

# Public Space for Social Integration

## Lessons from Sweden and the Philippines



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## 1 Introduction

Public space is where groups of different people have the chance to meet or interact. As cities grow and get denser, public space is often reduced. Without open common spaces that allow for people to share the same space, much less social integration is achieved (Rudd, 2020). The concept of integration has many different meanings, one of which concerns social bridging between different groups (Ager and Strand, 2008). This paper departs from the idea that such connections may be supported by physical places where people can meet. This paper also draws on on-site observations in the Philippines.

In February 2020 we visited Manila for a three-week-long study trip to learn more about the housing situation and relocating strategies for the urban poor. The trip included site visits, meetings, and interviews with city officials and residents. One puzzling observation that stayed with me concerns public space and its relation to people and communities. Having interviewed relocated informal settlers, I came to the understanding that most people preferred to spend their time indoors at home. For different reasons, they did not spend much time outside. Some people felt exposed like they were being watched and gossiped about by neighbours, and in some areas, there was a lack of seating or proper shading which might also have been a reason for people choosing to spend time indoors.

Another interesting observation was that the relocating-communities we visited, were gated settlements. Gated communities are the norm and also something that the residents were pleased with because it made them feel safe. However, this meant that besides lacking suitable outdoor common spaces, they did not have any close connection to public space. The only people spending (little) time outside, were neighbours with similar backgrounds, belonging to the same socio-economic group.

If people live in gated communities and do not spend time in the public, the opportunity to become integrated is reduced. With the current relocation strategies in Manila being relocating groups of informal settlers to closed-off, often mono-functional areas, it becomes extra essential to work with integration through public space and social infrastructure.

Having identified that visited dwelling areas were lacking suitable common spaces and were gated with a poor connection to public space, the focus for this paper is to explore public space in social housing, how to improve it and work with social integration. I will look at historical examples in Sweden – the million programmes built in the 1960s and 1970s are the most comparable – to look at similar examples where segregation and inadequate public space also have been an issue. I will thereafter investigate different projects aiming to upgrade housing areas from that period or in general work with integration. Finally, I hope to conclude some strategies to apply when working with public space in communities for the urban poor and areas in general that may risk becoming segregated, whether in the Philippines or Sweden.

## 2.1 Literature Review

### **Different types of planning**

In "Planning and Housing in the Rapidly Urbanising World", Jenkins, Smith and Wang argue that the planning approaches during the 20th century can be divided into three paradigms. The first paradigm peaked after the Second World War. It was designed-based with a top-down approach mainly using the masterplan as a tool. The second paradigm, starting in the late 1960s, had an approach of seeing urban areas as different sets of systems and making rational decisions based on massive amounts of data. Structure plans were the key element of this period. The third paradigm emerged in the 1990s, as a result of recognising planning as a political decision-making process which needed negotiation and dialogue, this could be done through different participatory approaches to planning.

Even though these paradigms emerged at different times in history, they all exist side-by-side.

The masterplan approach was used when reconstructing after the World War and when building new capitals in newly independent countries. It has been met with critique worldwide. When implementing it in developing countries, the critique has involved that Western norms might be inappropriate and ignoring indigenous traditions. The critique also involves often having a negative view on urban growth leading to underestimating future urban population as well as having a focus of the plan as a product rather than on its effects. Also, unlike in Europe, social infrastructure like education- and healthcare facilities was often ignored, being seen as consumption rather than production-related.

The structural planning that followed aimed to produce a strategic framework within which more detailed local plans could be produced. A broader regional context, transportation, housing and environmental issues were considered. The approach accepted the view that urban areas are in constant change (rather than finished products like in the masterplan). With data and new professionals in social sciences and economics, better guidance could be produced. Few of the countries with rapid urbanisation adopted structure planning.

Action planning or community action planning was another response to master planning. It promotes community involvement in the process. Methods from community action planning have been used worldwide, both in rapidly urbanising and in already urbanised parts, in a variety of scenarios: new settlement planning, upgrading existing settlements and capacity development. The method focuses less on strategic and longterm visions which means that the risk is that action planning produces isolated projects and leaves major strategic problems unsolved.

Despite criticism, master planning continues to be a dominant approach when controlling urban development (Jenkins, Smith and Wang, 2007).

### **Sweden's Million programmes**

1964 the Swedish Government decided to build 1 million new dwellings the following ten year period (1965-1974). The goal was to solve the current housing crisis.

