Landless People United
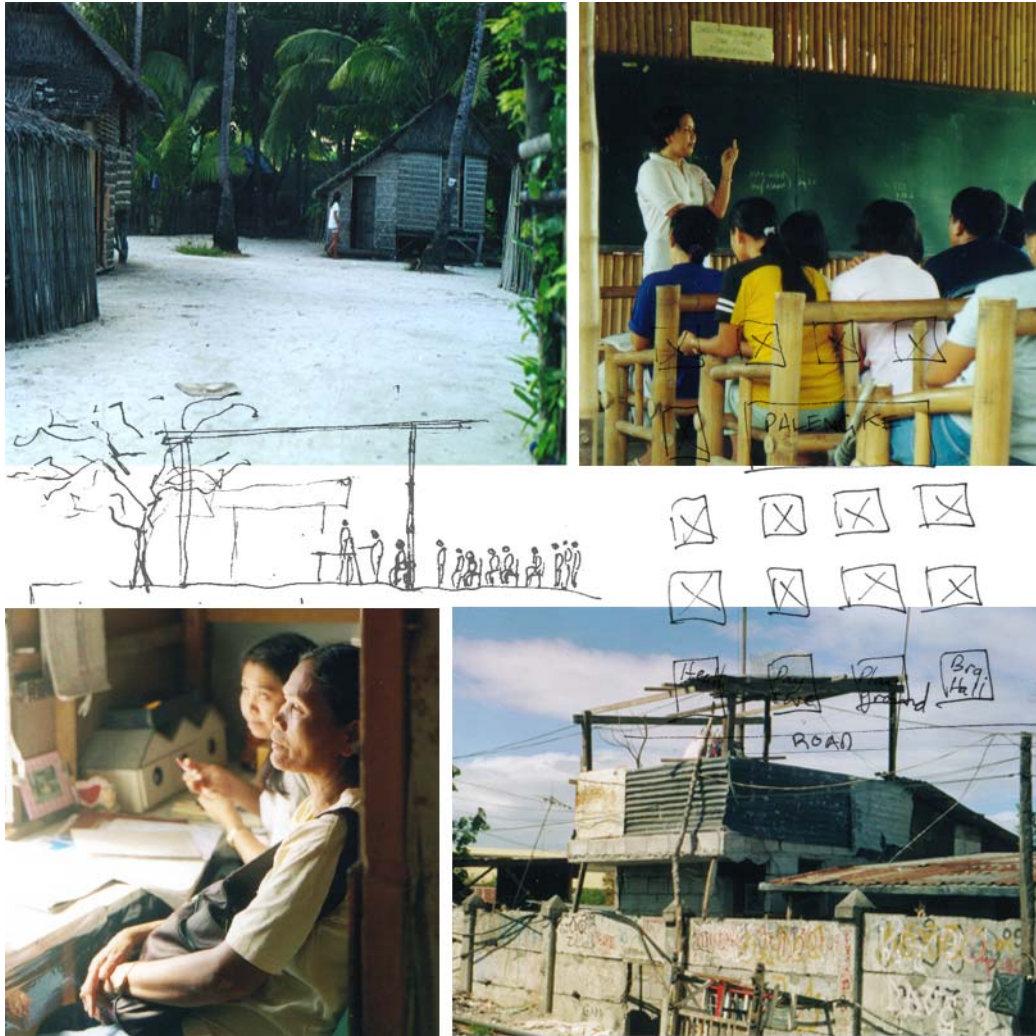
An architecture student's exploration of people-made settlements and grass-roots community development in the Philippines

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In March 2002, upon winning a bequest from the Byera Hadley Foundation, this third year architecture student set out to explore urban poor community development and the professional support process.

Initially, having received invitations to volunteer with support organisations abroad, this author expected to play a significant role in the development process, part of a team of professionals that manage and implement projects on behalf of the community.

However, after experiencing life in squatter settlements and participating in a ground-up approach to community development, it became apparent that the local community is capable of developing their own solutions to housing and habitat, but often lack the technical and financial resources to realise their solutions. It was concluded that, while external support plays an important role in facilitating community development, a truly sustainable outcome embraces local ideas, knowledge, skills and process as the backbone of projects.

This report will explore the challenges, discoveries and epiphanies that this architecture student experienced while living and working with urban poor communities throughout the Philippines. It will closely investigate the roles and approaches of participants in four community development projects, demonstrating their impact on the community and their relevance to the practice of community architecture in Australia. Additionally this report will examine the authors own support process as community architect, and his continual search for a support role that is sensitive to the community.

Problem Facing Landless Urban Poor in the Philippines

Masses of poor are migrating to urban centres in search of stable work, improved schools, hospitals and quality of life due to declining livelihood opportunities and inadequate basic services available in rural provinces. While 60% of the populace still live in rural areas[i], this number is quickly falling as mechanised farming practices render land-workers and traditional agricultural techniques redundant. Those that can't afford the technology can't compete. Manila's population growth is the highest in the country at 4% per annum and still increasing[ii], other major cities are also growing at an alarming rate. Consequently, cities are overcrowded and housing supply cannot, or will not, meet the high demand. Housing shortage is particularly severe for the low end of the housing market, urban poor are neglected as they are considered a "high-risk" group by private developers. Urban poor have little choice but to house themselves, and so exists the informal settlement, commonly referred to as squatter communities, fringe and perimeter settlements and slums.

While the underprivileged continue to solve the housing shortage informally, Federal and Local Governments, often in conjunction with Non-Government Organisations or NGO's, are responsible for developing formalised solutions to the social-housing deficit. These large-scale projects, often isolated and constructed using borrowed foreign funds are intended to house the growing numbers of informal settlers evicted from inner city slums in order to make way for private developments, environmental rehabilitation or city beautification projects. As a result of the *Urban Development and Housing Act* passed in 1992, if an organisation proposes a development that will dislocate informal settlers from their homes, they are required to provide alternative land and a suitable relocation strategy in order to gain development approval[iii]. Such private organisations, usually having no housing expertise, often employ NGO's to undertake development, management and implementation of the relocation strategy. The community development process is complex consisting of numerous players with different motives for their participation, not always in the interests of the community.

Contrary to their altruistic ideals, development NGO's are profit-based organisations, and need to generate a profit to stay afloat. Revenue generation is a proportion of the project budget, and religious/private donations; ranging anywhere from 50/50% investor/donor income split to 100% investor. The NGO support teams typically consist of architects, engineers, planners, housing and land policy researchers and community organisers. *Are these staff numbers necessary when the community is capable of doing a lot of the work?*
Within the NGO process, varying levels of community participation were observed; they relate to the communities level of organisation, the support groups period of contact with the community, the NGO's dynamics, funding/investors motives and support approach. These involvements range from minimal token input to complete local control over vital aspects of the projects nature. The impacts of these varying levels of participation on project outcomes and on the community itself are blindingly apparent; these will be discussed in more detail throughout the Case Studies.

Formalised community developments, such as those mentioned earlier, are relatively generic, orderly and consistent, unlike the curves, twists and inconsistent nature of informal settlements. They are relatively robust and spacious, with pre-installed basic services such as water, electricity, storm-water and effluent treatment systems; systems that are not always available in squatter communities. However informal settlements still continue to exist and thrive while vast new public housing developments remain empty….*why?*

…..Informal settlements are built by people for people. Informal settlements are closely connected to the intrinsic needs of their inhabitants because they were all part of its creation, and remain a part of its continual evolution. Crucial elements such as a support network of family and friends, employment, health, education, worship and recreation services, develop simultaneously with the dwellings themselves as need arises. Limited resource generates a gradual and piecemeal development process, development occurs as a need arises, and if a need ceases, the heavily contested space will be re-adapted.

While constrained by limited resources, informal settlements exude valuable ideas and innovations, people inventively utilise whatever materials can be sourced locally. Often, dwelling designs are an interpretation of traditional ideas utilising whatever materials are available. Examples below illustrate a traditional nipa hut typical to the costal regions of the Philippines (left), and a contemporary/traditional combination house that utilises available resources, in this case a boat cabin, with traditional concepts such as raised sleeping and ground cooking (right).


