

Promoting Awareness and Appreciation of Informal Settlements Through Education

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Slums have always been seen as nothing more than explicit symbols of poor economies. They have been castigated as detrimental to progress. They have been labelled as eyesores and stains to otherwise beautiful cities. They have even been compared to primitive settlements¹.

Like houses of early nomads, the squatter house is a makeshift structure, a product of improvisation, built quickly, sometimes in a single day. These structures resemble the primitive one room dwelling, where minimal space serves a multiplicity of uses: living, dining, and kitchen, and at night, the bedroom for the entire family. While our prehistoric ancestors lived in caves, many squatters live in spaces under bridges, enclosures within ruins, or abandoned buildings.. Recalling the ancient preference for building along rivers and streams-



¹ Dacanay J.E. *Balay Vernacular: Images of the Filipino's Private Space*

sources of food and water and transportation- many slums are found along the edges of rivers and esteros or canals. And while early villages centered around a water well, some slums still rely on public faucets or community pumps for their source of water. Finally, there is nothing more primitive than taking possession of land by simply occupying it and defending it, something the squatter has been compelled to do in his struggle to survive.

Slums in the Philippines have hardly been recognized as an effective housing option for the poor, an option that is more affordable, more convenient, more socially active, and in some cases, even more “livable” than the new planned settlements the government builds for them. Furthermore, these slums are barely acknowledged as places that actually account for a good chunk of the national economy.

In the meantime, so much attention has been given to recent urban design and planning concepts such as the Transit Oriented Developments (TODs), Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), Sustainable Urban Design, and New Urbanism. Though varying in scale and technique, each concepts’ underlying objective is simply to bring back the qualities of fine and compact early towns and cities that contained real communities. The physical application and translation of such concepts however, rely on features that already are and have always been found in many slums.

But unlike New Urbanism, which is a structuralist concept that aims to reform city ills with social conscious physical planning, the urbanism of slums is informal and spontaneous and “celebrates and builds on everyday, ordinary life and reality, with little pretense about the possibility of a perfectible, tidy or ideal built environment”². This is a variation of the concept referred to as ***Everyday Urbanism***.

It is my intention therefore, that through this project, I will compare the concept of New Urbanism with the more common Everyday Urbanism. Specifically I will compare new designed developments with informal settlements. In the process, I will identify positive features of slums and share these findings not only to the younger generations (particularly to university

students) but perhaps also to the various actors in housing development, people who can make a difference.

1 Shelter Situation Analysis

1.1 Basic General Data

Geography and Administration

The Philippines and its 7,107 islands has over a hundred ethnic groups and a mixture of foreign influences which have created a unique and diverse Filipino culture. The islands, with a total area of approximately 300,000 square kilometres, are clustered together into three main geographical groups divided into several regions, and further broken down into cities, municipalities, and barangays.³

Manila, more accurately referred to as Metropolitan Manila, is the largest of the three metropolitan cities in the Philippines (Cebu City a far second and Davao third). Covering 626 sq. km, it contains 1694 barangays, about a third of which are slum communities⁴. The city sits by Manila Bay and the 17km Pasig River runs through the metropolis with many slums (for up to 12,000 households⁵) found along its edges.

Though the present administration has made people think otherwise, the Republic of the Philippines is still considered a constitutional democracy, with the President as head of state. The national government has three coequal branches that exercise a system of checks and balances: executive, legislative, and judicial.

Congress consists of a 24-member Senate and a 250-member House of Representatives, 200 from different districts and the remaining 50 selected from lists drawn up by political parties to ensure representation of women, ethnic minorities, and certain economic and occupational groups like the informal settlers.

² Doug Kelbaugh. *The Essential Common Place*

³ Barangay - The smallest political unit into which cities and municipalities are divided. It is the basic unit of the Philippine political system consisting of less than 1,000 inhabitants

⁴ UN-Habitat (2003) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2003, The Challenge of Slums*, Earthscan, London; Part IV: 'Summary of City Case Studies', pp195-228.

