

Manila's resettlement communities: how the built environment structures kid's social lives

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ABSTRACT: Manila, the densest city in the world, actively resettles families from informal-inner city communities to large social housing communities on the urban fringe. This paper describes these resettlements from the perspective of teenage residents (kids). I applied an inductive research methodology and qualitative methods to investigate the relationship between architecture and kid's social lives. Collaborating with four resettlement communities, I collected and analyzed photographs, interview transcripts, observations, and drawings by kids, community advocates, and government officials. I suggest that kids in the resettlement communities are looking for ways to mentally adjust to their situation as they shift into the reality and responsibility of limited resources. They use cell phones and social media for entertainment and for testing out new identities that are uninhibited by their environmental constraints.

KEYWORDS: resettlements, social housing, kids, urban morphology, and equity

INTRODUCTION

At 4:30 am, the sky still dark and most of the community sleeping, half of the kids in Garden Village wake up and prepare for school. The first shift of secondary school is from 6 am to noon and the second shift runs from noon to 6 pm. Scheduling two shifts of classes per day is a common practice in Manila's peripheral communities where resources are scarce and even buildings must work overtime to accommodate demand. However, the kids "don't mind" getting up early; they told me that there isn't anything to do or anywhere safe to go so they stay home anyway (Interview with Caril 2018).¹

Manila, the densest city in the world, actively resettles families from informal-inner city communities to large social housing communities on the urban fringe. These resettlement communities range from 500 to 15,000 families collocated on vast stretches of former agricultural land. Promoters of resettlement communities argue that they are potential stepping-stones to a better life while critics challenge that the cost is extreme isolation. International humanitarian organizations are aware that these remote communities face daunting challenges such as a lack of basic infrastructure, transportation, and jobs leading many scholars to argue that they are seeding grounds for future slums. Yet, the tangible impacts of this typology (remote social housing architecture) on the everyday lives of the residents are often overlooked.

Following the work of Janice Pearlman and Louise Chawla, this research scratches the surface of contemporary social housing schemes in a global city to understand kid's unique perspective. Specifically, teenagers (kids aged 12-16) are physiologically developing their frontal lobes, which forms their identity and deep perceptions of the world around them. How does this type of spatial isolation affect kid's perceptions their environment? How does the architecture support or inhibit social reproduction? And, how has social housing in the Philippines evolved to produce this typology?

I've applied an inductive research methodology and qualitative methods to answer these questions. Over a period of eight months, living on the fringe of Manila and collaborating with four resettlement communities, I collected and analyzed over 432 photographs taken and 16

maps made by teen residents, 105 hours of site observations, and 61 hours of audio recordings with kids, community advocates, and government officials. I found that the architecture and urban design of resettlements impact kid's identity, accessibility, and encourage digital means of community through an administration that provides little stability.

1.0 SOCIAL HOUSING IN MANILA, PHILIPPINES

Here, on the urban fringe, the *National Housing Authority* (NHA) has approved sites for the resettlement of informal communities from Manila's thriving city center. The government cites a neoliberal agenda for relocating the communities to the periphery: land is cheap on the fringe, informal settlers must learn how to integrate into the economy, and the city needs to leverage the high-value land currently occupied to generate income (Interview with HLURB 2018). While it is clear that the inner-city informal communities are prone to unsafe and hazardous conditions, I argue that relocation to the extreme periphery has dangerous social consequences not previously considered even though the Philippines presents a tradition of relocating marginalized residents.

Informality and the demand for subsidized or "social" housing is a deeply political and social issue embedded in the island nation starting with the imbalance of resources between the landowning elite and the tenant farmers. Colonized by Spain, Japan, and the United States of America (USA) the Philippines underwent centuries of agricultural exploitation by way of *haciendas* (plantations) that echoed feudal property-rights and ultimately displaced millions of tenant farmers. Following the Spanish-American War, the USA sought to use the Philippines' rich agricultural resources to expand economic development. In 1901, the government under American administration held 93% of the islands' land area (Dolan 1991). The Catholic Church was the second largest private landowner and through negotiations with the USA sold the majority to Filipino estate owners (Seekins 1993). In the later stages of the American Colonial Period, a Commonwealth system was established to subdue rising insurrection regarding pressures on the failing sharecropping system especially around the countries growing commercial port city, Manila.

