Relocate people *in city* or *off city*, why does it matter?

When Metro Manila is urbanizing in a rapid pace, where do the urban poor fit in?

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1. List of abbreviations

ISF - Informal settler family

NHA - National housing authority

NCR - National capital region

LDC - Less Developed Country

MDC - More Developed Country

2. Introduction

According to UN-Habitat, (2019) nearly one billion people in the world live in slums. Of those one billion informal settlers, 881 million are urban residents, living in a less developed country (LDC) (UN-Habitat, 2016, s. 57). These settlements are usually densely populated and built up over time. UN-Habitat (2016, s. 57) stresses that slums are the product of corruption, failed policies, dysfunctional land markets etcetera.

These slums lack certain basic conditions, such as safe sanitation systems, access to clean water, waste management, fire escape routes, sufficient living area, durable housing and secure tenure (UN-Habitat, 2016, s. 57). Moreover, informal settlements are often located on endangered zones where no one else would settle by choice. For example, close to rivers that are threatened by landslides, under large power lines, in areas threatened by hazards such as typhoons or flooding, or next to highways (Liuke, 2020). Some urban informal settlements are located on land earmarked for governmental purposes, for example a bigger project for

infrastructure. In those cases, informal settlement families (ISFs) have to move from their homes to make room for governmental projects (Trinidad, 2020).

One may wonder, why do people choose to move into cities, as informal settlers, with the knowledge that they will live in endangered zones and with the constant threat of having to move? According to a recent study, it has foremost to do with the possibilities for livelihood that the city provides, and rural areas does not provide (Regala, 2020).

An informal settlement with very bad living conditions, located in an endangered zone or if it is in the way of a bigger infrastructure project, are reasons to relocate ISFs. Relocating in this scenario means moving the ISFs to another site. Hopefully with safer surroundings, more suitable and with possibilities for better living standards. The necessity for relocating ISFs in Urban areas are great, although it is not easy to do successfully.

When me and my group were in the Philippines, we conducted an interview with Elsie Trinidad[1], the department manager of the Department of Resettlement and Development Services at the National housing authority (NHA) in the Philippines. Trinidad (2020) described a major problem they had when relocating ISFs in Metro Manila. The best outcome for the ISFs is relocating them closely to their current home or at least *in city* (inside the urban area of Metro Manila). The major problem is that the free land at hand is limited and therefor, the land value in Metro Manila is skyrocketing (Trinidad, 2020). A development similar to several major cities world-wide (UN-Habitat, 2019). Due to the high land prices it is problematic for NHA to relocate the ISFs *in city*. However, relocating *off city* (outside of the urban area of Metro Manila, in rural areas) is usually unsuccessful in many aspects according to Trinidad (2020).

People who have moved their entire families into an urban area to give them a better life, tend to be unwilling to return to a rural area. They will most likely move back into the city as soon as they can. Either to the previous location or they will form new informal settlements (Trinidad, 2020).

This paper aims to discuss the different outcomes when relocating ISFs *in city* or *off city,* the discussion also aims to touch upon the reasons for rapid urbanization. There will be a focus on the context of Metropolitan Manila commonly known as Metro Manila and the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines (Murayama, Kamusoko, Yamashita, & Estoque, 2017, s. 85), at the end of the paper I will discuss the role of the urban designer and how to work with solutions through design in a Metro Manila context.

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[1]Trinidad, E. B. (2020, 02 17). Interview about relocation in Metro Manila. (N. E. Stenvall, Interviewer)

A very important aspect of relocating people is not just *where*, but also *how*. How the relocation process looks, how included the people are in the process and how they can influence the decisions regarding the relocation. These aspects of relocating people will not be handled in this essay due to limited time, but they need to be mentioned due to their importance for a good relocation.

3. Literature Review

The world's population started to grow rapidly in the nineteenth century and urban areas of the western world were expanding fast. Between 1800 and 1860 the urban population of the world grew thirty-fold. It is estimated that 3 percent of the world population lived in towns over 5000 people at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When the twenty-first century started that number was about 40 per cent (Jenkins, Smitt, & Wang, 2007, s. 12).