The Million programmes included multi-dwelling in different scales as well as detached single family houses. It is however often associated with the large scale, monotonous housing areas.

What characterizes the larger scaled areas are generous green areas, rational building design (often with prefabricated building elements), slab blocks with equal sun exposure and separated traffic systems with large parking lots on the edges of the neighbourhood. Often built in fringe areas, the developments contained commercial centres to function independently of the city.

To secure a good living standard for less fortunate large families, the Swedish Housing Board came up with new norms and standards. “The entire population should have access to healthy, spacious, well-planned and appropriately equipped housing of good quality at reasonable costs.” Planning for disabled people also became the norm. Before many housing projects were missing central heating (25%), their own bathroom(40%), refrigerator (40%), their own wc (30%). 1960, 47% of all the apartments in Sweden were half-modern. 1974, this had been reduced to only 15%.

The role of the architect changed during this period. Important decisions shifted from being made by the developer together with architect, to the developer and the construction company. The Million programmes were debated amongst architects at the time; they were wondering who would take over the holistic responsibility when cities and new districts were planned and built.

Other critiques at the time involved taking long time to complete planned public functions such as services, shops and public transport. Kindergartens or preschools were sometimes forgotten. (Nylander, 2008).

Many of the large-scale housing areas from this time period have today become segregated communities with a high crime-rate.

### **Planning in the Philippines**

There are different approaches to housing upgrading for informal dwellers in the Philippines. On our study trip, we encountered communities where different types of organisations were involved. National Housing Authority, NHA, is government-owned and the only national agency mandated to take part in housing production for low-income families (National Housing Authority n.d). It has a top-down approach to planning where the users are not included. An opposite approach is one of Technical Association Organisation Pilipinas, TAO. TAO is a non-profit, non-government association that assists urban and rural poor in physical planning, development, and management of their communities (TAO Pilipinas n.d). They do not provide the housing itself, rather information and guidance for people who want to build their own community.

Even if the communities tend to turn out differently depending on what type of organization is involved, all of the ones that we visited were gated and had poor access to public space.

## 2.2 Exploring upgrading projects

I have chosen to explore three upgrading projects of different kinds. They are all examples of how to upgrade segregated communities. The first project is from the Million programmes where the upgrading evolves around both social and physical improvements. The second project is from the same period and shares many of the characteristics of the Million programmes. The upgrading concerns physical upgrading on a building level. The third project aims to improve integration through social and physical upgrading as well as a participatory approach.

### **Case Study No.1 Rosengård, Malmö**

2006 Gehl architects were commissioned by MKB to make a strategy for redeveloping the outdoor spaces in Rosengård, Malmö. Rosengård was built as a part of "The Million Programme" to solve the lack of housing at the time. It is one of the largest housing areas in Scandinavia. Like many other similar projects, it eventually deteriorated into a worn-down, isolated area. The goal for Gehl architects was to turn this neighbourhood into a well-integrated community. They wanted to make it into an active part of Malmö and invite people from other parts into the neighbourhood.

Having analyzed the area and its lack of connection to the rest of the city – both physical and psychological – Gehl came up with several strategies to work with integration and upgrading. To deal with the physical disconnection due to the area being surrounded by large traffic routes, better traffic solutions for especially bikes and pedestrian were proposed. As for the psychological or mental barrier, they had ambitions for inviting people from other parts of Malmö and give the neighbourhood a better reputation. To improve the image, they proposed creating some destinations. By getting more people to move in the area, the numbers of eyes on the street would increase, which could decrease criminality and result in a better reputation. Some of their more hands-on strategies included densifying the area and opening up groundfloors to make the buildings more extroverted instead of introverted.

Besides developing a strategy for the neighbourhood, Gehl architects were commissioned in 2008 to redesign two decayed courtyards in one of the most run-down areas in Rosengård, called Herrgården.

For the design and planning of the courtyard, Gehl architects valued the input of the local community. Together with MKB, they visited every staircase that surrounded the courtyard and conducted interviews with the residents, asking them how they used the area and what they thought was missing.

Based on the input from the residents, the new design provided the courtyards with better lighting, play surfaces and a new human-scale. Other improvements included gardens with early evening sun and bikesheds behind south-facing benches to improve the microclimate while also helping to create semi-private spaces to increase the sense of ownership.