Examples of informal design, construction and planning that exist within squatter settlements are as follows:
Unrolled steel oil drum, ply, recycled concrete block as sculptures and walls; rusted pieces of corrugated iron as roofs, eaves and walls; level changes to denote function of space (ie. raised = private - sleeping, ground = public - utility); nails as pins for locks; reinforcement bars as side cart frames and anchors; recycled tyres as lobster traps and roof stabilisers. Public spaces, such as the street markets, basketball courts and the streets themselves are vibrant and social with at least two major purposes, they are rarely vacant. The street is an extension of the home; it is a play area for kids, a place to chat and meet friends for adults and a place to hang for teens. Due to lack of space, the roofs of houses and abandoned trucks often take on the role of playground in particularly dense settlements, such as depicted in the sketch to the right.
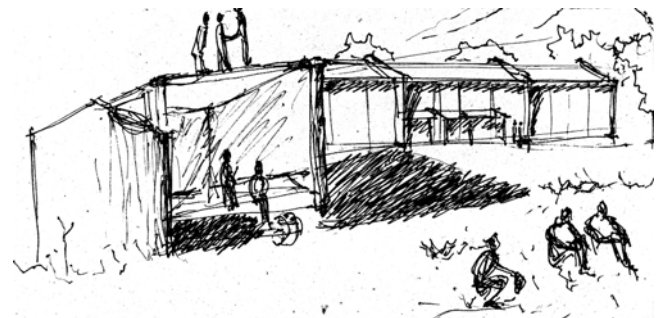
Common developmental problems in squatter settlements arise from poverty and the severe limitation of resources available to urban poor families. Permanent employment is almost non-existent and any income generation is typically informal and inconsistent. Banks do not approve loans to urban poor, and the daily cost of living and supporting an often large family leaves very little left over at the end of the day for savings. Informal settlements often lack storm water systems, household effluent treatment, electrical and water services, consistent planning and houses are not always so structurally sound and susceptible to typhoons. On a social aspect, gang warfare and household violence is a negative outcome of the dense mono-class population mix, stresses of a hard daily existence and low employment opportunities. Outside support groups struggle to understand how to help, and will often go in with an allocated budget and impose a project that may have no meaning to the community. *Why not let the people decide what they need?*
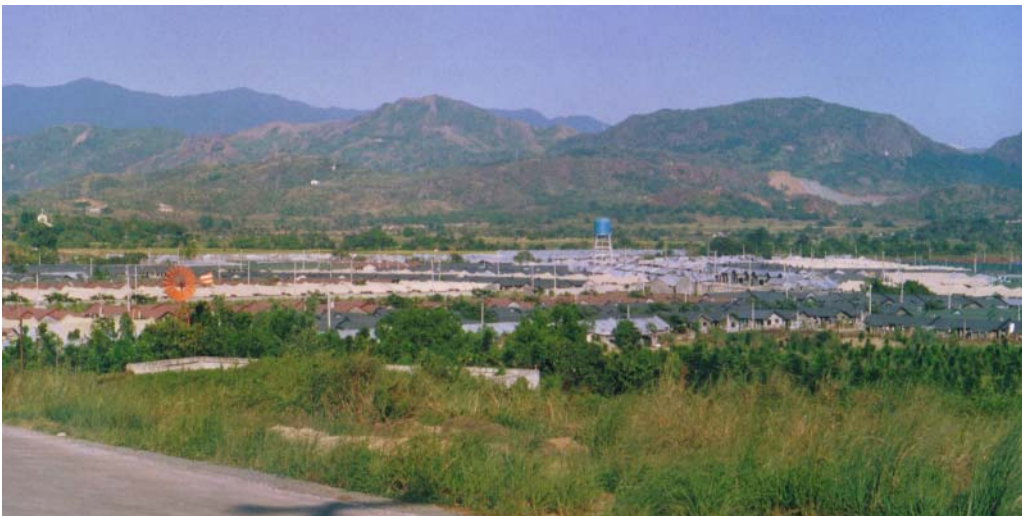
Government funded and initiated formalised mass housing solution from afar; Rodriguez, Quezon City
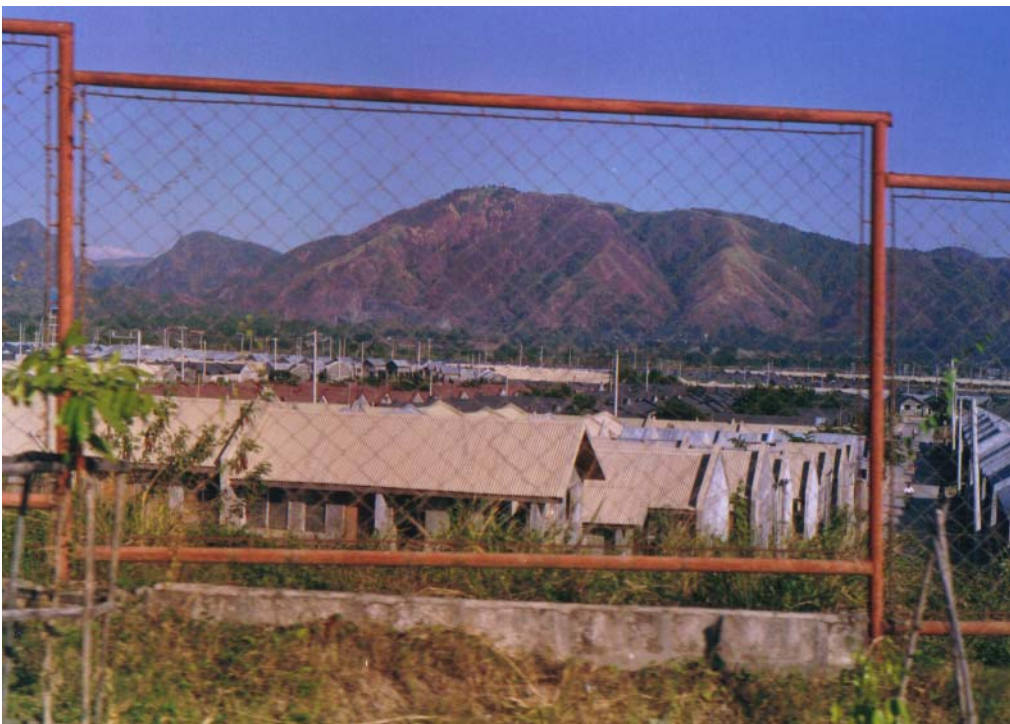
Roof colours denote economic status of each dwelling and the occupants within. Up close, it is obvious that this housing solution, already two years completed, is struggling to function as a community as apposed to the lively pace of informal settlements.

Informal (people built) mass housing solution: Rodriguez, Quezon City

Informal housing solution; although raw, solutions like this house on the watery fringe of Legazpi City, built on abandoned marsh land, are owned by the occupants. The community evolves gradually over years.

Vibrant street life in a squatter settlement on Iloilo City fringe. Trees are designed into dwellings as structural supports.

A ground up, community-driven, development process is emerging from informal settlements throughout the Philippines. This approach intends to direct focus back to the communities, their needs and their ability for self-help. These development support groups called Peoples Organisations or PO's, are also referred to as Community Organisations or CO's. Consisting entirely of squatters from the local community, PO's apply a grass-roots approach to projects, commencing at ground/community level and working up to governing bodies. This approach recognises the ideas, knowledge, skills, and processes of the community, and the individuals within, as the key components in a successful community development. *Do the people own the solution? Can the people maintain the solution? Will it lead to future projects? Did it utilise and build on local skills and knowledge?* Examples will be discussed in detail throughout the Case Studies.

The next section documents the approaches, roles and outcomes of community development processes within four informal settlements. Discussion will detail real life examples to strengthen ideas introduced, demonstrating the impact that differing levels of community participation have on the development process and project outcomes.