American President Taft commissioned Architect Daniel Burnham to design plans for the physical redevelopment of Manila.ⁱⁱ While this garden-city plan was never fully carried out some of the ideals were evident in the structuring of corridors and public space. Burnham saw possibility in the exotic environment but believed that the city could benefit from the influence of a "progressive [*sic*] civilization" (e.g. the USA). While his plan possessed climatically specific designs it did not address social equity and gave no caveat for low-income housing (Burnham 1905).

Yet, social inequality worsened due to competition for tenant land and the increasing population of the landless working class despite efforts from social revolutionaries such as Benigno Ramos and President Manuel Quezon. The Philippines' federally initiated relocation programs have their roots here. The *People's Homesite Corporation* (PHC) was the first government-housing agency to be established in the Philippines. One of the most notorious projects by the PHC was the 1940 Kamuning Housing Project. These suburban Manila communities intended to relocate poor farmers were the first to include community services and facilities such as schools, open spaces, markets, and utilities. Around this time, squatters, looking for service work in the port, inhabited reclaimed land from Manila Bay; over the next three decades this settlement would come to be *Tondo Foreshore* – Manila's largest slum and the one in most need of basic urban services (World Bank 1976).

Just a year after PHC was established, the government enacted the *National Land Settlement Administration* (NSLA) who's mission was "to facilitate acquisition, settlement, and cultivation of public lands, to afford an opportunity to own farms for tenant farmers in congested areas, to encourage migration to sparsely populated regions, and to develop money-crops to take the place of the present export crops to America" (Commonwealth Act No. 441, 1939). When the Second World War broke out major relocation settlement areas were already established with

populations upwards of 50,000 hectares signifying to working class Filipinos that top-down resettlement was a viable option (Manapat 2010).

However, due to its strategic position in the Pacific, Manila was a major site of conflict in World War II (WWII) suffering destruction to the built environment only second to Warsaw, Poland. During the reconstruction period, the Philippine government tried various social programs to stabilize unrest as the majority of land was still held by a small group of elite landowners who exploited tenant farmers and many working-class poor were rendered homeless from the WWII fallout. The democratic system failed to produce equitable legislation likely because most political candidates came from large land-holding families. In 1945, President Jose Laurel created the *National Housing Corporation* (NHC) and two years later, under a newly independent Philippine government, President Manuel Roxas merged the NHC with the PHC to create the *People's Homesite and Housing Corporation* (PHHC).

Each president appears to have used social housing as a cornerstone issue to define his or her term in office ultimately with little lasting material effect. President Magsaysay established the *National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration* (NARRA), which excised land to indigent families for farming. In 1963, President Macapagal enacted the *Agricultural Land Reform Code* which abolished tenancy based on harvest yields and replaced it with a leasehold system based on fixed rent. This was a significant advancement that helped to break-up the *haciendas* but was inhibited by congress' failure to allocate funds for implementation. In the years that followed, six more agencies were established each for a separate and distinct facet of urban informality and housing insecurity.

