

Urban Growth

and its consequences for the urban development



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1.) Introduction

Cities, especially in developing countries, are growing very fast. The growth has both positive and negative consequences for the cities development. Positive developments like economic and cultural growth are closely linked to the negative aspects, for example the increasing poverty air and the pollution of air and water. The government and planners are often not able to deal with the rapidly growing number of people.

In Manila two kinds of development can be seen. The first one is that the city is only growing vertically and the second one is that the city spreads out horizontally. Four examples, two for dense areas and two for spread out areas, will show the difficulties, which planners and the people have to deal with.

The role of the architects in this development is a very important one and its working fields are definitely expanded. There is a big pressure to act fast. Because of that pressure, subjects like sustainability and social matters often get lost in the planning process. With new guidelines and point of views on urban planning, the cities development hopefully stands a chance

2.) Urban growth in developing countries

The main matter of urban growth is not the geographical expansion of urban centres; but the growth of urban population. City expansion is often a consequence of an exploding population and handling land in the wrong way. The government and city planners can often not keep with the urban growth.

Urban growth is closely linked to urbanization. Urbanization means people from rural areas immigrating to the city.

Urbanization has been a statement for many centuries, but the world wide urbanization belongs to the 20th and 21st century. In the 1960s the highly developed world was already highly urbanized. At that time the developing countries had just started their process of urbanization.

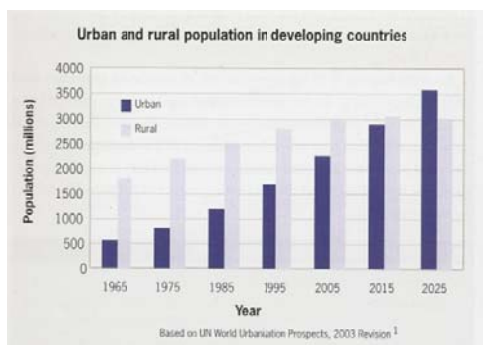


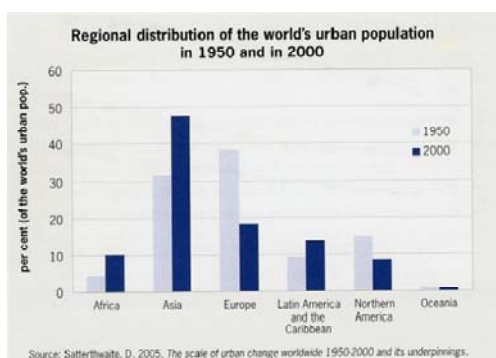
fig.1¹

The reasons why cities are growing so fast are the same in both undeveloped and developed countries.

One reason is migration. Migration has positive and negative consequences. Many high qualified people come to work and live in cities which results in the economic standard of the city rising, but also a lot of poor people arrive. Often they use all their savings for the new, better city life, but most of them become disappointed, because there is not enough living space and work for everyone. Therefore poor areas and slum areas are growing at the same speed as the economical centres.

¹ Fig.1: Reference: More Urban Less Poor

The other reason for urban growth is the natural population growth, which is in developing countries much higher than in Europe and therefore becomes a big matter, which is really difficult to deal with. In Europe for instance an average household consists of three people, in the Philippines an average household consists of five or even more people.

fig.2²

There are regional differences in urbanization. In Asia for instance more than 1.4 billion people live in cities. The urbanization level is nearly 40% and the annual urban growth is 2.5%. It is in Asia especially that the positive and negative aspects of urban growth and urbanization are visible.

In some parts, the economic growths and poverty are reduced. The negative aspects are that Asia has the largest slum population in the world (more than half a billion) and that the water and air pollution is high.

2.1) the situation in Metro Manila

Metro Manila, which has a total area of 636km², is the capital city of the Philippines and is divided into 16 districts.

The population is about 11.55 million people, which is 14% of the country's population. With 16,661/km² it belongs to the densest cities in the world. The growth rate has slowed down in the last 15 years from 3.5% to 2.11%, but it is still quite high. Manila has 51% informal settlers and about 1.5 million people live in slum areas.