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[i] Roces G & A *Culture Shock Philippines,* Singapore
[ii] Lonely Planet Philippines
[iii] *The Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992*, Ateneo de Manila University

FOUR PEOPLES ORGANISATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

The first two case studies, in which most time was spent, utilise a grass-roots approach in which local development PO's initiate, develop and implement projects with minimal external support. Whereas the second two cases are NGO/professional driven processes in which communities are more the recipients of external aid and solutions, the differences are striking.

1. PAYATAS, QUEZON CITY

Expecting to work in the comfort of large professional-based support group, it was surprising to learn that he would be located to the informal settlement of Payatas to work with a local development PO, alone, without a defined role or any knowledge about PO's, the community or its people. Three months past, living among residents, gaining their trust, searching for a support role and observing a ground-up approach to community development. It became obvious that my role wasn't important or vital to any of the projects going on here, original questions of how communities are supported became observations of how they can support their themselves, introducing this author to the *peoples process*. This case study will detail the process and participants in two community projects.

INTRODUCTION
Payatas is located in the hills 40km to the north-east of Metro Manila, on the fringe of Quezon City. Barangay Lupang Pangako, meaning Promised Land, or Payatas as it is commonly known, is a group of adjacent private and government titled lands that total approximately 280ha in area. The community grew around Manila's 20ha open pit rubbish dump, as this provided a vital source of income for early settlers and still remains a major source of livelihood for today's settlers.

Payatas boomed in the late 80's when masses of landless persons migrated to the new "fringe land", fleeing from inner city slums and stale rural economies that remained after the rule and recent impeachment of the corrupt president Marcos. The area was intended to become a new middle-class subdivision, but it remained idle. Landless poor took ownership, gaining popularity with the cities service persons, density grew as word of mouth and the kinetic action of residents inviting family and friends to move in took hold. With an average of 8 persons/household and 300 households/ha, Payatas has now reached city proportions with a population nearing 1,000,000, and is still growing.

Today, what seem erratic and unplanned streets, twist, thicken and narrow as they weave between dwellings and public spaces. They form an intricate network that connect social, economic and cultural nodes; work places, market places, chapels, community halls and schools. The streets themselves have evolved to host many social and cultural functions, such as marching bands, fiesta's, markets, ball games, Easter processions and graduation marches.

Houses with busy street frontage are converted to shops, markets are on main transport routes and busy intersections, snooker and karaoke bars are near the markets, chapels are on hill tops and basketball courts near schools. Local residents developed these solutions gradually and informally without plans.

Ball games and kids on roller skates on a Payatas main street

A squatter house floating on a sea of trash - Smokey Mountain rubbish dump; An eyesore to outsiders but to Payatan's this rubbish dump is a life line, a supermarket. It provides one of few stable forms of unskilled employment in the area.

Part of a network of twisting lanes in Payatas (above). Lack of adequate drainage and effluent treatment is a big problem, particularly localised in utility lanes such as this.

Main street in Payatas, elementary school (background left), chapel and PO headquarters (foreground left). Now peaceful, however often home to ball games, fiestas and ceremonies (above).

Palenke or street markets of Payatas; buildings are shops by day and homes by night

Active pubic space; one of a network of public spaces designed by informal settlers, functional and well utilised by youth. Nearby houses overlook and interact with the square.

In July 2000, a terrible tragedy struck Payatan settlers that still greatly affects squatter life and aid projects today. 50 ft of rain soaked rubbish collapsed burying 300 households, leaving unaffected dwellings near the fall in great danger of another collapse. An ongoing grass-roots community relocation project was observed during the three month placement in Payatas, in which some of those living in identified "danger zones" were being urgently resettled in the hills of barangay Rodriguez.

Rodriguez resettlement project had well and truly commenced on arrival in March 2002, with the completion of a row of 25 low-cost "shell houses", designed by the PO and constructed by the local community. The newly resettled community and the PO proposed the construction of a day-care centre and the support group identified possible funds. This student architect was involved in two projects throughout his stay with the Payatas community; the day-care in Rodriguez and a youth centre at Payatas. The youth centre, proposed by a local youth leader for central Payatas, never got off the ground due to internal conflicts and miscommunication, as will be explained in more detail below.

THE COMMUNITY
Youth Centre:
An existing local youth group in Payatas, without a headquarters in which to gather, initiated the need for a youth centre. After a possible site was discovered, meetings took place between youth members and youth leaders to discuss their ideas, however it seemed apparent that leaders dominated this process for the intended good of youth. At an arranged meeting, this student architect asked youth for their individual ideas but no one would speak up contrary to ideas suggested. Very basic plans had already been drawn up by a German architect, they were generic, vague and did not suit the program voiced by youth leaders. It appeared as if very little exchange had occurred between the architect, youth and project manager. This apparent lack of communication was to be later understood as the result of community and internal conflicts that prevented project leaders/initiators from reaching compromise, discussion, or a willingness to share project control.
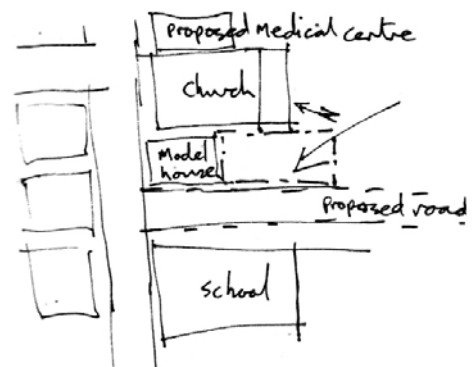

Site diagram identifying site issues; conflicting players

Day Care Centre:
Community meetings took place once a month between the community and PO, at the project site in Rodriguez and at PO headquarters in Payatas. These meetings informed project beneficiaries of issues related to the day care centre and other projects in the Rodriguez resettlement development. Beneficiaries of this resettlement project, and the day-care, were selected based on their "danger zone" status and participation in a PO managed community savings program that will be explained further in the following PO section.

At these meetings, community members would clearly discuss issues that arose in the past month, such as conflict regarding land use, connection of basic services and employment opportunities. When requested, they confidently expressed what the day-care means to them, their internal program, space requirements and concerns that they had about structural stability and reinforcement sizes.
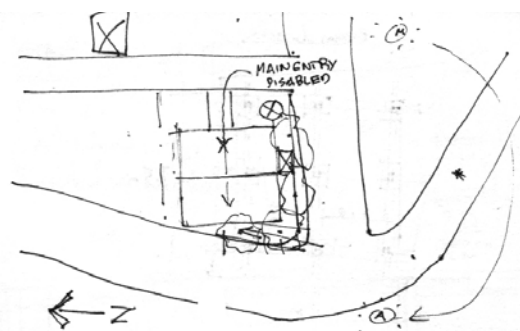
Site diagram for daycare centre; Rodriguez

Community expressing issues of concern to PO leader regarding the daycare centre

Local community involvement in the construction process of the daycare centre

Local labour from barangay Rodriguez bending reinforcement for the day-care columns. Grass-roots process introduces valuable employment opportunities at the same time as building local skills and confidence.

THE PEOPLES ORGANISATION

The primary role of the PO is to facilitate a community savings and loan program, a program that has a specific land and housing component in which to assist informal settlers break the squat/eviction cycle. Active participation in this program is the basis for PO membership and access to their grass-roots development projects, encouraging the philosophy of "help yourself and you'll be helped". PO leaders collect savings and loan repayments on a daily basis, a vital aspect to the programs success, as urban poor acquire small funds inconsistently and on a day-to-day basis.

With these collaborated savings, the PO researches nearby land titles, negotiates a price with landowners and makes a purchase after an agreement is made between the project beneficiaries, landowner and PO. Rodriguez resettlement project is a product of this people-driven process.

Youth Centre:
The PO were not directly involved in the development of the Payatas Youth Centre.