The notorious dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, framed the next era (1965-1986) of social housing. He attempted to balance the agricultural economy with industry by procuring large foreign loans to finance massive infrastructure projects. During his first term, the increase in federal spending was well received and he was the first Philippine president to democratically win a second term. But, as funds ran out interest rates increased and inflation dramatically rose which triggered social instability. Marcos reacted by decreeing martial law that lasted 15 years. During this period he enacted some social housing legislation. Most notably he abolished the many existing housing agencies and created the *National Housing Authority* (NHA) to take over and integrate their functions. A few years later he created the *Ministry of Human Settlements* (MHS) to take a holistic approach to housing (NHA was placed as an attached agency to MHS). MHS developed a standard set of guidelines for social housing called *Batasang Pambansa 220* (BP 220). Of specific importance, this legislation made transparent a new shift in the theory of social housing to rely on the private sector and officially defined new categories and requirements for housing:

It is hereby declared a policy of the Government to promote and encourage the development of economic and socialized housing projects, *primarily by the private sector...* [emphasis by author]

Economic and socialized housing refers to housing units which are within the affordability level of the average and low-income earners which is thirty percent of the gross family income... and to government-initiated sites and services develop and construction... in depressed areas (BP 220 1982).

The law for architectural life safety codes for economic and social housing is still written as BP 220; it is revised by the *Housing and Land Use Regulation Board* (HLURB) and implemented by the *National Architectural Council* (NAC).

One of Marcos most notable programs under the new NHA was *Bagong Lipunan Improvement of Sites and Services* (BLISS). BLISS was intended to illustrate to surrounding rural communities the benefits of a 'settlement' approach to community buildings. It ultimately constructed over 230,000 housing units.

When the People's Power Revolution overthrew President Marcos and he fled the country, President Corazon Aquino was elected in 1986. She shut down the MHS and reorganized social housing efforts through a National Shelter Program. This effort was coordinated through

a newly formed *Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council* (HUDCC) chaired by a Presidential appointee (EO No. 90 1986). President Aquino maintained the success of the National Shelter Program through public-private partnerships in social housing and directed government agencies to, “encourage greater private sector participant in low-cost housing through liberalization of development standards, simplification of regulations and decentralization of approvals for permits and licenses” (EO No. 90 1986). She allocated a large amount of public land for social housing. Many informal settlers occupied public land in Manila at this time because they knew they would get resettlement options under her administration (Interview with TAO 2018). During the final months of her presidency, Aquino’s government passed what is still the foremost law on social housing, the *Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992* (UDHA).

According to Dr. Grace Ramos, professor of Architecture at the University of the Philippines, the UDHA 1992 intended to ensure social housing was a priority by setting guidelines and metrics for success. However, she critiques the policy as vague, lacking participatory methods, instilling inadequate architectural guidelines, and measuring success through quantitative brackets that mask the story:

Design standards prescribed by the various building and planning laws are problematic. The application of the concepts of ergonomics and anthropometrics to low-cost housing have been very much oriented to the physical realm. Minimum dimensions of house components are largely taken from measurements of the users while laying out of functional zones are based on very rational analyses of sequential movements, oftentimes based on western models” (Ramos 1999).

Despite the push back, the HDUA supported the construction of nearly one million housing units on the urban fringe. In the late 1990s, along with many western capitalist nations, the government shifted its perspective on social housing from a highly centralized and subsidized perspective to a market-oriented approach. President Fidel Ramos had the idea of ‘toilet-communities.’ During his time in office, the NHA acquired large plots of land and put down slabs with only a toilet (no partitions or roof) (Interview with TAO 2018). The minimalist idea assumed residents would eventually invest in their home. However, these communities became seeding grounds for blight because the residents didn’t have the knowledge or materials to construction homes to a safe standard. People used what they could find—old wood, galvanized iron sheets, and tarpaulin. President Ramos also focused on military housing and under his term NHA experimented with 3-story housing along the railway easement (higher density, in-city housing). However, most residents sold their units to those more enterprising. Critiques argue that the high-density units were too small especially since residents didn’t have access to outdoor space (18 sqm for an average family of 6).