After their intervention, there had been a 50-60% increase in courtyard activity and 16% saving of maintenance due to reduced vandalism. (One size doesn't fit all, 2009)



*One of the upgraded courtyards (One size doesn't fit all, 2009)*

## **Case Study No. 2, DeFlat, Amsterdam**

DeFlat is a renovation project of a massive housing complex called Kleiburg in Amsterdam. It is located in the neighbourhood Biljemeer which was built as a CIAM inspired area in the 1970s. It consisted of 48 eleven-story hexagonal tower slabs, some of them up to a kilometre in length. Like many other large-scale housing projects from that time, mainly low-income citizens moved there. Unemployment, drug problems, and criminality became issues in the area.

In the mid-1990s an urban renewal project was initiated for the area. Half of the highrises were demolished and replaced with rowhouses and smaller-scaled apartment buildings. Some buildings were altered to bring down the scale or painted in different pastel colours to uplift them (Bokern, 2017).

Almost 20 years later a competition was held to renovate the last building in its original state, Kleiburg, to meet the needs of today's standards. The 400 meter long building, with 11 stories, had 500 apartments. The initial renovation was estimated to cost over 70

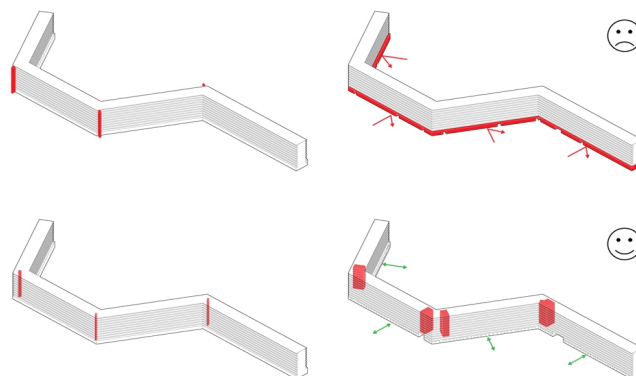


million, which made demolition more economically feasible. A competition which required cost-efficient interventions was therefore initiated.



*(DeFlat Kleiburg, 2020)*

The dutch company NL architects made the winning proposal. They proposed to embrace what is already there instead of trying to change it esthetically – e.g. change materials, colours. They proposed to remove elements added in the eighties, e.g. three elevator shafts that disrupted the original, brutal horizontality. They opened up the facades, placed large windows facing the galleries. They sandblasted the painted balustered and got a new fine surface. Another significant change was the move of the storages located on the ground floor which were leaving a dead zone outdoors on the ground level. Instead, they were placed on each floor. The ground floor was thereby possible to open up and activated to create a better connection with the surroundings. They also decided to create a more generous opening in the buildings for the pedestrian and bikers.



*Diagrams showing strategies of the project (DeFlat Kleiburg, 2020)*

The idea was to make the project cheaper both to renovate and to buy, by turning it into a "Klusflat", meaning that the renovation only included the main structure, leaving the apartments unfinished and unfurnished for the residents to renovate themselves. No kitchen, shower, heating or rooms. By minimizing the initial investment that way, a new business model for housing in the Netherlands was created.

The project was rewarded with Eu miesaward 2017 (DeFlat Kleiburg, 2020).

### **Case Study No. 3, Kvarterloeft: Holmbladsgaede, Copenhagen**

In 1997 the Danish Government's Urban Committee and the city of Copenhagen accompanied by different organisations initiated an urban design renewal to uplift dilapidated and segregated areas. The project was named "Kvarterloeft" (Neighborhood Revitalisation).

Before this initiative, the urban renewal in Denmark had mostly concerned physical changes, either demolition of dense and worn-down estates or preservational upgrading of buildings from the 1850s, like Vesterbro. By the 1980s, Vesterbro was characterised by slums and social problems. The housing in Vesterbro, like many other estates in Copenhagen, consisted of small apartments that did not attract families with children. A strategy when renewing the neighbourhood was, therefore, to remove party walls and extend the sizes of the apartments. Urban renewal projects like these were met with opposition, mainly for only including physical upgrading methods. Social problems were not solved but exported to other parts of the city. The aim of the "Kvarterloeft" was therefore to counteract this.

The aim of the urban renewal project was formulated followingly: "The principal objective is to implement and support a positive trend in the neighbourhood; to empower and support its residents and create a positive image for the neighbourhood by means of visible physical measures and social and cultural facilities." The core components of the upgrading projects could be summarised into: the action area should concern small urban districts, be holistic, cross-sectoral and based on residents' desires and proposals.