With the industrial revolution during the nineteenth century, a global economical and industrial growth started (Lorenzo, Ito, Kaku, Mukaiguchi, & Ono, 2019, s. 52). Urbanisation had a delayed progression in developing countries compared to the rest of the world, though during the twentieth century this shifted drastically. In 1920, 25 percent of the urban population of the world lived in LDCs, 30 years later that number had increased to 42 per cent (Jenkins, Smitt, & Wang, 2007, s. 12). All over the world, urbanization was a fact and Manila was no exception. For Manila this development led to urban sprawl, where the city of Manila spread to the outskirts and further (Lorenzo, Ito, Kaku, Mukaiguchi, & Ono, 2019, s. 52).

Metro Manila has today, in 2020, a population of 14 million. Taken into account the larger urban area of Metro Manila that number is stretched to 21 million (World population review, 2020). With a population over 10 million, Metro Manila is a so-called mega-city. Right between Osaka in Japan a more developed country (MDC) and Cairo in Egypt a less developed country (LDC), Metro Manila is the 14th largest mega-city in the world (Designing Buildings, 2020). And with a density of 42 857 people per square kilometre, the city of Manila is the most densely populated city in the world. In comparison, Paris in France (MDC) has 20 000 people per square kilometre and Mumbai in India (LDC) has 23 000 people per square kilometre (World population review, 2020).

Tannerfeldt and Ljung (2006, ss. 21-22) implies that rapid urbanization is a major challenge for any society and has consequences for economy, politics,

culture and social life in the city. Tannerfeldt and Ljung stress that poor countries with weak institutional framework has undoubtedly an even bigger challenge when it comes to handling fast urban growth. For example, former uncertainty with policies of landownership, low land taxes and general control over land prices in Metro Manila are some of the reasons for a skyrocketing land market. In which, better policies could have been preventative (Garrido, 2019, s. 60). A result of countries inability to handle rapid urbanization, is more and more people living in unsafe informal settlements in cities (Tannerfeldt & Ljung, 2006, ss. 32-33). One strategy to stabilize rapid urbanization and relieve pressure on mega cities is to give people incentive to move to small and medium-sized cities (Tannerfeldt & Ljung, 2006, s. 34).

In a country, the dominance of a city when counting urban population, eventually turns into *urban primacy* (Jenkins, Smitt, & Wang, 2007, s. 14). *Urban primacy* in itself means that the size of the city is ostensibly larger than other cities in the urban network. A dominant urban concentration gives a city *urban primacy*, usually a city that accommodates twice the size of the population of the second largest city of the country (Faraji, Qingpinga, Valinoorib, & Komijanib, 2016, s. 35).

A country with an *urban primacy* city often leads to only one attraction point for supplies of labour, capital, infrastructure, education, health care and improved living standards. When cities reach the level of *urban primacy,* they usually proceed to grow very fast in population because they become the centre of development. As the city grow bigger the possibilities of *in city life* compared to *off city life* increase. With this snowball effect, rapid urbanization is a fact (Jenkins, Smitt, & Wang, 2007, s. 14).

Even with Metro Manilas low-lying coastal area location, which is vulnerable to various hazards such as floods, earthquakes and tsunamis, the NCR is a mega-city with *urban primacy* (Murayama, Kamusoko, Yamashita, & Estoque, 2017, s. 103). Metro Manila has an overwhelming amount of the country´s population. When only counting the urban regions, the NCR has a bigger population share then all of the other metropolitan regions combined (Murayama, Kamusoko, Yamashita, & Estoque, 2017, s. 92).

The consequences of *urban primacy* are discernible in Metro Manila. People often move to the NCR for greater opportunities (Trinidad, 2020). With such a concentration of the population in one region of the Philippines, other

urban functions and services are also centralized to the NCR (Murayama, Kamusoko, Yamashita, & Estoque, 2017, s. 102). Metro Manila is the seat of the government and is the economic and political centre of the Philippines (Murayama, Kamusoko, Yamashita, & Estoque, 2017, s. 85). The NCR is also the central business district of the Philippines, it houses an international airport and most of the countries prime educational and research institutions are located here. Just as healthcare, sport and culture centres are (Murayama, Kamusoko, Yamashita, & Estoque, 2017, s. 102).

As Metro Manila has *urban primacy* in the Philippines with what seems to be an endless population growth, the NCR has also gained a positive economic growth. This primacy however comes with a great imbalance in the Philippines´ urban hierarchy and development possibilities for the country as a whole (Murayama, Kamusoko, Yamashita, & Estoque, 2017, s. 94).