President “Erap” Estrada is likened to American President Ronald Regan because he always played the hero during his acting career was beloved by Filipinos. His presidential cornerstone was a mass housing development (55,600 units) called Erap City (Kasiglahan Village) administered through his newly formed Presidential Commission for Mass Housing (EO No. 159). Erap invited private investment through the Asian Development Bank and the project received over 3.2 billion pesos (roughly \$61M) from SSS, Landbank of the Philippines, and NSJBI. This was one of the first all-horizontal housing communities constructed on agricultural land outside of suburban Manila – displacing over 200 farmers. Ironically constructed to relocate settlers from the flood-prone banks of the Pasig River, this community also experienced significant flooding over the past decade likely due to poor grading and insufficient stormwater design. Over 80% of residents did not have access to livelihoods due to the remote fringe location. But, the community fed into the culturally imbued concept of ‘home’ being a function of land-ownership – something that wasn’t offered with the high-density in-city housing promoted by both President Corazon Aquino and President Fidel Ramos.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo supported many large resettlement sites. The *Philippine National Railways Clearing Act* moved informal settlers from dangerous railway easements to the distant fringe of Bulacan, Laguna, and Cavite (at least 60,000 families). But, once these easements were cleared new informal communities formed again due to the lack of policing.

Following Ketzana, a destructive typhoon, President Arroyo reallocated funds from the relocation program to focus on building high-density in-city housing. But, informal settlers didn't want to live in multi-story housing because of the cramped space and the cultural stigma that "home" is in the land. This perception only worsened due to the poor architectural designs of the high-density social housing units that limited access to natural light, offered no cross-ventilation, and had little opportunity for parents to see their children playing from their unit, etc. Another major issue was that settler's experiences in low-density blight communities inadequately prepared them for the responsibility and maintenance required of living in high-density units; without oversight or organization the buildings were often abandoned or sold.

President Benigno Aquino III was known for his support of a participatory planning method through the NHA that resulted in communities such as the Sampaloc Project. These communities are small in scale, incorporate behavior requirements (such as keeping the community clean), and are located in the metropolitan areas of Manila. Aquino targeted informal residents in danger zones due to environmental natural disasters such as fire, flooding, earthquakes, and typhoons (Yolanda victims explicitly). Unlike many countries grappling with social housing and informality, the Philippines is an exceptionally dangerous state for housing insecurity because of the environmental conditions. Typhoons, earthquakes, landslides, flooding, and volcanic eruptions have plagued the state's most marginalized residents making stable housing an even more critical concern.

Finally, the current President, Rodrigo Duterte, has taken a neoliberal perspective and shifted the responsibility of social housing to the market economy. In this light he reduced the national social housing budget to less than half of 1% in his term (from 1.1% to 0.46%) (Interview TAO 2018). The remaining social housing projects are tied to the threat of the Islamic State in Marawi (Mindanao) or military housing to support his war on drugs.

Social housing in the Philippines is closely tied to each Presidential campaign. Constant turnover of housing agencies and juggling for control have rendered little material changes but rather a pendulum swinging between strategies always with a focus on 'numbers of housing units' over qualitative assessments. Over the past three decades, social housing has transitioned from a public responsibility to an opportunity for the private industry. Relocation is not a new concept but rather a century-old plan for dealing with the pressures of a rural-urban migration. Administrations have alternated through in-city or off-city models; horizontal or vertical typologies; self-help housing or holistic housing models. As urban designers and architects work toward tailoring solutions to the next relocation project, little empirical work has been done to understand, qualitatively, how relocation affects the residents.

2.0 METHODOLOGYⁱⁱⁱ

Over the period of eight months, I worked with kids living in resettlement communities on Manila's periphery to understand how the built environment their perspective. This was a mixed-methods study using a participatory approach to increase accessibility to kids. The post-positivist perspective relied on inductive methods to reflexively collect and analyze data. Through these iterative cycles of data collection and analysis, I was able to adjust the methods to fit participant's needs, refine questions, and validate data.

I chose a case study model to compare youth experiences across resettlement communities varying in population, age, and housing typology. I defined a case as a discrete resettlement community. Within each case, I repeated the sequential methods working with kids and their peers. To select cases, I conducted a site visit of 9 peripheral resettlement communities. After receiving permission from each community, I selected four that were diverse and politically stable.^{iv} These four communities are located on the north side of Manila and have approximately the same duration of commute into the city.