Demography and Health

While it is very difficult to come up with accurate demographic figures, the average consensus is that the Philippines now has a population of about 97.1 million people⁶. Since 2005, growth is about 2 million people a year, equivalent to 3000 births a day (1.92% population growth).

Of this population, 52% live in urbanized areas and 34% are poor. According to different sources,⁷ Metro Manila is among the 20 largest metropolitan areas in the world, with varying figures ranging from about 12 to 15 million people.

Regardless of the exact number and specific ranking, Metro Manila's high density is a result of rural in-migration that intensifies the poverty situation and the urban housing problems, and even more because of natural population increase, especially from the poor, who frequently have large families. According to data from the National Housing Authority (NHA), in Metro Manila alone, there are about 750,000 families who are informal settlers. Coincidentally, just about the same number of families live in slums throughout the rest of the country.

Improved health care and facilities in the Philippines have reduced the number of infant deaths and child mortality rates. Needless to say, the situation is still far from satisfactory. In 2005, the Department of Health (DOH) listed 1840 hospitals in the country, but only about a third was run by the government (33% of the hospitals thus serve about 66% of the population). The same list indicated that there was a shortage of government doctors (only 3000) and nurses (4500) in the country, due largely to the lack of competitive salaries that might prevent them from working overseas.

A result of this shortage of doctors and facilities can be seen in the many deaths from curable and preventable diseases. For example, in 2005, the most cases of deaths due to disease were from containable diseases such as Diarrhea, Pneumonia, and Tuberculosis, a result of poor sanitary conditions, particularly in the slums.

⁵ Richard Helmer and Ivanildo Hespanhol. *Water Pollution Control: A Guide to the Use of Water Quality Management Principles*. 2007

⁶ Data from www.cia.gov April 2009

Economy

Generally speaking, the Philippines is a poor country. In 2006, when the last census on poverty levels was conducted, it was reported that approximately 27 million families, or about 33% of the population then, lived below the poverty threshold. In 2008, unofficial studies reported that due to the unfriendly economic situation this figure has since increased.

The positive outlook is the projected economic growth of 9%, a result of the expanding Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries and the continuing somewhat stable remittances from overseas Filipino workers⁸

1.2 Shelter Related Fact and Figures

Access to Shelter

Attempts have been made to resolve the challenges of the housing sector, especially in meeting the rapidly growing housing need, but financial limitations, poor implementation of policies, and the continuing unstable and corrupt political system has limited progress. By next year it is forecasted that the demand for housing will be for 3.76 million units, about half for Metro Manila.

Thus, majority of the urban poor live in the slums- in public or private land that is left idle. Many of these families live along railroad tracks, *esteros* (canals), under bridges, and in other danger zones. Many of the slum dwellers are rural migrants, who upon arrival, first live with family or *kababayans* (people from the same region), and eventually build their own shelter. These can be broadly classified by construction type: Temporary shelter made from salvaged materials, Semi-permanent shelter with a combination light and heavy materials, and Permanent shelter built of the conventional reinforced concrete hollow block construction.

Access to and Cost of Basic Services/Infrastructure

Practically all parts of Metro Manila, including the slums, have access to power (92.7% of 2.1m households have access to electricity). Access to water systems is

⁷ Wikipedia, www.worldgazetteer.com, www.demographia.com, etc

⁸ Unofficial documents state that in 2008 the country earned 15 Billion dollars from OFW remittances

likewise relatively easy, though up to 50% of slum dwellers still depend on community water sources. Despite easy access, the problem is the costs of such services are usually beyond the means of the poor, thus resulting to a lot of utility tapping. A bigger problem however, is the totally inadequate systems of solid waste management, sanitary systems, storm sewer systems, and access to safe drinking water.

Access to and Cost of Education

In the Philippines everybody has equal rights to education, regardless of gender, race, religion, or social status. Most Filipino children have access to some form of free government education, but while provided, they frequently have inadequate facilities and poorly trained, overworked and underpaid teachers. Majority of Filipino children complete elementary levels, but many stop studying when they reach high school⁹.