One of the first neighbourhoods to be selected for the revitalisation project was Holmbladsgaede in Amager neighbourhood. It was chosen on the basis that it belonged to the most vulnerable neighbourhood of Copenhagen with higher unemployment rates than the rest of Copenhagen. It was also in need of improved living conditions with better standards of accommodations and a better reputation. (Sprogøe Petersen, 2001).

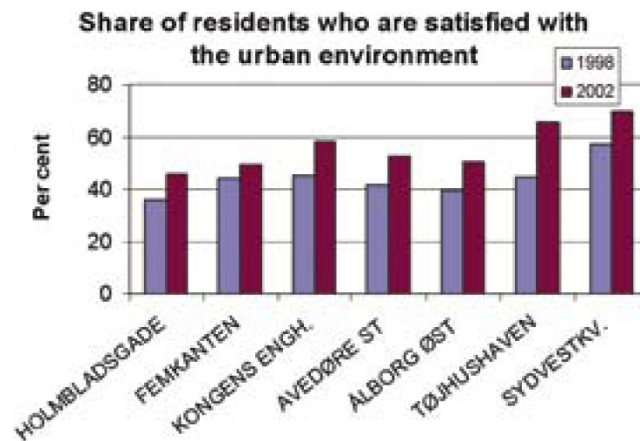
To give Holmbladsgaede a lift, innovative high profile architecture and participatory design was used as methods. As the oldest area in the programme, Holmbladsgaede was in a big need of upgrading, as it lacked enough outdoor and green areas. Beautification, greenification and creation of squares were important actions. Also, creating a



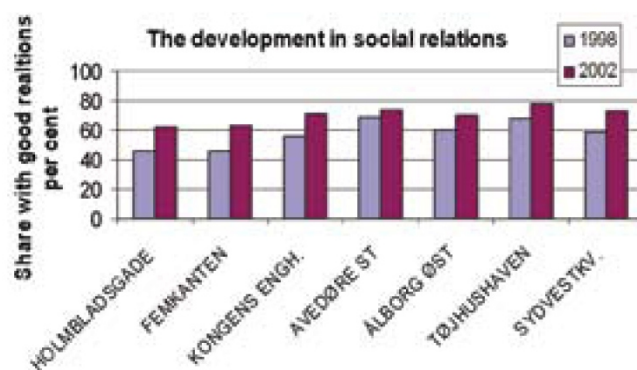
comprehensive sports and culture plan for the area, which amongst other things resulted in a sports and culture centre, designed by Dorte Mandrup.

Residents were engaged in the renewal project, for example, the changing of Prag Boulevard where they were involved in the entire process. In the initial phase, they suggested future uses. They then took part in the architectural competition as representatives and lastly they got to give input into the design, collaborating with the architects. The results were different types of outdoor spaces with various functions; a playing field, a sit hut with a little garden and a natural playground.

Evaluation of the neighbourhood shows that the residents have created stronger ties to their neighbourhood, and they believe that the reputation has improved. Almost twice as many are happy to be living in the area (Lungholt, 2007).



The development 1998-2002 in residents' satisfaction with buildings, streets and squares.



The development 1998-2002 in residents' relationships with neighbours. The share of residents who feel they have good relationships with other residents in the neighbourhood.

*Improvements of the urban renewal projects (Lungholt, 2007)*

## 3 Discussion

### **Exploring public space in social housing**

The history of the different planning approaches and the Million programmes illustrates some of the reasons why cities become segregated. The top-down approach is as mentioned the most common approach of planning, although as history has shown, if not done right, e.g. if some essential functions like social infrastructure are left out, integration is hindered.

I think it is interesting to compare the large scale housing areas in Sweden from the Million programmes and some of the housing for the urban poor in Manila. They share many similarities. I believe the critique of the Million programmes in Sweden can be summarised into the followingly: They often lacked good connections to other areas, they were often mainly residential with no destinations for people not residing in the area. They often accommodated people from the same socio-economic background. Quality public spaces were often forgotten or not well maintained. The life between the buildings was not as prioritized as the life within the buildings.

The projects for the urban poor that we visited in Manila were also isolated communities in which everyone shared the same background. They also often lacked inviting shared spaces in which people wanted to spend time, and they did not have any functions that invited outsiders. Some of these projects in Manila and the large-scaled Million programmes are examples of top-down planning where social infrastructure has been left out. Luckily, as the case studies show, many projects have been successfully upgraded. If neighbourhoods could be upgraded or planned this way from the beginning, mistakes from the past could be avoided being repeated.