Table 1: Site selection criteria with chosen sites highlighted.

Community	Barangay (Neighborhood)	Province	Distance to Manila	Population (Families)	Age	Housing Typology (Flr Area/Lot Size)
San Jose Del Monte Heights	Muzon	Bulacan	39 km	4,283 F	6	22sqm/40sqm, some lofts, rowhouses (RH)
Pabahay 2000	Muzon	Bulacan	32 km	7,045 F	20	22sqm/36sqm, RH, 1 flr
Garden Village	Graceville	Bulacan	30 km	494 F	1	45sqm/40sqm, duplex, 2flr
Towerville VI	Graceville	Bulacan	27 km	8,514 F	12	22.5sqm/36sqm, RH, 1 flr
Golden Horizons	Hugo Perez	Cavite	50 km	1,500 F	7	N/A, RH, 1flr
Dorothea 1	Halang	Cavite	49 km		5	N/A, RH, 1flr
Belmont Homes	Halang	Cavite	48 km	54 F	1	N/A, RH, some lofts
Bronzeville 2	Halang	Cavite	51 km	270 F	4	N/A, RH, some lofts
Resettlement Site	San Isidro	Rizal	36 km	0 F	1	N/A, RH, some lofts

The research captures kid's perspectives through multiple mediums as they often have trouble communicating through words. First, I gathered general perceptions by holding one focus group of at least 8 kids in each case. After the focus groups, I conducted semi-structured interviews with new kids. By analyzing focus group responses, I was able to develop specific participant recruitment criteria and tailor interview questions to each case. During the first interview, kids were given a disposable camera to take pictures of spaces they hang out in their community. Analyzing the first-round interview responses led to emerging themes and a refined set of follow-up interview questions. I returned the photographs to each teen asking him/her to write a caption for each photo and to plot the photo location on a community map. The kids were then asked to draw their daily route, identify places they regularly hang out and the homes of people they connect with on social media. After analyzing the third round of data and developing a working theory, I identified 6 "social spaces of significance" in each case. I conducted 4 2-hour site observations using behavior mapping in 15-minute increments to document patterns of use in each space. To validate the findings, I also conducted 12 contextual interviews with school guidance counselors, homeowner's association members, parents, and *barangay* (neighborhood) officials.

The data collection and analysis process was iterative following principles of grounded theory. I used Dedoose Software to systematically code and analyze the interview transcripts, photographs, and maps immediately following each phase. The top codes were "hangouts," "basketball court," *barkadas* (clique), "walking," "nature," "Facebook." To adhere to principles of child safeguarding during the research process, I initially recruited and trained 6 local residents per case to identify and approach potential kid-participants and their parents for interest in the study. This step ensured the privacy of the kids (and the community). Following, I met with potential kid-participants and their legal guardian to explain the project risks/benefits through a translator in the local language (Tagalog). I selected kids on the basis of diversity of age, gender, and school attendance with the goal of understanding a wide range of perspectives. This process was followed for recruiting kids for focus groups, interviews, and mapping exercises.

3.0 RESETTLEMENT ARCHITECTURE

Distance, in the greater Manila metropolitan region, is best measured in time because of the deeply congested traffic. The four communities that I worked with were all located about a 4 hour commute to Metro Manila on an uneventful day. They were all in the province of San Jose del Monte City where many of its 700,000 residents were relocated from Manila in the 1970s/80s. Frequent heavy rainfall exacerbated traffic and typically left rural communities stranded without access to basic resources. Public transportation to these areas was limited to commercial nodes where residents could use jeepneys and then rickshaws to eventually

arrive home but these vehicles were unequipped to deal with flooding and landslides. Accessibility, due to limited services, geographic distance, and quality of infrastructure was a major concern of all residents in each case. The two communities in *Barangay* Graceville, Garden Village and Towerville 6, were the closest (about a 20 minute drive or 1 hour walk) to the transportation hub at Tungko built on the first floor of the SM City SJDM shopping mall with the other two communities farther out.

