shifting in time. As well as gender is a social construction, the role of the architect is part of many different discourses that seek to explain what the actual role is. For many decades, architects all over the world have been seen as experts where the architect per se also acts and conducts as one. In my way of seeing it, the architects are slowly growing into a role with more advocating character as we promote more participatory processes. The role of architects today is, especially dealing with issues like this paper states, to mediate knowledge, trying to get different groups together and enable them to understand each other. As the example for Designlab Rosenlund examines, not all groups have the knowledge and language to discuss what they actually want. Even more important, thinking of the urban poor, the ones that may not know what they want to have because they simply do not know what they are missing. The role of the architect today is to shape these discussions and translate that into the design. The shift is something that takes time and we must let the architects grow and develop in their new role in order to enable better

and more qualitative processes where they themselves are learning for every time. As the paper states, 1:1 real experiment is the only way of allowing architects to explore new processes and new ways of designing our future societies. I have strong hopes that the architects of tomorrow are not only a part of but also the ones promoting the future sustainable society.

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