Participation and Scale in Housing for Urban Poor

How different actors work with involving urban poor communities
in their future housing and the affect this has on the built reality

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Introduction

During our field visit in Metro Manila in February 2019 we visited several housing projects built by different actors such as the state agency National Housing Authority (NHA) and small NGOs. We met with representatives from both of these groups who explained the design processes behind the housing projects. One factor that differed in the design processes was the level of involvement by the future users in the process. Some housing projects we visited were started by an organized community themselves who had enquired the right help to build their own housing while other project had a more conventional top-down approach to design with little or no participation by the end-users. In this paper I want to look at the participatory process and how it can take shape. Who are the actors working with this kind of processes and what are their reasons for choosing this way of working? What are the key components in a participatory work flow? How does a participatory process affect the built result?

I will use two examples of participatory housing projects for urban poor to explore the field of participation and its possible key components. The examples work on different scales as one is a national community upgrading programme in Thailand called Baan Mankong and the other is the involvement of the end users in the work of the small Filipino NGO TAO-Pilipinas.

Literature Review

What is participation?

The minimum requirement for architecture to be participatory could be said to be the users involvement in some stage of the process. In the book Slum Upgrading and Participation the authors define participation as following:

"Participation is a process in which people, and especially disadvantaged people, influence resource allocation and policy and program formulation and implementation, and are involved at different levels and degrees of intensity in the identification, timing, planning, design, implementation, evaluation, and post-implementation stages of development projects." (Imparato & Ruster, 2003, p. 20)

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In this long definition the idea of involvement, influence and control is crucial. Participation can be the consultant of the end-users in the early design process as it also can be the process of contribution with labour by building your own house.

Source: Goethert (1998).

Figure 1. Level of participation. (Imparato & Ruster, 2003)

In figure 1 a model is used to explain the different levels of participation. In this scheme the control of the process by external agencies is decreasing by every step and the community's control over the process is increasing. The first level, *none*, represents the total lack of participation. On the levels of *indirect* and *consult*, participation is through communication and negotiation only. *Shared control* and *full control* corresponds to the community managing the project. The last level, full control, assumes the community and the external agencies to be equals. (Imparato & Ruster, 2003)

Why participation?

Ruster and Imparato stresses the fact that participation can be used as a mean to outweigh the lacking democracy overall that can be present in a society. (Imparato & Ruster, 2003) I learned from a woman we interviewed in Manila, when saying that I was very impressed by their self-organizing, that the reason for organizing in groups is that there will be no state providing unless you exert pressure on it as a group. When the reality is like this, you have to organize and do it yourself.

In the 1960´s in the United States planning theorists where starting to advocate for the political nature of planning and architecture. They did not see planning just as a process with objective facts and figures but a political process with opposing interest. The planners saw it as their job to represent the group who were less present in the planning process. This way of thinking acknowledges that by

bringing in participation you recognise the politic nature of architecture. (Jenkins, et al., 2007) To bring in participation can also be to be bring a new layer of complexity to architecture. The participation will complicate the process and the traditional view of architecture as pre-determined process by architects or as a finished, aesthetically pleasing building will be questioned. (Blundell Jones, et al., 2005)

The problematic side of participation is that the involvement can be used to legitimize a process without really transforming it. (Blundell Jones, et al., 2005) In the rapidly urbanizing world, the implementation of participatory processes has sometimes been problematic. The participation has often been in form of directly imported policies from Western planning or funding of program by international agencies. The participation sometimes worsened the situation by just tapping the local communities' resources rather than providing real ways for the community to be involved. (Jenkins, et al., 2007)

Baan Mankong

Baan Mankong Programme, introduced in 2003, is a national government programme in Thailand that deals with community upgrading in terms of housing, infrastructure, tenure security and social empowerment using a financial model where the community is in charge. The programme supports upgrading processes that are designed and taken care of by low-income communities. The underlying idea for the Baan Mankong Programme is that participation in housing development can improve the sense of community among urban poor. The hope is that this process improves the relationship between the slum inhabitants and the local authorities. (Boonyabancha, 2005) An evaluation of the programme from 2011 shows non-monetary improvements such as greater social cohesion. One example is that children in participating households spent 3.6 hours more on studying than other children. (Bhatkal & Lucci, 2015)

The first step in the Ban Mankong programme is a city-wide survey. The poor communities themselves survey, in partnership with NGOs, local authorities and professionals, all the poor communities in the city. Using this survey, a plan for upgrading for the urban poor community network is made. With the finalized plan the communities themselves can receive funding from CODI, the agency managing the Baan Mankong programme, in forms of infrastructure subsidies and

housing loans. (Boonyabancha, 2005) The forming of networks of urban poor communities in cities often makes the urban poor together negotiate for their tenure as a bigger group has more power in a bargaining situation. The network also provides a platform where the groups can learn from each other.