Day Care Centre:
The PO, together with the community, initiated the need for the day-care. An in depth project proposal and budget was prepared by PO leaders to be presented to the support group, for the approval and release of funds. Proposal development occurred in collaboration with the Rodriguez community, the people's needs are identified by the PO and then presented to the support group in the form of a project proposal. A PO leader explains the importance of full community involvement in the development process: *"Its like giving them cake without asking them [the community] what flavour they like, it just sits there"*

At monthly community meetings, PO leaders and the community would set an agenda of issues they wanted to discuss regarding the Rodriguez resettlement project, such as drainage, water availability, the day-care centre and the possibility for construction work for the men. The PO would transparently present the budget for the day-care and what remained, this was an important factor as this governed the amount of local workers that could be retained. When the budget was tight, the PO often had to lay off or reduce workers hours, a tough decision to make when other employment options remain slim, with the rubbish dump being to far to utilise.
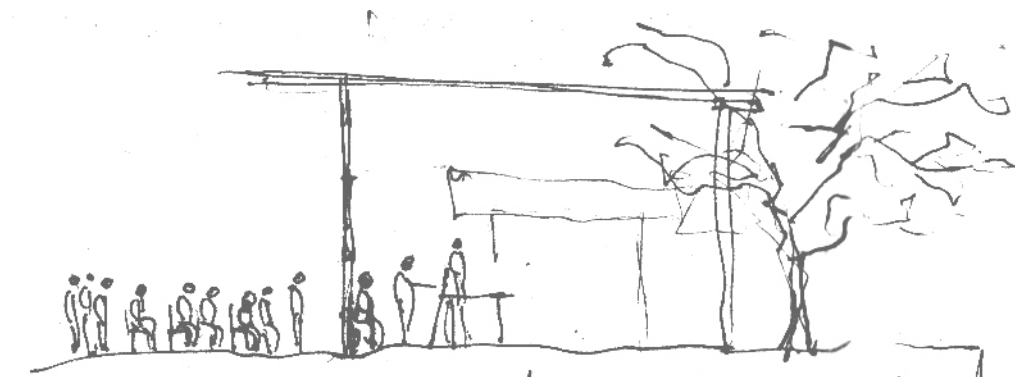
Community meeting at Silangin; community set the agenda and PO leaders respond to issues and concerns regarding the continual development of their community.

PO leaders in the process of creating a contour model for the mountainous Rodriguez resettlement site.

Completed site model; useful as a visual planning tool. PO leaders eagerly participated in its construction, however more time was required to understand how it could be better utilised.

Rodriguez housing project; designed by the PO and built by the local community. The site of the daycare centre sits on the upper portion of the site, middle foreground.

THE ARCHITECT
Youth Centre @ Payatas:
The local parish minister/NGO project manager requested assistance in re-designing the youth centre at Payatas. There had been some conflict between the parish, who has title over the land, and the school next door, which feels as if the land could be better used to construct desperately needed classrooms. When asked for an opinion on the matter of who was in the right, a reply was difficult, particularly when one is foreign to surrounding issues and a subjective is answer expected. The building can be shared as both uses are for the benefit of youth, suggested this author, but it seemed more complex than this and the conflict was never resolved.

Existing architectural drawings that did not respond to the youths requests were re-worked by this student architect, according to the youth leader and the parish priests suggestions, however these efforts seemed futile as the project was obviously premature. It was felt that the project could not possibly advance until agreements were made regarding land use and internal program.
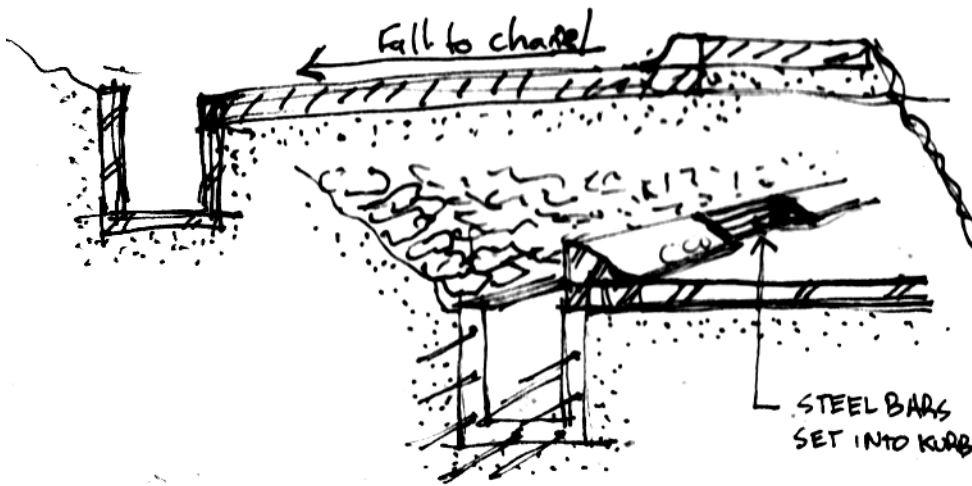
Day Care Centre @ Rodriguez:
Upon being approached by the PO for assistance in designing the building and supervising its construction, most time in Payatas was devoted to the day-care and the Rodriguez housing project.

After observing two different subdivision plans of the same site, none of which were being followed, it became apparent that the community needed better access to the design and planning process. In search of a useful role, the construction of a contoured site model was proposed to help develop a peoples lot subdivision and site plan. However, the peoples process was slowly unravelling, the plans were often in the minds of PO leaders rather than on paper. PO leaders were actively involved in the development of the model as it was his intent to teach a skill rather than provide a solution, and to some extent, the PO gained a new tool. However, as this project was initiated by an outsider, the PO had very little time available to allocate to a project that had limited immediate value to an informal planning process.

Intermittently, throughout the construction of the day-care centre, this author lived at the Rodriguez site to assist design development, supervise construction and offer technical advice regarding reinforcement, structure, site planning and plumbing. On site tasks often varied, such as supervising construction, preparing drawings, digging trenches and communicating with a local foreman. As verbal communication was difficult to maintain, ideas were shared through sketches on paper, ply formwork and by demonstrating ideas physically on site.
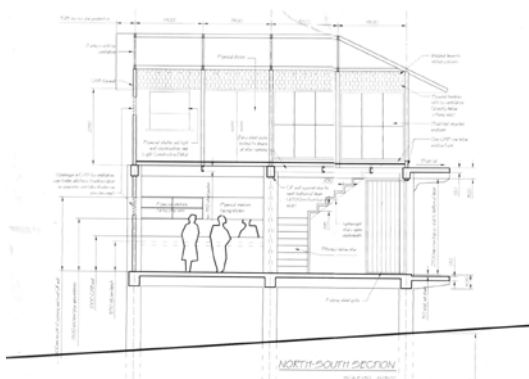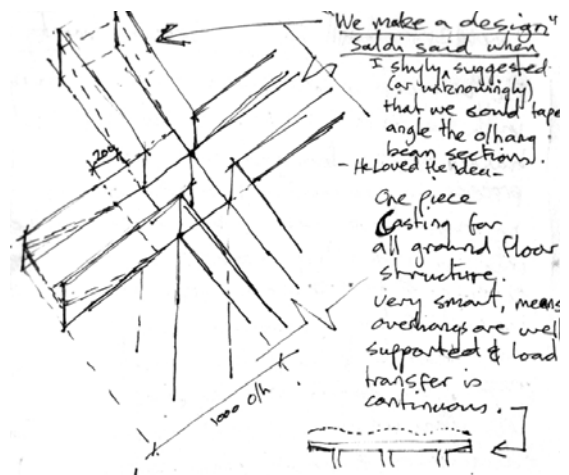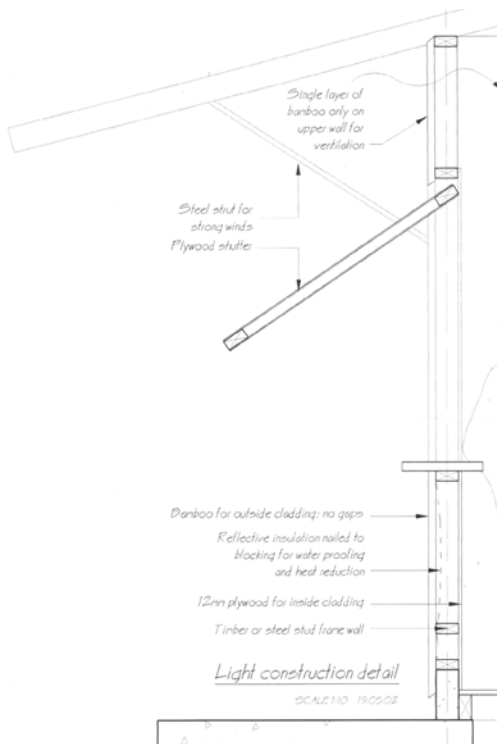
Continual presence and purpose on site led to a sense of trust and acceptance that was initially lacking during the model making project where a useful role had not yet developed. Often there would be a rich exchange of ideas with the foreman; architects technical suggestions such as tapering cantilevered beams, propping reinforcement up off formwork and installing kitchen/bathroom plumbing before pouring the slab, were met with cultural ideas on detailing column/beam junctions and door position relative to the morning sun. Formalised drawings did not carry much significance during the buildings early development, as a result the building constantly evolved with the rich exchange of ideas. However, on the foreman's request, drawings were produced later in the buildings development, to assist with planning internal divisions, floor and roof heights. It was unexpected that such an action would cause conflict with a PO leader whose auxiliary role was also designing.