² Reference: Moor Urban Less Poor

2.1.1) For the land use

Because Manila belongs to the highest disaster risk areas in the world, it should mean that there should be a strict plan of land use, but there is not.

The higher the income of someone is, the higher the chance is to live in a low risk area. People with a low income or informal settlers build their houses where there is space, for instance next to a river or a mountain. These people are the first victims of floats or other disasters.

But the land use is not only a matter of disaster risk management. A sustainable and economic use of land is also very important. In Manila especially we can notice two different types of developments. The first one is that they try to think in a more 3 dimensional way in business areas and high income residential areas. High rise buildings are the following consequence out of it. The second development is that the city spreads out. High income as well as low income houses are built around the city centres. Both developments are not following an economic and sustainable way of land use.

The fast urban growth and the big amount of informal settlers makes it nearly impossible for the government to control the city growth.

2.1.2) For the living conditions

The urban growth and the land use, strongly affect the living conditions of the population. Informal settlements often result in the country having a lack of infrastructure and services. Too dense settlements can have a private atmosphere but there are also a lot of negative consequences. A non working garbage collection leads to very unhealthy living conditions. There is also often a shortage of green space or free space at all. Also in higher income areas, where the services are all given, people do not feel very well, because they lose their connection to the earth.

People, whom are living outside the city, have better living conditions around, but their daily way to work is nearly impossible, because of the bad infrastructure.

3.) Positive and negative consequences of the urban development

At the moment there are two really extreme developments in Manila. The first development is that that city spreads out in a very low and open way. The second development is that in the middle of the city the buildings are getting more and denser. Both ways have different consequences for a sustainable, economic land use and the living conditions for the people. The next examples will explain the different consequences.

3.1.) Portofino, a high income, spread out area

Portofino is a 200ha, Italian inspired, residential area. The lot sizes are between 263 and 925m². It is a low dense area, situated 25 minutes from Makati. It has its own clubhouse and there will soon be added a 15ha area for commercial activities. Around the area there are services, like hospitals, schools, and shopping malls, but they within walking distance. Everyone, who lives there, has to have a car to go to work or their activities, and the traffic situation in Manila is already unbearable. There is definitely no lack of free space, contrariwise the area is empty. During the day everyone is at work or at school and in the evenings they are in their air-conditioned houses. The atmosphere there is boring, empty, probably too quiet for the Philippine culture. In a city, where access to water is not normal for everyone, they use a huge amount of water for watering the empty green areas. To feel save there is a huge wall around the area and at security men by the entrance.

3.1.1.) Muntinlupa, a low income, spread out area

The 50ha Southville 3 housing project is situated in Muntinlupa city. There are 7.035 lots with a density of 141 families/ha, which means 705 persons/ha. From the whole area, only 15% is open space, the rest is for residential and circulation use. The area is really spread out and the houses are one-story buildings. At least they have some jeepney and tricycle terminals for the people, but for people

without money it is nearly impossible to go to work somewhere else, therefore many get stuck in their living standard.

There are not enough shaded playgrounds for the children at all. The streets require the function of open space, meeting place, and playgrounds. It is a very dense area, but only in a horizontal way. The advantages for living on the ground floor are none. They have no garden area or possibility for bigger extensions of their houses. There is a lively atmosphere on the streets, but people do not feel safe. The daily living costs are more expensive than living somewhere in the city, because needs like water must be brought. The area is too spread out for it to have a strong and comfortable community life.

3.2.) Bel-air, a high income, dense area

Bel-air village belongs to the business district Makati and is a 10.57ha big area. Concerning the good situation in the city all facilities, like hospitals, green areas, and schools are very near and easy to reach. It is known as the cleanest and greenest part of Makati. But the high rise area does not only have good sides to it. Tower constructions are very good for the land use and density but this does not automatically mean that it is the most sustainable and economic way for using land. The construction costs for a tower are uneconomically high and therefore the monthly rents are exploding. The rich people could probably afford the rent, but the flat sizes are in comparison to other projects really small. Living on the 20th floor is not always that what people would prefer, when they have a choice. The feeling of being isolated from the environment is often a big problem for people living in the towers. Because of this, many apartments in Bel-air are empty.