Despite this, the literacy rate of Filipinos is surprisingly high. In the last two decades, 98% of Filipinos above ten years of age, could read and write simple messages (in both Filipino and English).

1.3 Housing Policy

As early as the 1980s the private sector began participating in housing programmes for the low income sectors through joint ventures with the government. In the 1990s, Local Government Codes decentralized many functions of the National Government, including that of providing socialized housing. Also, several laws on housing were implemented. These include:

- The Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992 (UDHA), which gives public and private agencies strategies and incentives to develop more socialized housing projects and ensures the proper implementation of resettlement.
- The Comprehensive and Integrated Shelter Finance Act of 1994, which allocated funds for the national shelter program through percentage of proceeds derived from the sale of military bases in the country.

⁹ School participation rate- 95.9% for elementary, 65.3% for secondary (NSCB)

- The National Shelter Program, which makes affordable housing packages available to the lowest 30% of the population through resettlement, slum upgrading, core housing, sites and services development, and mortgage programs.
- The Community Mortgage Program (CMP) under the National Home Mortgage and Finance Corporation, which allowed informal settlers in a community to apply for financing to purchase private property they are illegally occupying (provide that the owner is willing to sell).

The first three of the abovementioned policies deal directly with providing new shelter, while the Community Mortgage Program is a simple mortgage financing program that allows the informal sector to access formal housing finance systems. The CMP is designed to make it possible for the landless poor to acquire land, perhaps even the land where they are presently situated in, and to upgrade their housing.

1.4 Actors in Shelter Delivery and their Roles

There are several different actors in shelter delivery in the Philippines including government agencies, the private sector, universities, professional organizations, and non-government organizations. However, particularly for government agencies, while their roles are technically defined, there appears to be a lot of redundant and overlapping responsibilities. Such government agencies include the following:

- HUDCC (Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council)
The highest policy making and coordinative body on housing and urban development mandated to serve as the lead agency to assist the President in formulating the national objectives, policies and strategies for housing and urban development.
- NHA (National Housing Authority)
The sole government agency engaged in direct shelter production through the National Housing Program.
- HLURB (Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board)
Enhances rational land use and housing and real estate delivery through policy development, planning and regulation.

- NHMFC (National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation)
Develops and provides secondary mortgage markets.
- HDMF (Home Development Mutual Fund)
Created primarily to address two of the nation's basic concerns: generation of savings and provision of shelter for the workers.
- HGC (Home Guaranty Corporation)
Created to operate credit insurance and mortgage guaranty systems by assisting private developers in undertaking low and middle-income mass housing production; operating mortgage insurance program and insuring mortgages and loans.
- SSS (Social Security Service)
The primary provider of funds for long term housing mortgages for low and middle income private sector employees
- GSIS (Government Services Insurance System)
The primary provider for long term housing mortgages for low and middle income government employees
- NEDA (National Economic and Development Authority)
An independent cabinet-level agency of the Philippine Government responsible for economic development and planning, including housing.

The private sector participates in housing production primarily as real estate developers for upper income groups. They occasionally form partnerships with the government for socialized housing projects with the incentive of simple requirements and exemptions from project related taxes. The private sector also participates as contractors and suppliers of building materials.

Many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have played a key role in providing affordable shelter to the poor. Among the most effective is Gawad Kalinga (translated "to give care"), formed in 1995 by the religious group Couples for Christ. Gawad Kalinga's (GK) most direct objective is to improve housing conditions of the urban poor, either through the building of new settlements or upgrading existing ones.