Visual communication on site was easier than any other form, universal language of drawings overcame cultural differences.

EAST WEST SECTION
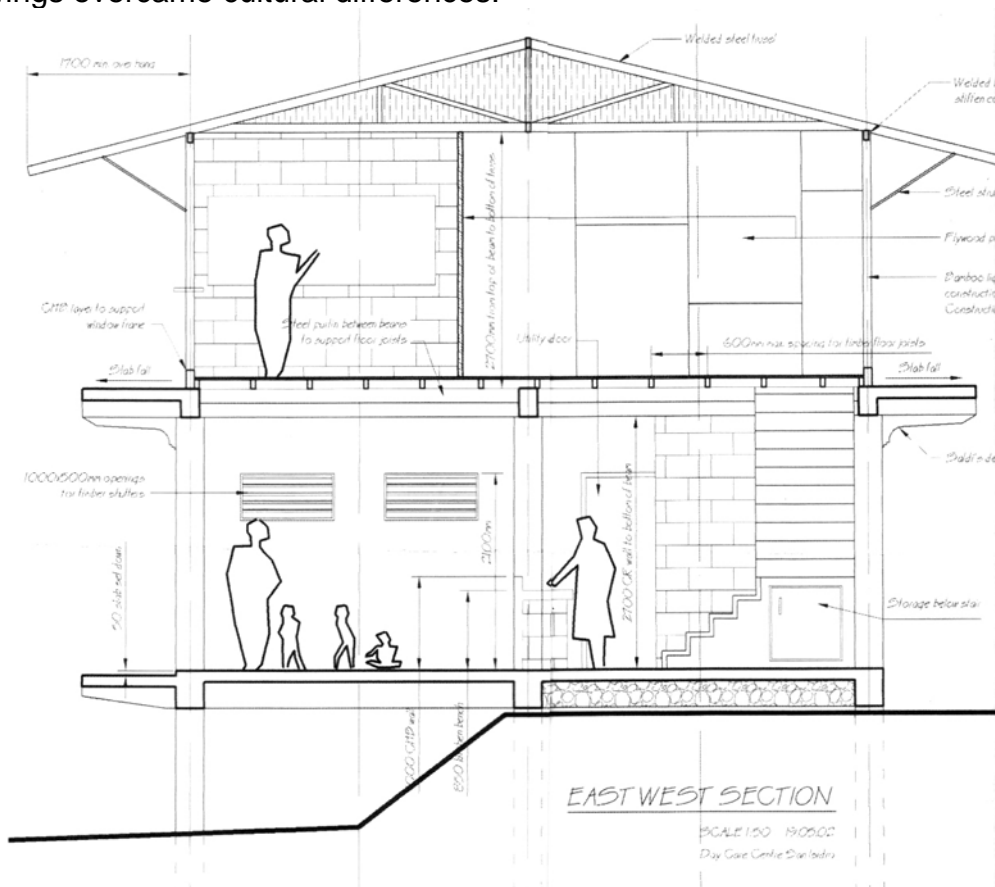
Schematic drawings prepared for the Rodriguez daycare centre with the intention of implying, not stating, ideas.

GROUND FLOOR
SCALE 1:50
Day Care Centre

cool easterly wind off mountains

Single layer of bamboo only on upper wall for ventilation

Steel strut for strong winds
Plywood shutter

Bamboo for outside cladding: no gaps
Reflective insulation nailed to blocking for water proofing and heat reduction
12mm plywood for inside cladding
Timber or steel stud frame wall

Light construction detail
SCALE 1:10

"We make a design"
Saldi said when I shyly suggested (or unknowingly) that we could angle the o/hang beam section. - He loved the idea -

One piece Casting for all ground floor structure. Very smart, means overhangs are well supported & load transfer is continuous.

NORTH-SOUTH SECTION

Final daycare drawings (left) as requested by the foreman and PO. The intent was non-prescriptive in the drawings so that the community could easily interpret the design the way that suited them. This was difficult to achieve however.

Preliminary drawings and site sketches used to communicate with PO and foreman.

Daycare centre halfway through construction

THE SUPPORT GROUP
Youth Centre:
The project manager for the support group, and local parish priest with 10 years of local contact, supported the initiation of the project. He facilitated the production of preliminary drawings but a lack of communication was evident from what was produced.

Day Care Centre:
Throughout the development of the day-care centre, the support group acted in the role of funds manager, assessing proposals put forward by the PO on the community's behalf. Assessment is based on how well ideas and budgets are thought through, the success of previous projects undertaken by the PO and the availability of funds.

2. CALUMPANG, ILOILO CITY

After struggling to find a consistently useful support role in Payatas, it was a pleasure to accept an offer by a visiting sister PO to work with them on a similar grass-roots resettlement project for evicted squatters at Calumpang, Iloilo City.

INTRODUCTION

The well-established squatter community of Calumpang is bounded by the closed waters of the Visayan Sea and a small river on Iloilo City's perimeter. Calumpang is a bustling community of informal workers, such as pedicab drivers, street vendors, fishermen and numerous religious sculptors, that live informally on government or privately titled land. In a city where over 50% of the population are living informally, approximately 2 mil., and low-cost housing is inadequate, evictions are constantly leaving urban poor homeless.

Sourcing of building supplies is not limited to scavenging as was the case in Payatas; bamboo, Nipa leaf (used for thatching roofs) and coco-lumber (used as round trunk for structure) are readily available and relatively cheap. House construction uses a hybrid of contemporary and traditional materials, and concepts in their design. There is a preference, however, for heavy construction materials among squatters, perhaps creating a psychological sense of security against the threat of eviction, this often translates to interesting hybrids, sometimes a concrete box.

The peoples design ideas and innovations, as in Payatas, with little to no resources, have translated into amazingly sophisticated street and urban life. Rest houses, simple beach resorts, sand floored restaurants, videoki bars and barber shops line the busy main road that passes through Calumpang. Large mango trees shade side streets, and houses are built to fit around them, utilising them as a support members.

Land is not so fiercely contested, lot prices are lower, there are an abundance of indigenous construction materials and the smaller city government is more supportive of new urban settlers who will service and populate the expanding city.

The project was clear, with the assistance of a local PO, a group of 50 squatters purchased a 7ha piece of nearby land using collateral from their combined daily savings to secure a bank loan. Having subdivided the land into 50 lots and commenced site development the PO wanted to gather an inventory of designs for low-cost dwellings. Project beneficiaries, ie members of the savings and loan program, would use some, all or a combination of these designs on their allocated lots, and it was thought that the designs would assist in gaining development approval by local authorities. They invited this architecture student to participate and one week soon became four.