These processes of people, industry, politics, money and opportunity all concentrating to one urban area, of course have an effect on the physical appearance of the area. Murayama et al. (2017, s. 94) reveal in their *urban land change analysis* that the built up lands in both Metro Manila and its surrounding areas increased almost twofold between 1993 and 2014. Murayama et al. (2017, s. 94) further emphasize the fact that many of the new built-up areas in the region have been occurring beyond the borders of the NCR, meaning that the region is actually moving its borders. This, Murayama et al. (2017, s. 94) means, is an indicator of an urban sprawl development pattern. Murayama et al. (2017, s. 85) have simulated land changes which have indicated that built-up lands will continue to expand both in Metro Manila and on the surrounding areas, with both infill and sprawl development patterns. With this estimated future for the NCR Murayama et al. (2017, s. 85) stress the many challenges Metro Manilla has and will face in the future, they also stress the importance for sustainable urban- and landscape planning to meet those challenges.

One big challenge for Metro Manila today is affordable housing for the urban poor. As mentioned, there are strong forces that moves people into Metro Manila, but to actually find a safe and comfortable housing is difficult. NHA builds new housing for the urban poor and relocates the ISFs to new settlements. Due to the land market value in the NCR, NHA has a hard time finding *in city* relocations sites (Trinidad, 2020) leading to NHA mostly building housing for the urban poor on the outskirts of the NCR, because of cheaper land. This might make

it affordable for the ISFs in theory, but at the same time less attractive when they cannot find work and other opportunities at an *off city* location (Garrido, 2019, s. 64). Garrido (2019, s. 64) argues that the problem with social housing is *high land prices*. When social housing cost too much, considering price and location, they cannot compete with slum housing *in city.*

There are many examples of ISFs being relocated *off city*, to sites where they cannot make a living, who later returns where they first were relocated from (Garrido, 2019, s. 62; Trinidad, 2020). In such a process there are no winners, only unnecessary expenses and suffering. Migration is mainly driven by the search for a better income, other factors (as mentioned before) can contribute, though liveability is primary. Other factors as war, conflict and natural disasters can reinforce the migration process (Tannerfeldt & Ljung, 2006, s. 27)

For many people, even if they know all the difficulties, *in city* life is a "good" or at least "less bad" choice (Tannerfeldt & Ljung, 2006, s. 28). To understand this one can compare the migration decision with an investment. People have to balance the risk of economic costs and social loss, however their chances for an increased income is much higher if they choose the social loss.

4. Discussion

When reading the literature review, one might wonder: when it comes to relocation, what is in it for the ISFs? From my group's interviews[2] with former ISFs it is apparent that many things had turned to the better for most of the ISFs by being relocated by the NHA. They felt safer, further away from crime and hazards. Many of them went from being squatters or working in an unsafe informal sector, into having a formal job with a safe income. Almost all of them said they were comfortable because the units have plumbing and electricity, and families even told us they were proud of their new home. In our interview with Elsie Trinidad she also mentioned the stigma you experience when living in informal settlements and the discrimination that follows. For example by not being hired in the formal sector.

One aspect that needs to be mentioned, is that during our fieldtrip to Metro Manila we only interviewed former ISFs that had relocated *in city*. My only examples from *off city* relocation projects is from literature and the interview with

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[2]Interviews with residents in multiple areas in Metro Manila 17 February – 6 March 2020

Elsie Trinidad. Despite that fact, many of the former ISFs we interviewed, even if they had been relocated *in city,* told us they commuted up to 6 hours per day to the work they had from before they were relocated.

When people choose to move to Metro Manila and into slums, they look for work, however there is also an aspect of living close to their jobs, and many informal settlers actually live within walking distance (Garrido, 2019, s. 61). Relocating people too far from their former home and work has a huge impact on their day-to-day life, low commute hours and cost of travel make a difference.

Therefore, *in city* is a problematic term when Metro Manila is so very large. Another aspect is that, an ISF can be relocated close in kilometres to their former home, but very far when it comes to traffic. So, I think NHA should not just take distance into account when relocating people, they should also evaluate traffic and time from the former home. But when it comes to the decision of relocating ISFs in Metro Manila today, sadly any *in city* solution is still better than an *off city* one.