GK, like another NGO, Habitat Philippines, has managed to reduce the cost of construction by at least 15% through a sweat equity program that entails

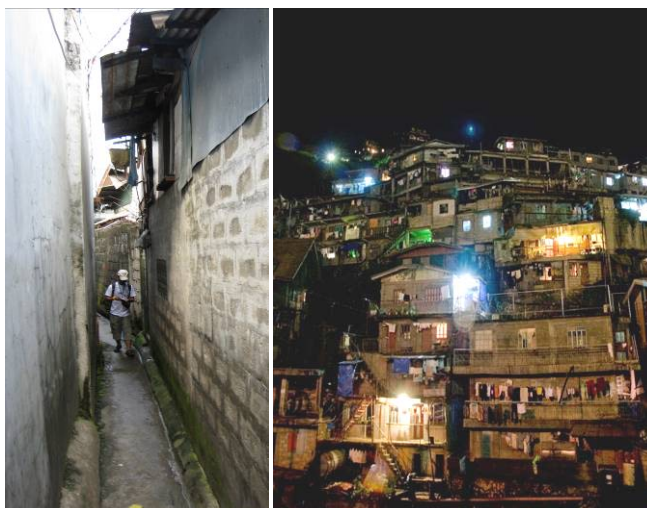
participation by volunteers in the actual construction of houses. GK and Habitat Philippines have also managed to reduce construction costs by soliciting for substantial donations of money and materials.

Other NGOs, like the Technical Assistance Organization (TAO) contribute by providing technical assistance and information to the poor. The group assists the urban poor in matters of securing land tenure, encouraging community participation in planning, and integrating physical, social, economic, and environmental components into community development.

1.5 Shelter Design

Shelter designs for most structures refer to the standard building regulations of Presidential Decree 1096, or the National Building Code, accompanied by civil / structural, electrical, and sanitary codes. However, in 1982, Batasan Pambansa 220 (National Law 220) set the standards and technical requirements for the economic and socialized housing in the urban and rural areas of the Philippines. The standards include, among others, social, cultural, environmental, and hygienic considerations. More importantly, the standards are adjusted based on minimum requirements with the goal of making housing units more affordable. For most new settlement schemes for the poor, these standards practically dictate the physical layout of the development; hence these are usually a monotonous series of identical boxes laid side by side.

In contrast, squatter shanties of informal and unplanned settlements totally disregard these building laws and codes, but display a lot of innovativeness and ingenuity in the use of recycled materials and on building in whatever space is available, whether this is on



dry or wet land, flat or steep slopes, under bridges, by riverbanks, etc. Tiny makeshift shanties, as small as 12m², are constructed in random sequence, in a

rather haphazard layout resembling medieval cities, leaving very minimal space for circulation (with some alleys are as narrow as 0.3 to 0.4 meters). Some slums have population densities of up to 1200-1500 persons per hectare, compromising their health, safety, and comfort.

However these settlements also contain a social fabric that is unlike many planned communities. Most slums center around an open space anchored by common facilities that have been built out of a collaborative effort to provide the community with common needs. These anchors come in the form of chapels, multi-purpose



halls, or day care centers, and the open space serves as basketball court, cock fighting arena, community meeting area, etc. Whatever the case, unlike high-income planned developments of *New Urbanism*, where communal spaces are provided but hardly used, these spaces are always teeming with activity. Nearby, there will likely be a variety of shops and services: sari-sari stores (convenience stores), bakeshops, dressmaking shops, barber shops, and the like, all catering mostly to the community they are located in. The mere proximity of houses to each other practically ensures that neighbours know each other, thus establishing a true community feel.

2 Organization

The University of the Philippines has always been a socially responsive school with the ultimate goal of producing graduates who will contribute to the improvement of the country, in any field, including housing.

The College of Architecture (COA) is found in the main campus of Diliman. Established in 1956, COA offers undergraduate and graduate programs in Architecture and Landscape Architecture.

Though a relatively small unit, the college of architecture is broken down into several studio laboratories, including one in urban design (and planning). Through the Urban Design Studio Laboratory, the college requires 4 undergraduate courses

in the fields of urban studies, including a course in urban design and a course in housing. Several other urban studies related courses, including 12 units on housing policies and design, are offered in the graduate program.

The College of Architecture in general and the Urban Design Laboratory in particular, also engages in extension work with local government units, non-government organizations, private institutions, and other schools and colleges. In recent years the studio lab has assisted in reviewing and preparing new development plans for the U.P. systems' different campuses. The COA also regularly sends faculty members to seminars and conferences on urban studies, and last year hosted the International Universities Seminar on Asian Megacities. Additionally, COA has collaborated with NGOs with immersion and hands-on programs.