3.1 Garden Village

Garden Village was a new community of 700 plots but just over 500 families had relocated in the past year with more pending. The community was clean and new - living up to its name as a "garden village" because of a strongly enforced homeowner's association that emphasized planting around the houses. Each family was allotted a duplex unit with a side and front yard and alley-access in the back. The streets were wide but with out sidewalks to accommodate on-street parking (as none of the houses had driveways or carports). Most residents didn't have a car but some were taxi drivers or would entertain relatives and so there were always a few cars on each street.

The community was difficult to find and more difficult to enter. The residents of Garden Village had deep solidarity and cohesion as they had fought to first remain and then to be relocated as a community from a long-held informal settlement on public land that was now leased to Ayala Land Inc. (to build a commercial live-work-play center, Vertis North). As part of the government lease, Ayala was responsible for procuring a relocation site. The company was pressured by investors to expedite the relocation process and negotiated with the settlement's People's Organization (PO) for some atypical participation in the site selection and design process. NHA hired Dowal Realty & Management Systems Company as the designer of record.

The PO had some input into selecting their site (from a list of 3 others) and chose the only site that allowed their community to stay together even though it was farther outside the city than many found comfortable. The site was also desirable because a river on three sides wrapped it; the site was a dead-end and for many this was a safety feature because it allowed them to control access. After driving through the rural area the road stops at a closed metal gate. Two resident-volunteer guards are posted 24-hours and above them a sign proudly reads, "SRCC Garden Village..."

Inside, the road leads to a traffic circle surrounded by duplex houses. The residents also had some small influence on the layout of their units. Cost was tightly controlled so they opted for larger lots and a two-story shell by compensating with an unfinished, interior second floor. The units came as a single room with a built-in counter and an attached bathroom. As residents saved money they improved their houses. Some common improvements were awnings over the entrance, metal security bars on the windows, a second level floor and staircase, interior partitions.

3.2 Towerville 6

Towerville 6 was located just a few kilometers from Garden Village but it was vastly distant in form and character. It was one of many expansions to an older relocation site with a combined population of over 30,000 families spread over *Barangay* Graceville and *Barangay* Muzon. The community was rundown and tired with an air of tension on the streets. The residents did not relocate from the same informal community or the same ancestral village at the same time; neighbors spoke different languages and had different conditions governing relocation. Some were victims of Typhoon Ondoy while others were resettled from railway easements and still others were relocated from public property. Without similar cultures or circumstances the community didn't form a strong PO and was not able to advocate for their interests in the way Garden Village was successful. The residents of Towerville 6 did not have a say in their relocation site or in the design of the community or the layout of their homes. This detachment from their surroundings resulted in a lack of household maintenance and an increased presence of violence.

The community had been living together since 2006 and over the last decade the hardships of remote relocation had visibly taken a toll. The narrow lanes were dotted with abandoned carts and vehicles. The houses were constructed in rows each sharing a common wall (zero-lot line). Initially, the houses were setback 6 m back from the street curb to accommodate a sidewalk but long-ago homeowners unanimously encroached on this frontage with a small porch, a *sari-sari* store, or an expansion.^v The single-room houses were one-level with a small, attached bathroom along the rear alley. As with the front of the house, the alley, too, had been encroached and now was impassable by foot traffic. Many families used the alley encroachment space as the kitchen and for storage of bedding. Few residents made architectural improvements suggesting that they did not consider the community as a long-term solution.

3.3 San Jose Del Monte Heights (Sjdmh)

Barangay Muzon is approximately a 45-minute drive farther into the agrarian countryside from *Barangay* Graceville. There is some commercial development along the major road intersection that features one franchise fast food store, Jolli Bee. The sprawling community of SJD MH was located just three kilometers from this intersection. Although over six years old, the community was still expanding; it was an active site for relocation. It was home to just under 5,000 families who had been relocated in two distinct phases with construction of community amenities and several annex zones on-going.