THE COMMUNITY

A consistent role the community, or beneficiaries, had throughout the resettlement project was to continue putting money away everyday so that house construction and bank loan repayments could commence when site development had finished. The community attended monthly meetings to discuss issues they have regarding the developments progress and site use. Before and after these meetings, beneficiaries were encouraged to talk with proposed neighbours, as lot allocation was random, about what each family wanted to build and whether a combined solution, such as a duplex or row-house, could be possible.

THE PEOPLES ORGANISATION

Like the Rodriguez resettlement project, the PO initiated, developed and implemented the project based on the immediate needs of the local community and existing PO members. The PO selected local squatters, whom recently received notices of eviction, as the beneficiaries of the resettlement project. Nearby idle lands were identified by the PO as possible project sites. Investigations into important factors such as land title, size, zoning, right of ways and price then took place. The PO and beneficiaries identified that the land needed to be near existing homes, as this is where existing employment and the support network of family and friends is located.

Negotiations took place between PO and land-owner, the PO representing the beneficiaries. When an agreement was reached, the PO managed funds acquisition for the project, deciding to retain daily savings in reserve for house construction and unexpected emergencies. A loan of p300,000 (A$ 10,000) was required. The PO successfully utilised collective savings to negotiate the banks for a loan to purchase the land cooperatively.

During site development, the PO wrote letters to government departments requesting sand from beaches to help level the site and the use of earth moving equipment and a driver. The PO believe that its important to work with authorities, seeking outside support when required. However, the importance of self-help is reinforced in every facet of the PO-driven development process…

"*People + Savings + Communication + Information = Power*"

Above: informal settler being surveyed; one of a series of surveys undertaken by the PO that access the situations and needs of local squatters – part of global campaign for secure tenure.

PO leader talking to project beneficiaries; informing them of site progress and issues of gradual land repayment utilising community daily savings rather than government loans.

THE ARCHITECT
On arrival to the community, a series of neat drawings presented by the PO were studied, each demonstrating numerous housing schemes. Designs such as the duplex, quaduplex and the row house were prepared by local professionals with the intention of being low-cost. Designs with intricate roof folds and enormous footprints could not be low-cost, nor would they fit on the small 72sq.m lots that were allocated to members. It was observed that these discrepancies were not discussed by the PO and drawings were quickly rolled away after viewing.

Nevertheless, drawings began for a row-house, with the intention of developing drawings and designs that were not quite as rigid and prescribing as those already viewed. The plans suggested design options and construction materials to suit varying budgets and family sizes of beneficiaries. However, during design development, attempting to generate discussions on drawings was hard going, it became apparent that drawings represented nothing to the PO, or beneficiaries who would often say "the plan is up here" [referring to the head] when this author would query them on their process of house design and construction.

"Ios na!" or "ok fine already" was a common response from PO leaders when asked to comment on two dimensional drawings, but when walking around the street with them they would often clearly point out a home they liked and explain why in great detail.

The community was then introduced to a physical design approach. The intention was to increase the community's access to the design process by introducing tools that allowed a more holistic view of a building or site, constructing a detailed cardboard model at a scale of 1:25 with interchangeable options. Cardboard stairs, people, sala sets (bamboo lounges), indoor/outdoor kitchens and toilet bowls were included to assist beneficiaries understand the sense of scale and enhance peoples recognition of spaces. With the eager collaboration of architect, PO leaders and members, the model evolved quickly, from the original 2D plan, to have various options for roof, stairs, bathroom, kitchen, bedrooms and a shop-front option. PO members would drop in to make daily deposits, they would often stop and ask questions, giving feedback on its design without having to ask. *"It gives them an idea where to start"*
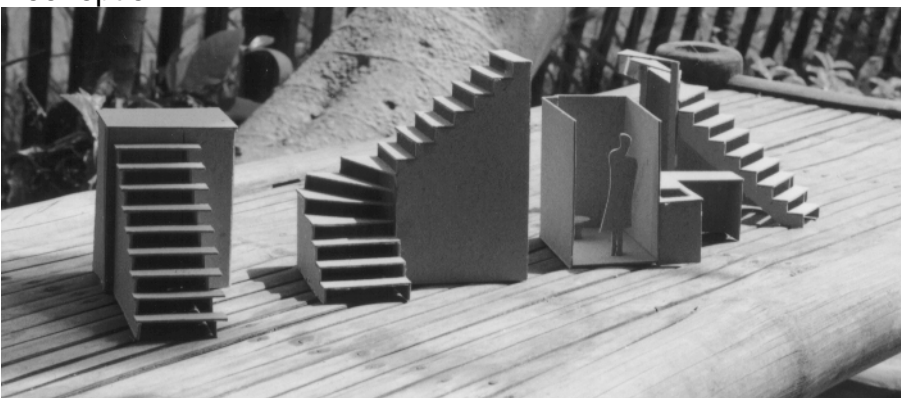

Enthusiastic PO leader suggesting many new options for the "model house"

Roof option 1; base board indicates site boundaries and minimum setbacks
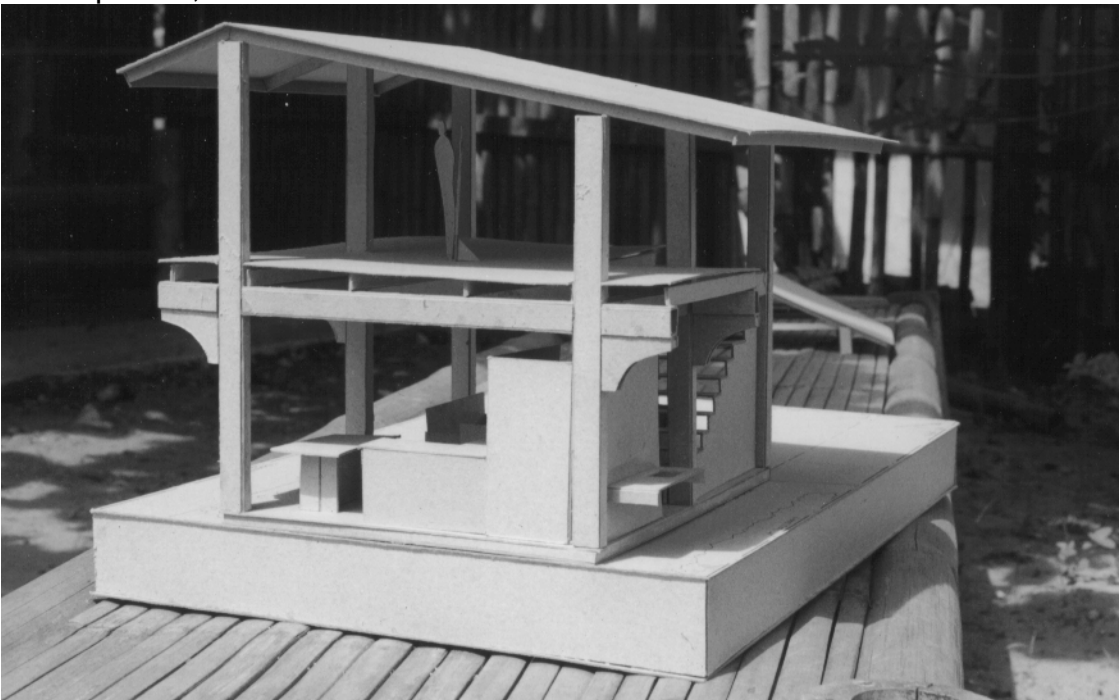
Roof option 2

Collection of interchangeable options that student architect and
PO leaders have work-shopped.

Drawings of possible single-detached and row-house designs

Design session where this author initiated preliminary thinking on house design issues to beneficiaries (local informal settlers) who were soon to commence building houses using their daily savings.

THE SUPPORT GROUP

The Calumpang PO often seeks guidance from the same NGO support group that assists the development PO in Payatas. However, unlike the Payatas PO, Calumpang PO has developed independently of a local professional-based support group. Their approach is confident and strong.