As an assistant professor who has been teaching at COA for more than 12 years, I share the responsibility to contribute to the development of the college as a socially responsive unit, and have earned the capacity to bring this proposal into reality.

Already established tie-ups and affiliations with certain government agencies, NGOs, and local and international universities will likewise support me with this endeavour.

3 Shelter Problem

As implied earlier, slums typically generate negative impressions only. This is apparent in anti-poor government actions, particularly the demolitions of squatter settlements, usually done in the guise of “development” or “progress”.

Occasionally slums are “accidentally” wiped out by fires (often blamed on the government). In recent years demolitions have been justified by the provision of relocation plans, but the choice of settlement sites were geographically irrational. The Philippine government is embarrassed by the presence of slums, an obvious observation when shanty facades along major roads are painted, or high walls are quickly constructed to conceal the slums, anytime an international event takes place in the city.

Even the non-squatter common public regard slums as danger zones and threats to society, evident in the countless number of citizen's complaints sent to

newspapers, radio stations, and government agencies. When shopping for land or new homes, buyers are immediately turned off by slums located within a kilometer's distance, but take advantage of lower market values brought down precisely because of their presence.

The people's anti slum sentiments are understandable, yet questionable. Yes, from a legal viewpoint, slum dwellers are violating the law by squatting on land that is not theirs, but from a socio-economic standpoint, they are mere victims of inequitable distribution of property and wealth. Squatters have no right to build on public property, but they do so because of the lack of viable alternatives. Squatters do not wish to live in sub-human conditions, where there is always an unrelenting threat to comfort, safety, security, and disease, and where they are constantly in fear that their homes will be taken away from them. But in their struggle to survive they learn to cope and make the most of what they have, consequently creating an environment that evolves out of their everyday experiences.

So rather than condemn the squatters and the slums they live in, we, the general public, should acknowledge their presence and their contributions to society. We should study the living conditions of squatters, be aware of the physical and social fabric of slums, and perhaps even learn from them. At this point, society knows very little about the structure of these unplanned settlements, largely due to the lack of proper documentation. Such documentation may help people interpret, understand, and maybe even appreciate and accept the reality of informal settlements.

One avenue towards slum understanding and appreciation can be through the comparison of slums with modern day urbanism concepts like *New Urbanism*. Developers have used these concepts as marketing tools when selling newly developed villages and subdivisions. Buyers are sold into moving into these new developments because of the promise of "real community living", suggested by such elements as a neighbourhood clubhouse and a corner convenience store. A closer look at these new places however, will reveal that they are very artificial, and do not achieve what is advertised, as what is created are neighborhoods formed by economic principles of developers' mentalities. Conversely, these special "community binding" features are, and have always been regular

components of slums that have grown naturally and organically as a result of the squatters' needs and aspirations.

Looking further into the intricacies of contemporary urban concepts, one can see several other qualities comparable to the characteristics of the urbanism of informal settlements. The key elements of new urban concepts include:

- *Encouraging pedestrianization and the use of mass transit.* These are non-issues for informal settlers as other than those with a “family motorcycle”, most families do not own private vehicles, and rely on the many different modes of public transport, or on walking to their destination.
- *Creating compact settlements with high densities.* As implied earlier, this is likewise a non-issue in informal settlements. However, the problem may be geared towards the opposite direction, as some slums may be too dense for efficient sanitation services, and for safety and comfort.
- *Providing a mix of land uses in one community.* Families in informal settlements often establish small stores or service centers within or immediately adjacent to their dwellings. Not only do these present the families with an additional source of income, but they are also an effective and convenient means to provide the community with their everyday needs
- *Promoting infil development and building homes close to the inner city, rather than building in the hinterlands.* Informal settlements are usually found in whatever idle land found near or within the inner city.
- *Designing “conversational” layouts where buildings face and communicate with each other, providing security by means of natural surveillance.* Squatter houses along railroad tracks always face each other with the tracks serving as open space between each row of houses. The same set up is seen for houses along the edges of small roads and alleys, as well as for those along waterways.
- *Providing a discernible common area at the center of the development.* Practically all informal settlements contain a rough clearing, usually with a makeshift basketball court, anchored by a building of multiple uses, and always full of activity.
- *Generating sustainable developments.* Though informal settlements lack the modern sustainable technologies like water recycling systems, the use of solar