Like Towerville 6, many of the residents did not know each other before relocating to SJD MH. The community was initiated as a resilience/risk reduction strategy as many were living in informal communities inside flood planes and active danger zones. However, the relocation was wrought with typical challenges: residents were evicted and their homes razed before utilities were set up in SJD MH. Many participants recalled a period of 12-18 month in which they carried water from the creek for bathing, washing, and cooking, they paid a daily fee for access to an electric generator (organized by the neighborhood), and had to purchase water by the drum from the city. But, they had hope because they saw a pathway to home ownership.

The streets in SJD MH are wide and often stripped for a make-shift basketball court. Houses range in typology from single-level row houses to loftable duplexes similar to those in Garden Village. Some are maintained and painted while others are in disrepair. The community is spatially open – too open. Sprawled across a hill-top there is no visual connection from one end of the community to the other. Vacant fields awkwardly interject into the street grid and break up the cohesion. The community has no main gate or guard system and feels as though the clusters of houses between the fields operate as individual units.

3.4 Pabahay 2000

Pabahay 2000 lies three kilometers on the other side of the Jolli Bee. This is the oldest community I worked with originating in 1998. The community has undergone many transformations and many presidential campaigns. The community is only accessible through a two-way loop that dead-ends into a gated community. Other than from the cramped and inhumane density, it would be hard to tell from the architecture that this community was once and perhaps still is a social housing site. Today, every unit has undergone at least one renovation. Lots have been combined, divided, and raised. Property has been sold to enterprising neighbors and the NHA estimates that perhaps 40% of the residents would not qualify for social housing.

Originally planned with one street size and one house layout copied throughout the entire site, the community has morphed into a complete town with a main street lined by commercial use: bakeries, computer cafes, restaurants, poultry supply, liquor stores, ice cream stores, resale shops, sportswear, private schools, water filling stations, etc. The standard single-room single-level layout as constructed in Towerville VI has completely vanished underneath medium density mid-rise construction.

The residents came from a few different locations. Some echoed Garden Village as they were relocated from an informal community on public land in North Triangle when the government leased the land to SM Land Inc. to develop the SM North commercial shopping center. Others were relocated from flood prone areas around Tondo. The community, as a now hybrid social housing project has little cohesion but residents also feel less stigmatized.

4.0 KID'S PERSPECTIVE

The kids in these four communities had similar enough experiences to warrant generalizable themes. Most significantly, they told me about where and how they socialize, they talked about their fears and hopes the environment presented, and they shared their reflections on their identity and future.

When asked about their ideal space almost all kids mentioned “trees” and “grass.” Those who had bikes imagined trails for riding while others, picnics. The kids talked a lot about nature – about wanting to be in it – as if being surrounded by agricultural fields wasn’t ‘in nature.’ They differentiated between the ‘controlled’ nature of public space in urban areas like parks and the dangerous wilds that surrounded them. They told terrifying stories of rapes, kidnapping, and animals that lurked in the wilds. They didn’t dare explore or play in the wilds. The exception was a few younger boys in Garden Village who liked to climb down the floodwall and swim in the river that divided their community from an informal settlement. However, they also said it was dangerous to be there because the informal settlers would throw rocks at them and sometimes adults would even cross the river and steal from their houses.

Their parents were afraid for them too. It was always better to stay close to the house. The parents in Garden Village allowed their kids almost free rein because gate guards controlled community access and everyone knew everyone. There was an element of this type of freedom in the cluster formations of SJDMMH but most kids described tight spatial boundaries – usually a block or two from their home and strict curfews. Girls were allowed less freedom under the guise of protection while boys were allowed more space and time. In communities of mixed relocates, kids (both girls and boys) talked of gang violence and the pressure to join a group for protection. Drugs seemed to be limited to alcohol and cigarettes (about half of the kids participated) but none mentioned or knew anyone on harder substances.