### **Improving public space and social integration in social housing**

*Involvement and planning approach.* It is hard to say which type of planning should be preferred to promote integration through public space. If done right, all the different planning approaches would probably be more or less successful. Learning from the case study in Holmsbladgade, a mixture of them could be useful. The upgrading project is an example of participatory planning which seems to have been successful both in the smaller and larger scale. Perhaps the key lies in such a distribution of input amongst architects, users and other stakeholders. However, I believe it is crucial to keep the architects and planners in a key position, to avoid repeating what was seen to some as a mistake during the Million programme – losing the person with the holistic responsibility. On our study trip, we interviewed architects from NHA involved in some of the upgrading projects that

we visited. They told us about the process when upgrading informal dwellers. As architects, they had no input on the functions or the project as a whole, they only designed the buildings. Many of their projects that we visited were not of high quality in terms of public space and integration.

*Including the users.* By including the users, public space in social housing might be of better quality. Addressing their needs and wishes by involving them in the process, might increase the sense of ownership and appreciation of their environment.

Many of the upgrading-projects we visited on our study trip were missing qualitative shared spaces. Sometimes there was a lack of shading and proper seating (see image below), also, spaces where you could be alone were missing. Some residents told us they did not like to spend time outside because it felt like people were watching and talking about them. Some residents were wishing for opportunities to grow vegetables. I believe input like this and physical features in general are better planned together with the users.

The public space on the sites that we visited often consisted of only a street. There were rarely squares, commerce or education- or health facilities. I suggest, these types of improvements should be made by the planners and architects. Like the example of Holmsbladgade, the planners and politicians decided on what type of intervention – like the culture- and sports centre. The residents were instead involved in the smaller scaled interventions as the physical qualities.



*Examples of common spaces in visited projects (L: Camarin, R: Ernestville).*

*Camarin is a NHA project, Ernestville is a FDUP project (Foundation for the Development of the Urban Poor, a non-government organisation). Both communities are gated with no good connection to public space. The images show commonspaces lacking seating.*

*How public space can help social integration.* The case studies illustrate different examples of how public space can help social integration. Even if not all of them were

realized, I believe Gehl's strategies for Rosengård are essential. Especially their strategy of working with destinations to invite other people to visit the area. This is the same approach that they used in Holmsbladgade when building a sports- and culture centre. The purpose was to change the image of the area, and the Holmsbladgade project proved a change.

I think Kleiburg is an inspiring project even though it only involved an upgrading at the building level. With a small budget they managed to significantly change a building for the better, by introducing a new concept of housing with the Klusflat. The upgrading did not evolve around public space and integration, but it did however affect the public space around it. Safer outdoor crossings through the building and a better connection to the surroundings by opening up the groundfloor improved the outdoor spaces.

## 4 Urban Shelter Design Guidelines

Based on the approaches in the different upgrading projects, I propose the following strategies when planning housing and public spaces to support integration:

- **Establish or connect to existing social infrastructure**  
Establish essential destinations which benefit people not residing in the development. Destinations can include work opportunities, recreational activities, education- or health facilities.
- **Design outdoor spaces of high quality**  
Design site-specific outdoor spaces with good qualities. Whether in Sweden or the Philippines, the microclimate must be considered as well as a mixture of spaces where one can be alone and together with others.
- **Avoid making entirely gated communities**  
Avoiding entirely gated communities will help to integrate the residents and is also more democratic as a larger number of people can benefit from the project. If gated communities are the norm like in the Philippines, one should work with strategies that allow for some parts to remain open for the public when gates are closed.
- **Involve users early in the process**  
As the case studies show, users can provide valuable information during the planning phase. When being listened to, residents will be more willing to take care of their facilities. By involving them early, they will hopefully be prouder and more engaged in their neighbourhood.

These strategies may seem obvious, but they are nevertheless important as they are often forgotten.

## 5 The Role of Architects

Integration sometimes seem to be forgotten when upgrading or building various projects for informal dwellers. Even in such a country as Sweden, which is characterised by a high degree of equality and wealth distribution, there is a problem with increased urban segregation. Whether in Sweden or the Philippines, the goal should be to integrate all citizens. By working with public space and establishing a network of social nodes and destinations to avoid creating monofunctional residential areas, different user groups can share the same public space and become better integrated.

Architects should be involved early when important decisions are made concerning public space and social infrastructure. Architects are the spokespersons for the residents. They have to advocate for what is important for the city and its inhabitants, and be the key role that connects the politicians, the investors and the citizens. They have to support the humanistic approach, which might otherwise be forgotten.

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