An important part of the economic arrangement is that the communities are obliged to form savings groups. To obtain the loans the communities must save 10% of the amount they would like to borrow in a collective savings account. CODI lends the money directly to the community cooperative. The community cooperative on-lend to the members adding a small extra interest and by that starting a fund used for community expenses. (Bhatkal & Lucci, 2015)

The goal of programme was to reach 300,000 households. In 2015 only a third of these households has been reached by the benefits. The strength of the programme could be said to be the collaboration between community and other actors. This process is also very time-consuming, and the effect is that the projects of the Baan Mankong are slower and smaller than a more conventional national housing programme. The implementation of projects in a participatory way demands that communities also learn many new skills such as knowledge of finance and construction and this takes time. (Bhatkal & Lucci, 2015)

TAO Filipinas

The Philippine NGO TAO-Pilipinas advocates for participatory planning and works directly with organized poor communities by giving technical assistance for housing and planning. The organization´s choice to deal with participatory planning comes out of the wish to ensure that the end product designed, the house, lives up to the needs of the people and is usable. TAO Pilipinas works with informed participation by providing the community with technical knowledge in forms of lectures on housing technics and important regulations. The technical professionals at the NGO try to design with the people and find methods to extract design inputs and creative ideas from the communities. The next step for the professionals is to translates these ideas in feasible solutions.

The participatory process of TAO-Pilipinas is arranged through a series of workshop where each family must send one representative. The aim with the

workshops is to draw out the design needs and preferences of the people. (Lusterio, et al., 2019)
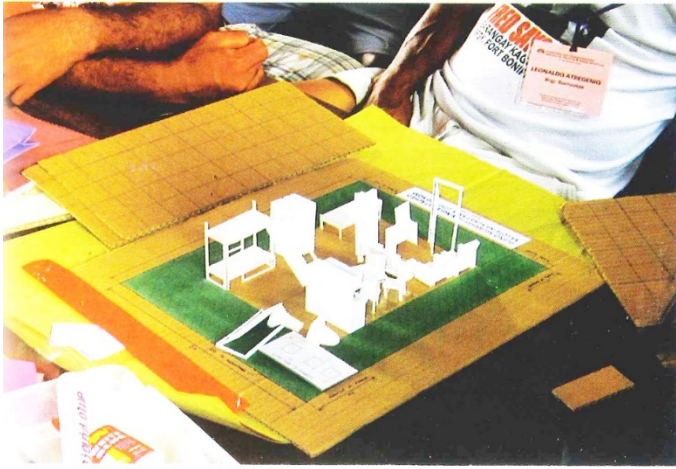

Figure 2. The 3D-model used in the workshops. (Lusterio, et al., 2019)

We visited the office of TAO-Pilipinas in Manila and interviewed the architect Angel Sales working at the NGO who explained their work with participation. When we visited they were planning for a workshop with one community of 200 families. The affordability level of the families made it possible for them to have a 24 m^2 unit. 40 members would participate in the workshop. The maximum the organization of TAO-Pilipinas can handle in a workshop is 60 persons, in terms of limited manpower. The ideal is 30 to 60 persons.

The workshop is divided to 3 days. The first step is half a day of lectures on important topics. One lecture is dedicated on building regulations which is regulated by the building code for social housing BBP20. Another lecture deals with affordability level. Architect Angel said that the community members have grand ideas on what they wish for their housing, and by introducing these lectures they try to achieve more realistic expectations. A booklet with important passages from the BBP20, has been handed to the community in beforehand. The building code is in English, but the booklet contains important parts of the code translated to the local language.

The second half of the first day the workshop participants have to cluster the housing using a tool kit provided by TAO. The tool kit contains different typologies of units of 24 m^2, roads, parks, play grounds, basketball courts and

more important design features in scale 1 to 200. The focus in this stage is the building design. The architects working during the workshop must be fast to make sketches of possible drawings during the whole workshop.

Figure 3. The tool kit provided in the workshops to make the building design. (Lusterio, et al., 2019)

The next step in the workshop is to do the unit design in 3D. Parts used to make the units, such as windows, doors, toilet, walls, is provided for the participants. Before the end of the second day the workshop participants have to come up to a criteria for choosing a design. Divided into smaller groups, each group propose a unit design, a building design and a site layout. The participants also have to

make a list on what is their important considerations in a design. This list also contains the things they want to prioritize.

The third and last day is a day for voting on the different schemes. The architects will provide the workshop participants with a summarized version of their different schemes. Each group has to vote for a proposed scheme and they vote as a group, not an individual. This process is also about choosing different good characteristics from different schemes and includes discussions on what these good features are. The workshop decides on two winning schemes.