Calumpang resettlement project did not require significant assistance from the support group.

3. PAROLA, METRO MANILA

This case will present a professional-led community re-development project and the process of two community architects at the early stages of developing a community brief. Although the architects approach is refreshing, when comparing the attitudes of the <u>receiving</u> community in Parola with those of the previous community-led cases studies, one can begin to appreciate people's process and ground-up approach to community development.

INTRODUCTION

Parola is 9.6ha of densely populated land, home to nearly 5000 families located in the rough dockyards area of Metro Manila. The centrally located land is highly contested and the subject of many disputes between informal settlers, squatting syndicates, authorities and developer syndicates. Finally proclaimed by the Government as "peoples land" some years ago, the proposed community redevelopment had not yet commenced. Until recently this plan has been delayed, urgency increased when a fire broke out that wiped out a significant part of the community. Squatting syndicates, those profit from buy/selling and renting out dwellings, continue to impede the redevelopment process and a divided community remains a large obstacle to a successful project.

Despite these setbacks, an NGO has been commissioned to develop and implement the project on behalf of the National Housing Authority, government housing department who initiated the project.

THE COMMUNITY

Parola is not a cohesive community, over the many years of its existence there have been many aid programs with hidden motives, such as religious or political indoctrinating, that have created further division and dependence amongst its people. Land is severely contested and densely inhabited, in the heart of the slum, thoroughfares between dwellings are no more than 400mm wide and house units are stacked up to three stories high.

During the early stages of project, the role of community members was to try and put differences aside and participate as a group in the development of the projects brief.

THE PEOPLES ORGANISATION

The recently established PO, consisting of 20 local residents, some of whom are not squatters, were assembled by community organisers from support group. This community-based housing group did not evolve naturally as those in Payatas and Iloilo, its leaders were specifically selected to gain community involvement in the resettlement project. *Is a functional PO the product of a cohesive community or does a cohesive community come from a functional PO/'s?*

The PO's primary role is to bridge the large gap between the informal settlers of Parola and the professional-based support group. It is the role of the PO to encourage community interest and involvement in the project, meeting with residents once a week to discuss concerns they may have regarding the consultation sessions administered by the support group.

THE ARCHITECT
The architectural body involved in the Parola project consists of two young architects working on project/contract basis with the support group. The architectural team provide technical assistance to many NGO's seeking collaborative architectural solutions for community projects. They call themselves the "technical arm of the NGO".

During consultation phase, the architects met daily with community groups from Parola, these groups had been "organised" by the support group's ground person, the Community Organiser or CO, to be discussed later. The architects would commence the four-hour consultation sessions by asking community groups what their expectations were for the session. Responses were individualistic and exclusive of community issues, showing more concern for individual house designs rather than the community they inhabit. After introducing the community group to planning issues such as open-space requirements and design issues such as type of house, single detached/row house/duplex, small groups went away to workshop their ideas using butchers paper and markers. Groups would individually present their ideas to the larger group, illustrating their ideal home, streets and barangay (suburb), such as this example to the right.
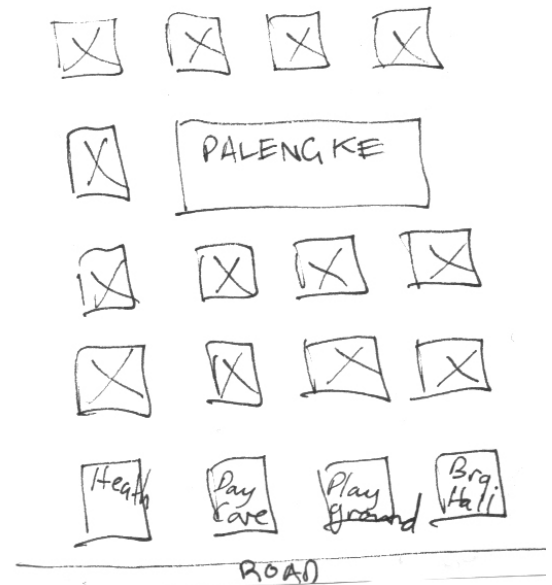
During the consultation session, the architect and the assisting CO would invite participants to explore a series of 1:1 house plans on the ground, walking within and around them. Additionally, a series of basic elevations and plans drawn approximately at 1:20 assisted the verbal communication of design options and their pros/cons; row-house, duplex and single detached.

THE SUPPORT GROUP
The support group acting in Parola is an NGO whose role it is to develop and implement projects on behalf of the National Housing Authority. This large team of professionals fully manage the resettlement project, undertaking community consultation, design development, project implementation and evaluation.

The support group's ground person is the Community Organiser, often spending most of the week meeting and building rapports with residents. They are one of few direct links the NGO has with the community. In this case, the CO had the additional role of facilitating greater community participation in the architect's consultation sessions. Additionally, the CO assisted in directing the sessions, as due to time constraints, the architects had not yet gained the peoples trust but the CO had.

4. VARIOUS COMMUNITIES, LEGAZPI CITY

This author was invited to observe and participate in a number of professional-led land acquisition projects within Legazpi squatter settlements. This case demonstrates how professional support can lead to dependent PO's and communities.

INTRODUCTION

The small provincial City of Legazpi has a large proportion of informal settlers, like Iloilo it averages about 50% of the urban population. Communities build on idle fringe lands, beside unused rail lines, reclaimed marsh areas and on vacant lots. Recently, coinciding with the national launch of a UN global Campaign for secure land tenure among urban poor, there has been a push by a local NGO and affiliated PO's to acquire government loans in which to purchase lands cooperatively.
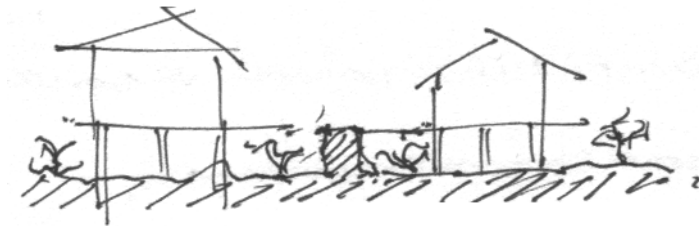
Stilt houses built over marshland; connected by an intricate series of suspended walkways

Contemporary materials such as tin, fibrecement and ply are used in many dense informal settlements due to a lack of natural materials such as nipa leaf and bamboo.

THE COMMUNITY

The primary role of community members was to meet in small groups with PO leaders once weekly to discuss the procedure of securing the government loans and the commitments involved, financial and lifestyle. They would need to start putting money aside for initial loan application fees, a task the community were finding difficult to justify when daily expenses were hard enough to meet.

Not all families were keen to purchase the land they inhabit, finding the outside support more of an imposition. These members would not attend meetings or put savings aside, creating division within the settlement.

THE PEOPLES ORGANISATION
Similar to the previous case in Parola, the development PO was a product of the NGO's organisation rather than a slowly evolving support group such as Payatas and Calumpang PO's.

A self-help mentality is not present in PO's, the community or exampled through the NGO's support approach. *"Of course they will do that, the city has an obligation to find alternative land for relocation".* PO's prefer waiting for government aid than any notion of self-help or community savings.

The PO's primary role was to gain the trust, cooperation and participation of the community on behalf of the NGO, a vital component to the success of the cooperative projects. PO leaders living throughout the community answer the queries or concerns of local members regarding the project. It was the PO's role to keep people informed of project progress, acting as an intermediator between community and support group rather than an autonomous support group in its own right.

Once the loan has been granted, the PO has the great responsibility of managing the loan, ensuring members of the community don't fall behind on payments. It is a cooperative loan during the initial years; therefore, if one member neglects payment, the whole group is affected.

THE ARCHITECT
There were a number of local architects and engineers from a Young Professionals Program intermittently working with PO's to help develop housing solutions after land had been acquired. The architect's contribution was difficult to maintain as the support groups process neglected site re-development issues, focussing only on land acquisition through government loans and not what comes after.