As Metro Manila today has *urban primacy* in the Philippines, people who are aspiring for a better life seem to have no other choice than to move to the NCR. And if they are excluded from the NCR, because they cannot find housing, their possibilities are greater if they stay in informal housing *in city*, than in legal housing *off city*. After that big transition by moving *in city*, even as informal settlers, you can easily understand why relocating *off city* is not attractive to them. I do believe that NHA has an important job helping ISFs to a formal living. Many of the interviews we performed show that an adequate housing can in many ways lift a family out of poverty. For example, they can get a job with a higher income when not having the stigma of living informal. Also, their children can get the possibilities for tertiary education. However, if they cannot relocate *in city* and instead move *off city*, I believe other aspects need to be considered when starting a relocation project. One obvious aspect is if the ISFs are able to find work in the new area and another one is the possibility for education. Other aspects as accessible healthcare, the cost of residence and access to free public space and green areas are important for their health and future.

Off city could be something else than the outskirts of Metro Manila. To overcome the imbalance between NCR and other Metropolitan areas in the Philippines, the NHA, municipalities, the government and the private sector could work together on making other Metropolitan areas more attractive for a person or

family wanting to migrate to an urban area. One big challenge is how you could make *off city* life attractive. Obviously, is not just by building affordable housing. People need livelihood to be able to survive. And many sources of livelihood are dependent on an urban infrastructure which different sectors of society can help to create. Long term solutions and development would probably not stop the rapid urbanization of Metro Manila, but maybe slow it down and more importantly give more people an opportunity for a better city life from start.

Another proactive implementation the government, municipalities and the NHA could do, is to have an institution, or something similar, that could help people find housing before they move to a city. Instead of putting out fires by relocating people from informal settlements at the same time as new ones are created. They could offer adequate housing directly when people move to a city in the Philippines. This would maybe encourage more people to move into cities, but then the government actually could spread out the population on more cities than just the NCR. I agree with Jenkins et. al. (2007, s. 14) who mean that a proactive solution to spread out the population on more than just one city, will probably not stop that one city of dominating the others. I especially believe it to be true when it comes to the very dominant Metro Manila. However, I think it could balance the urban hierarchy in the Philippines, and that, I believe, many people could profit from. With more than just one influential urban region, people in general, and the urban poor especially, would have more options. They could even choose a metropolitan area closer to, or even in, the region where they actually live.

With policy making, collaborations with public and private sector and regional planning, the development of more urban balance in the country could be possible. However, I believe that to actually manage this trend shift it is going to take both hard work and a lot of time. Especially with the rapid urbanization that characterizes Metro Manila, it is hard to control, slow down and shift. Even more so, due to the fact that the Philippines is a poor country.

Before I end this discussion, I would like to return to the stressing issue of land value in the NCR. Metro Manila and the NHA have an alarming problem today when it comes to how many ISFs they need to relocate. And with a very high land value in the NCR and very small plots to build on, skyscrapers may seem like the only option. However, ISFs are usually not used to living in multi-storey buildings and many of the families we talked to said they would not be comfortable and even scared living in a skyscraper. So, the question is how to do

small *in city* infill projects, for as many ISFs as possible and at the same time ensure high quality in those projects.

5. The Role of Urban designer

I think the urban designer firstly should be the catalyst of a project. People are experts on their situation, home, community, neighbourhood and city. When people tell their stories, wishes, problems and solutions, an urban designer needs to listen, process and transform it into design. An urban designer should not be biased, or design after her own wishes and liking.

An urban designer is the expert of other conditions, such as light, wind, space, form, traffic safety, public space, legal framework, infrastructure, need of green space etcetera. And she will play a vital role in the design, with knowledge as the tool to catalyse the ideas of the people into reality and design.

Furthermore, I believe that the second part of the role as an urban designer is to hold knowledge of history. What has worked before and what mistakes should not be repeated. As they have one foot in the history of their field, the other should stand in the present, with knowledge of recent projects of the world's cities, how they are working and what parts from them could be reused again.

In the World Cities Report 2016, UN-Habitat (2016, s. 69) stresses the importance of making cities more inclusive and the need for new planning visions, strategies, policies and tools that can implement that change. I think urban designers have a very important role to push this development. In their work I think they need to challenge the general view of cities and urban contexts. Sometimes urban designers even have to challenge the people, who are the expert of their own situation, to actually make cities more inclusive and sustainable.