After the workshop the architects at TAO have a week or two to translate all the information received and knowledge produced during the workshop into a digital file. They digitize the two winning schemes which will be presented to a bigger group at a hearing. This hearing is needed for the community to agree on the design. TAO-Pilipinas asks for at least half of the community to be present at this hearing. Architect Angel explains that they need to arrive at a consensus at this meeting and they always stresses the importance of making decisions at this stage.

The translation of the outcome from the workshop is an important part of the workflow. The architects do not translate what they see slavishly, if it does not follow the regulation it will be corrected. Architect Angel said that is where the technical assistance comes in. They use the result as a base, then they apply the laws. Often the changes come also from the wishes of the community. The case can be that the community have two schemes but are not satisfied with any of them and asks TAO to develop it further.

A part of the work as an architect at TAO is apart from the designing buildings is to design workshop methods. The methodology of the design workshop is constant evolving. This workshop had to be evolved since the group of 200 families were very unevenly distributed on four smaller groups to ensure the equal representation. (Sales, 2019)

Figure 4. The rowhouses of Ernestville. (Lusterio, et al., 2019)

Discussion

During our fields visits I perceived the housing projects that had evolved from a participatory process as more pleasant. What could be the reasons to this? That these housing areas were better maintained and often also in a smaller and more human scale probably made an impact. I also believe that the design process has implementations on the built result, that how architects think and what knowledge is produced and acknowledged during the process affects the result. But still, one important distinction between the participatory projects and the non-participatory was the scale. One of the community-driven projects we visited was Ernestville, a community nowadays residing in densely built two storeys row houses on a small plot. The density of the rowhouses did make room for many families to live here

but the small plot size still gave the impression of a small scale. The process had also been in a participatory and small-scale way.

With the example of Baan Mankong, the correlation between scale and participation is addressed. By introducing the participatory method, the programme takes longer time to implement and the reached households are fewer than desired. The learning process which the community are undertaken by the housing project will benefit them in many more ways than just housing, but this process will also make the housing project slower. The work that TAO do in their participatory process requires a lot of work from the professionals' side and they also have a maximum of participants of the workshops.

How do the participation differ in these examples? The Baan Mankong programme I would label as an economic participation while the work of TAO more deals with a participation by time and knowledge.

The participation in the work of TAO-Pilipinas could be said to be on the level of consulting if we trace back to figure 1. Corresponded to this second lowest level their methods involve interest groups who takes part of a workshop. Although in this case the figures simplified version does not make the work of TAO justice. What about the quality of the interest groups? Since I hade the great opportunity to meet with the staff of TAO I have gained insights in that they do a thoughtful and reflective work, which I find as an important factor to realize a participatory project.

The Baan Mankong programme could be found on the highest or second highest level of participation as the community gains control of the funding. Still I have not found any literature on how the participation works on a more specific project level, equivalent to the information provided by TAO. Here the information of the participation ends by the describing of the city survey and the funding given to the community. By giving the community the funding, it also gives them the power to act according to their wishes and in that way, it works as a strong participatory tool. I would have liked to see the participation on a smaller scale, how do the communities arrange meetings, how do the design processes look like that the communities starts and how to they reach their decisions.

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A conscious and well-thought through work flow narrows the scale on which projects can be implemented. It takes time to do good projects and if participation is an aim it sets a minimum of how big a project can be. This combined could lead to that less persons will enjoy much needed, new housing. I still believe that a participatory process is worth it, as it gives housing that lasts in the long run.

The Role of Architects

Underlying many of the thoughts on participation I see it as a thought about the pure and real participation. That by doing the right thing and involving in the right way you could achieve a pure and perfect result. The idea that the architects are coming in and destroying the result of the participation can sometimes shine through, and I myself have had these thoughts. When I have given this further thinking I see the problematic in this achievement of pure participation. There will always be conflicting interests, that is in the nature of allowing different interests. The nature of participation must always be allowed to be conflict and never to be a mean to achieve the one truth. A participatory process will probably be hard and very tiresome for those involved, both end-users and professional.
To have in mind when introducing a participatory process how much the end-users would like to contribute is important. To introduce participation cannot be a way of shying away from your professional responsibility.

In opposite of the pure participation you could see the process of participation as a translation process where the architect is the interpreter. Architect Angel at TAO-Pilipinas uses the word translate several times when describing their workflow of participation. They translate the drawings made in the workshop and they also translate information from the world of the architect to the world of the community. If a building code only exists in a language which you do not speak, how are you supposed to understand that world? By being the interpreter, the architect can give insights into a hidden world.

The reality can hardly give you everything you want. As sure as that, a design process is always a process of deciding what is the most important and what competing factors to give space to or not. The architect can use a professional gaze to distinguish what is needed in a design, but maybe make the wrong choices

when it comes to what is most important. Here I believe that the use of participatory tools will be of much use.

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