None of the communities have open space with nature. Half of them have basketball courts (the ideal Filipino child is male and plays basketball, girls have a limited childhood and stay home to help with chores and take care of siblings). Barangay Graceville developed a nature park for residents, which has beautiful trees and is well maintained. However, the park is too far from Garden Village or Towerville VI for kids to go unaccompanied. The park has rules, restricted hours, and is often overcome with adults.

The kids use the street corners as their open space by default. They sit on the curb, lean against the houses, and sometimes escape to the alleys. Some more daring youngsters convert unoccupied houses into fort-like headquarters for their *barkada*. Sometimes they have standing meetings to play but many coordinate through Facebook Messenger (FBm). All of the kids have a personal cell phone and most had a smart phone. Very few actually had a data plan but FBm operates without data. The kids spent much of their free time at the *peso arcadia* (computer café) playing multi-user video games or FBm. Their social media connections were both local friends as well as friends back in Manila and abroad. They used this outlet as a means of identity expressed unattached to their physical surroundings.

Older kids made the long walk to the commercial center to use the free Wi-Fi. It took an hour each way and many skipped out of school to make the journey and return before dark. The route wasn’t safe at night. They had to decide to walk the busy highway and risk getting hit by a car or through some rural neighborhoods where gangs controlled the streets or drunkards loitered. But, they relished the time they spent at the mall. There was air conditioning, free Wi-Fi, and a Starbucks. The bright over-lighting made it feel safe and all of the white surfaces made the mall feel clean and even modern. It was so unlike their community – dark, stained

concrete, trash. At the mall, they felt that released from the problems in their community and their family. Their Facebook pages said as much. They took selfies in front of popular stores and hung out on the mall's expansive second-level patio that overlooked a greenfield site. There were so many people there and security guards. This was safe nature.

CONCLUSION

The kids in Manila's relocation communities are challenged with inadequate spaces for socialization and compensate by investing in the virtual world of Facebook. Their spatial decisions are dictated by real threats to their safety but also by a desire to fit into a global commercial community. Although these relocation communities are located in remote and spacious areas, kid's daily environment is consolidated to a few blocks. This affects how they see themselves and their communities.

The Philippines has a long history of managing housing insecurity through relocating marginalized residents to the urban fringe. Government corruption, inadequate funding, and gerrymandering organizational responsibilities have only inhibited progress to social housing. Some more innovative programs have attempted in-city relocation but efforts at high-density housing have failed due to anomie with the social conventions of apartment living.

This study contributes to a developing body of research on kid's social spaces. Throughout its execution I have attempted to include the voices of teenagers. Resettlement communities produce challenging landscapes. Kids may value many different kinds of spaces for a variety of reasons. I suggest that inductive participatory methods of this kind seem to provide a very useful direction for further research on the relationship between kids and the built environment. In particular, this calls for careful and detailed studies of how kids socialize in their communities. This approach places considerable emphasis on the role of public space in the development of agency.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Children selected their pseudonyms as denoted with an asterisk.

ⁱⁱ Manila was an established centuries-old city with a population over 220,000. The Americanization of territories and possessions was largely to the comfort of American businesses and for easy of social control.

ⁱⁱⁱ This study was endorsed by the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board (IRB) and collected informed consent. The IRB assessed and minimized risks to participants and the university. The project was reviewed, amended, and endorsed by Save the Children Philippines, for compliance with the principles of Child Safeguarding.

^{iv} During my site selection period, general elections created a state of emergency in Cavite. My project partner closed field operations in Cavite for a standard period of 90 days, which precluded any work in this area.

^v A sari-sari store is a home-based convenience store. About 20% of the homes dedicated frontage space for a sari-sari store. It was a main form of income for women as they were able to manage the store while rearing children at home. Programmatically, this space takes away from livable family space.