energy, green architecture, and solid waste management systems, these are the only developments that naturally contain the key elements of new urban concepts mentioned above. Settlements that are compact, pedestrian oriented, have a mix of uses, have neighbours that know each other, and more, are the communities that should be considered sustainable.

4 Proposal for Change and Improvement

My general objective is to change people's sentiments on slums, and to educate them on the potentials of adopting the physical fabric of slums that is dictated more by need-based informal and innovative designs, rather than market driven layouts. I am not attempting to glorify the slums, for despite the good that will hopefully surface from this activity, the need to further improve the slums will always take precedence. It is important to understand however, that these improvements should focus more on slum upgrading, on providing better services and facilities, sanitation, disease control and security of tenure, rather than on creating new villages with superficial layouts in relocation sites that are far away from the city.

In doing so, I must first establish both qualitative and quantitative data that will support my theory that slums contain positive features translated to better social communities, comparable and perhaps even better than those from new developments designed and built with contemporary urbanism concepts.

This process will involve several steps, and can be divided into two categories: short term tasks that will be worked on immediately, and long term tasks that may take several months, even years, to accomplish.

Short Term Tasks:

1. Establish a connection with an urban poor focused Non-government Organization, possibly the Technical Assistance Organization (TAO, Philippines), that our college has worked with in the past (and whose founders have recently been recruited to the our faculty), and identify a medium sized slum area that can be used as case study (possibly a slum area in Navotas, right by Manila Bay, that we have already done initial studies on).

2. Do an in-depth documentation of this slum area, perhaps as a class activity in the College or an activity with my office staff. Documentation will include:
 - a. population and density figures
 - b. history / growth
 - c. political, social, and family structure
 - d. identification and mapping of uses (i.e. commercial establishments, community facilities, etc.)
 - e. physical layout
 - i. open spaces
 - ii. circulation network
 - iii. building heights
 - iv. location of common facilities
 - f. activities
 - g. construction methods and materials
 - h. housing types
 - i. plans and elevations
 - j. other relevant data
3. Analyze and synthesize findings, and package into an organized form of literature (like a manual). Compare findings with existing settlement designs and contemporary urbanism concepts.
4. Disseminate information (preliminary findings) in urban studies and housing related classes.
5. Develop a course syllabus that focuses on this topic. Courses where this may be applicable include:
 - a. 3rd or 4th year architecture design classes
 - b. Arch 161 (introduction to urban design), Arch 162 (introduction to urban planning), and/or Arch 163 (housing)
 - c. CommArch 231 (introduction/ fundamentals of community architecture, graduate level)
 - d. CommArch 232 (community architecture 2, graduate level)
 - e. CWTS (community welfare training service)
6. Institutionalize syllabi into the College of Architecture curriculum

Long Term Tasks:

7. Reconnect with other schools of architecture and planning, both locally and internationally, to establish joint programs pertaining to this topic.
8. Present studies in seminars, symposia, and local and international conferences like the annual International Universities Seminar on Asian

Megacities (IUSAM), United Architects of the Philippines (UAP) and Philippine Institute of Environmental Planners (PIEP) conventions, etc.

9. Disseminate information to government housing agencies and private developers, with the hope that new settlement designs may adopt the positive social and physical features of slums.

Completing this process will take a substantial amount of time, resources, and effort, and the objectives may be fully attained only after even more time, perhaps in a span of five to ten years. I firmly believe however, that future and present planners and developers can learn from the slums. These are places with energy, character, vibrancy, and a real community spirit, and if these qualities can be adopted into new settlements, regardless of income level, and with improved living standards (sanitation, health, infrastructure, etc.) the wait will be worth it.

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