THE SUPPORT GROUP
Like most NGO support groups in the Philippines, funding for this support group's operation come from overseas investors and donations. Initiator fees, which are received upon the approval of a government community loan, provide additional income to the support group. The relatively small regional office consists of a regional coordinator and a handful of Community Organisers or CO's.

The primary concern of the NGO support group was to manage the process of land acquisition for informal settlers. Communities threatened with eviction would approach the NGO for assistance, additionally, the NGO would approach a community that they thought required assistance. If a consensus was reached for outside assistance, CO's would then commence organising the community and form, or strengthen existing, PO's. Land title and policy research coincide with community organisation as it is vital that the communities are fully organised prior to group application for the government loan.

The support group assist PO's negotiate with landowners and government bodies, often advocating on their behalf. If the loan approval and land purchase are successful, the loan goes into the PO's management, still with the aid of the support group.

While the support group involves the community and PO throughout projects, they appear completely dependent on the support group for guidance, and could not function with confidence in their absence. As spoken by a PO leader from barangay Lapu, *"We still need them [the NGO], they help us with research, organising, [and] advocacy with LGU [Local Government Unit]",* a feeling of helplessness and dependence that was not present in grass-roots community development.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this author's exploration of informal settlements, it became evident that these settlements hold more meaning than the term squat implied; impermanence and lack of *place*. Payatas and Calumpang, in particular, were important transitional zones for people tackling massive lifestyle changes, such as moving from a rural existence into an urban one. Often the combination of urban and rural cultures is blindingly obvious as many squatters eat with their hands, have at least one pig, a fighting cock and a Coke dispenser.

As an *outsider* it can be easy to miss, but it seems evident now that, while these settlements lack basic services, vital resources and consistency in their design, they do carry a great deal of meaning to inhabitants. Bernardo, a well respected Payatas resident, project manager and anthropologist introduces the notion of *"sense of place"* and its many permutations throughout Payatas life in his masters thesis. *"Why would they risk going back, even forego relief rations to stay on site"*? Bernado observes that the populace of Payatas hold a strong sense of place and ownership for the settlement that they and their fathers designed and built. A sense of place that cannot be achieved by insensitive support or outside support alone.

In the same thesis Bernado also writes *"[outside] support...would turn out to be other forms of displacement...[by] wittingly or unwittingly failing to be sensitive to the peoples sense of place"*. Affected Payatans would suffer further anguish as vital outside aid became a tool of manipulation and imposition, disconnecting people from their natural support network of family and friends and creating an unsustainable dependence.

In the Cases of Parola and Legazpi, an unhealthy community dependence was the product of a prescriptive support process and less project control in the hands of the community. The PO's were not developed and strengthened by the support group, their existence and purpose was under-utilised and solely project based. Projects were large scale, particularly in Parola, and therefore difficult for community's to even contemplate managing. This led to an attitude of helplessness, dependence and expectation for external assistance, in contrast to the enthusiasm of independent PO's in Payatas and Calumpang. Professional support approaches can have major impact on a projects success and more importantly on a community's sustainability.

On the other hand, in the Cases of Payatas and Calumpang, professional involvement was less prescriptive and obtrusive than in Parola and Legazpi. Project sizes were smaller and manageable by community groups. This allowed the two PO's to grow in strength and confidence as proposed projects became reality. As external support gradually retracted, the PO's evolved into powerful tools to unlock the potential, ideas and needs of community members. They encouraged attitudes of self-help and cooperation by example, such as the community savings and loan scheme, which showed urban poor they could make a difference. With increased autonomy of the PO, the community became the project facilitator rather than a mere contributor as was the case in Parola and Legazpi. The role of professionals changed from facilitator to contributor, participating in a *"Peoples Process"* rather than imposing a foreign support process.

It is understood from the four case studies that the success of a PO is the product of a reasonably cohesive, an independent community and unobtrusive professional support. The formation and actions of a new development PO in a non-cohesive community may reverse the trend, leading to a sense of achievement among members, developing community independence and cooperation. PO development requires support, an ongoing and evolving support, which the architect can provide.

Norberto, support group director for Payatas and Calumpang, would often say *"its important to work with communities to develop local resources [skills, knowledge, cooperation], not simply to provide an unwanted end solution"*. Outside support can do more harm than good if the approach used is insensitive, dominating or forceful; such as inflicting unwanted solutions and not developing community skills.

Norberto describes his organisations support approach; *"I let the community decide...sometimes they make mistakes but they learn from these"*. *"Transparency is what is needed in grass-roots development. I let them know how much money was donated [or allocated by government/private investors] and they come up with the ideas and proposals themselves"*. The result is a confident, independent and sustainable development body within the communities of Payatas and Calumpang.

A similar ground-up approach to community support could work in an Australian context, such as neighbourhood low-income earners in need of low-cost housing. In this case the community architect or organiser would work with the community intermittently over a period of time, co-facilitating smaller projects while the internal development group or PO evolves and gains strength. When the PO is confident of their abilities, housing projects can then be initiated, developed and implemented by the PO in consultation with the architect. Peoples process involves the investment of time, both on the communities part and on the architects, it's slow but rewarding.

Another application of the ground-up approach could be within an existing community of indigenous Australians. Rather than outsiders designing Aboriginal housing based on assumptions and common stereotypes such as a need for serpentine walls or no walls at all, the ground-up approach would enable the formation of a local development group or PO. Grass-roots housing and settlement solutions would be more responsive, sensitive and localised, better targeting the needs of future inhabitants. The architect is vital in providing support during the PO's smaller initial projects. But this changes as the PO strengthens, the architect later takes on the more passive role of consultant to a grass-roots support group.

Patience and cultural understanding was vital to this authors role as community architect. Particularly in Payatas, roles were confusing and ever changing throughout the project, from construction supervisor to trench digger to model maker. Patience was needed, and understanding of cultural differences, not impose suggestions even though everything appeared to the outsider as backwards. For example, building commenced before drawings did, site selection, set out and digging of footings took place without adhering to a previously devised sub-division. Later on in the process it seemed evident that things were going according to some plan, just that it was not in hard copy. This plan, residing in the heads of the foreman and the PO president, allowed us to commence work on an urgently needed day-care facility.

Role instability in Payatas is primarily attributed to an imposed role rather than an invited one. With no briefing by the support group as to my purpose, it was a continual search. Once in a while it was good to hear the PO's positive feedback on involvement in their process…*"We like you [the architect], but he [a previous foreign architect to work with the PO] told us don't do this and that, nothing we did was right"*. Emphasising the need for the community architect to listen, culturally understand and not impose ideas onto the community if a positive support role is to be achieved.

Some lessons this author learnt in the role of community architect:

- Time spent in a community is important to how well a project will function.
- Gaining entry and acceptance within a community is arduous and continuous.
- Roles imposed on the community did not function as well as roles initiated by the community.
- Never assume understandings between cultures, often they are wrong. It is vital to undertake cultural research prior to commencing community work.
- Do not impose help or ideas, often there is a fine line between imposing and suggesting an idea that seems obvious to the professional/outsider.
- Meet people in their place and time, discourage hierarchy and attempt local language and etiquette, cultural efforts made are usually cultural efforts matched.

IN CONCLUSION: after experiencing life in people-made settlements and participating in both professional and grass-roots support approaches, it became apparent that the local community were capable of developing their own solutions to housing and habitat. However, they often lack technical knowledge and financial resources in which to realise their solutions. This author recognises that, while professionals have an important role to play in co-facilitating community development, a truly sustainable outcome requires a partnership between professionals and people. Community involvement should go beyond consultation sessions, interviews and surveys, where the people don't own the process, nor do they truly own the solution. Architects, planners and engineers need to recognise, develop and utilise the community's own ideas, knowledge, skills and framework of development. The outcome will be more than a building, rather a new set of skills and a collaborative architectural solution that is proudly owned and maintained by the local community, leading to future community-driven projects and sustainable community development.

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[i] Bernado J. Y. *Power, Disaster, Placemaking - [Re]Making of Payatas*, University of the Philippines 2000, pg 11

PO friends