3.2.1.) Damayang Lagi, a low income, dense area

Damayang Lagi is an 18,2ha big informal settlement in Quezon City. 1643 families are living there under the worst conditions. The area is really well situated and a lot of facilities like hospitals, schools and churches are reachable within walking distance. There is a huge lack of green space, meeting places, and

playgrounds. To get access to water it is really difficult and the tight ways between the buildings stink and have partially no access to day light. Another bad aspect is that because of the high density no natural ventilation through the ways is possible. Therefore, and because of the non working garbage collection, the health conditions are appalling.

4.) The role of architects

The role of architects in this kind of development is not only the design of master plans or construction plans. It is much more.

- One really important component of the work from an architect is to do a huge amount of research about the city situation. An architect should be able to see the special needs of people and to include these in the design. It is important to get an overall view of the city and its problems, but also about its positive aspects. The collection of all the information and observations should be shown in a way so that everyone can understand the given city situation, in an easy way. The research should not be only a description of the existing situation; it should also include reasons for the problems, but also for the good things. Only when we understand why something went wrong or why something is good, can we improve the situation.

- Another important aspect of the work is to get in contact with other professionals. An architect alone is not able to cover the whole knowledge about a city and its problems. Social workers, economics, engineers and politicians are only a few examples of professions which are really important to work with. The more people that get included into the project, the more complicated the work will get, but the more information and opinions you have, the merrier the solutions will be.

The role of an architect is to coordinate all of this information and opinions and to find a good in between solution.

- To search for sustainable and economic solutions is important as well. Now a day, the right handling with the environment is necessary. In fast growing cities the matter of sustainability often gets lost, but it is not a solution to build in the same way as before. To create better cities innovative solutions are essential.
- The best known role of an architect is to go thoroughly go through all the plans and manage the construction work. Doing the design is an important role, but only a small part of the construction.
- With the completion of the project the work is not done. A good architect should watch and study its and the work from others as well, to learn from the mistakes. There is never a perfect project and we can only try our best to improve these mistakes.

5.) Design of sustainable cities and neighbourhoods

Most of the guidelines for sustainable cities and neighbourhoods are independent from the income group. It is not a matter of money to build in a sustainable and economic way.

- We really have to think about how we use land. In Manila we see high rise areas and spread out areas. Both developments have positive sides, but concerning a sustainable and economic land use, they are not working. It is really important to find a solution, where people still want to live and which is not only working in a horizontal way. In my opinion medium rise buildings is the best solution, as people still feel grounded and it can be quite dense as well.

When cities grow this fast, we should also think about in which direction it should grow. The vertical and the horizontal directions have their limits, so there should be an in between solution. When cities have to extant in the horizontal way, there should be a controlled development of new city centres.

- In megacities like Manila, traffic is always a big problem. In the planning phase from every single project the infrastructure connection should be included, it does not matter how small the project is. No citizen should be reliant of his own car. The cities have to invest in the public transportation system to improve the traffic situation and to reduce the air pollution.
- To reduce construction and electricity costs, the choice of building materials and technical house services, is extremely important. The use of local materials is often more sustainable than the use of imported ones. It is essential to include the climate conditions into the project. With a right design the living conditions can be the same as in a highly technical and expensive building.
- To create a city with good lifestyle conditions, the planning of enough green areas and open spaces is necessary. There must be rules, which regulate the proportion between built area and free space. Otherwise the risk is that people will get sick or feel depressed. We have the need for green areas and nature.

6.) Conclusion

Urban growth is a big challenge, which people have to learn to deal with. If the situation in Manila does not change, living conditions will get worse. The government and the planners have to think about how they want the city to look like and how they can make everything work.

In the two developments, the dense and the spread out, you can recognise that they try to find solutions, but only in extreme ways. Probably it would be better for the whole city and its inhabitants to find a golden centre.

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