The last part of the role as an urban designer is to push the development of our cities, project by project. It might be a very slow process sometimes, however, I truly think urban designers must do their (quite big) part to make the cities of the world sustainable, inclusive and great places to live in.

To conclude, I think the role of the urban designer should be to listen, take in information from the experts, consider different spatial qualities, take into consideration proven methods, challenge todays views of cities and transform all of that into new smart and innovative design. Simple as that.

6. Urban Shelter Design

The current situation with the land market value in Metro Manila today and other big cities in the world, and the importance of how we choose to develop and use land is stressing. Especially in urban areas, I believe measured planning and design decisions have never been more important. The design of cities must reflect on that and the urban designer is playing a vital role in how this development may look, work and what it means for the users.

If we would like to build homes for all the ISFs living in Metro Manila today, and still create an open, democratic, green, sustainable city and society, building high can seem like the only option. I believe taller buildings could be a part of the solution. However, this must be done in a very adequate way for it to be successful. First, there should be strategies and policies for a framework over the design of the buildings. This framework needs to be developed by urban designers, building architects, landscape architects, interior architects and ISFs and former ISFs. Second, the framework needs to be adapted to the specific context of every project, both when it comes to resources, the specific group of ISFs, the landscape and how many people the region can support with infrastructure, schools, healthcare etcetera. Third, the framework should be an ongoing process, that should be evaluated by all the participants and changed for the better along the way.

In addition, I believe there are some features of the design of quality urban shelter for the urban poor that cannot be compromised with:

•   Giving the units adequate space, and with possibilities for a growing family.

•   More than one unit size, for different families.

•   Public and common space with walking distance from every building.

•   Green areas with walking distance from every building.

•   Elements of good natural light and ventilation in units, the building, the streetscape and public areas.

•   Protection from hazards as flooding and heavy rain.

•   Fire safe units and buildings.

- Protection from the sun in the units, the building, the streetscape and public areas.

- Providing areas in the building for community activity .

- Making it possible in the building and in the units for business in or close to home.

- Building high might help relocate people *in city*, but it does not equal a better life for the ISFs.

In my neighbourhood design group during my visit to Metro Manila, we created a concept for urban shelter design. The idea was to make progressive building of units as single housing and communities in a vertical way. To help urban poor with the transition, of living as an informal settler in more of a single house housing, they themselves have built and evolved over time, to a stricter apartment, were not much can be changed. We thought of a typology where the family could actually expand and evolve their unit more and more as the years go by. These progressive units would be grouped together with common space in between, like communities, and those communities will be stacked on each other. A vertical single house living could be created, housing many former ISFs, but still in a familiar way for them. Established communities in informal settlements, could move together into the new building and maintain their social network, which also could empower the individual.

On a more strategic urban design level I think Metro Manila needs an improved urban mobility to help the urban poor and the entire population, with a better city flow. Specific for the urban poor is that it should be free or low-cost. For example, fast and affordable public transport is important, a bicycle lane network through the city, and adequate pedestrian sidewalks on every street. Another regional planning instrument that should be implemented is a regional green plan for the NCR. It could regulate how the region is preserving green areas and planning for new ones. I think this is also very important for the city's climate, by preventing heat island effect and helping biodiversity and ecosystem services in the region.

Working proactive with disaster preparedness and resilience on a city region level is also important, especially in a hazard prone area as the NCR. Before a typhoon hits there should already be a plan and adequate design for fast evacuation. And, when the city floods because of heavy rain, the design of the streets and housing should lead the water to reasonable flooding zones etcetera. Furthermore, I think NHA should keep up their work with infill project *in city* instead of *off city* projects, that also lead to an urban sprawl city

pattern. They should in my opinion try to densify those areas that have lower density today and relive the pressure on districts with high density. In conclusion, they could create a greater balance of density in the NCR in general.

Hopefully many of the strategic urban design implementation I write about, can come true through the Greenprint 2030 (Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, 2014), a report where Metro Manilas 16 cities are collaborating and have reached consensus around one vision for the NCR. In the Greenprint 2030 they write "Based on the vision the Greenprint 2030 will provide metropolitan wide spatial guidance, demonstrate coordination mechanisms, and identify areas for catalytic investments […] The aim is to equip the metropolitan area to compete globally and to provide its citizens a safe, resilient, and green environment." (Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, 2014, s. 2). Even if anyone can use grand words, this fills me with hope that the development of Metro Manila is heading in the right direction.

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