

Urban Planning and Architecture Design for Sustainable Development, UPADSD 14- 16 October 2015

Filipino Culture of Filling up Space in a Gated Community

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Abstract

This paper aims to aid architects, planners, and other interested individuals by understanding the spatial dynamics in a gated community, particularly of the Filipino – an endearing nation with an interesting perception of space. One’s sense of place stems from their past, own family and the generations before him or her. Architecture is not just about the building; it is all encompassing and for the most part, for the user. Comprehending Architecture in relation to the individual, and in turn the community, will further enhance one’s experience of space and nurture the already rich history in any nation.

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Peer-review under responsibility of IEREK, International experts for Research Enrichment and Knowledge Exchange

Keywords: Filipino; Architecture; culture; community; spatial dynamics; sense of place

1. Filipino Culture

This study explores facets of the culture in community architecture and planning. As with all other cultural groups, what is truly Filipino is also a complex concept. Filipinos have become multifaceted due to their extensive history, which in so many ways affect their architecture. The following is an excerpt describing the Filipino culture by Fernandez (1995):

“As a consequence of the strategic location of the Philippines, and the resulting exposure of the people to a wealth of goods and ideas, the Filipinos have enriched the fabric of their culture with fibers that are both of local

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and foreign origin. The natives have mastered the ability to adopt and adapt, in other words, use fibers of foreign origin so that, through the years, such fibers no longer remain foreign but have become part of the local fibers that are interwoven with new fibers introduced from foreign lands. Such is the fabric of Filipino culture and that is how architecture in the Philippines is to be viewed.”

1.1. Filipino Family

The best-known characteristic of Filipinos is its families. Theirs is a noisy and colorful household; which is not only for the principal family members but also for other relatives and friends. This is one reason Filipinos get attached to their homes and generations live in the same house. A family can easily establish themselves in a community through time.

Another quality of Filipinos is not leaving their parents as they age. It is hard to leave home especially if he or she is the last of his or her siblings living there. Parents cannot part with their children, and youths are guilt-stricken leaving the nest. This desire to surrounding their selves with family and friends, affects greatly how Filipinos move in the society.

1.2. Filipino Home

The *bahay kubo* is a semi-permanent bungalow made with materials found nearby. Located in the tropics, the materials are lightweight to allow for natural ventilation thus effectively cooling the interiors but come rainy season, there is sure to be some part of the residence blown off or destroyed. Once the sun shines again they can easily repair their house though. They repeat the process of making the same *bahay kubo*. In this sense the Filipino people are resilient to say the least.

Even the use of the space within the traditional Filipino house cannot be singular. There are no partitions, the interior is one open area: for dining in the morning, noon, and evening; a *sala* (living room) for entertaining guests in between meals; for napping in the afternoon and finally the whole family sleeps beside each other at night.

2. Philippine Spatial Dynamics

Of all the interesting characteristics of Filipinos, catching the researcher’s interest greatly is the penchant for filling spaces. It can be associated with the concept of *Horror Vacui*, defined as horror of empty spaces or an aversion to empty spaces in artistic designs (Merriam-Webster, 2015); but of which De Leon, Jr. (2012) fittingly identifies as *Maximalism*.

The typical Filipino home has every wall covered with paintings, photographs, and assorted memorabilia. Every nook and cranny in a single room must have some thing. A veranda cannot have just one table and two chairs; it must also have an altar and so another table, plants, the *banga* (Filipino earthen jar), and a small rocking horse if possible.

2.1. The Filipino

The study focused on residential communities and the cultural parameters that influenced community architecture. The emphasis is on middle-income families, living in gated subdivisions with single detached housing. This presents a clearer boundary so that tangible displays of the cultural parameters can be better identified. Subtleties of the Filipino’s treatment of space were isolated and further defined based on the many interviews with experts, discussions with professionals knowledgeable on architecture and the community, numerous literatures by Filipino writers, and related publications on the internet.

Horror Vacui is a Latin expression, which Praz (1982) used to describe the interiors during the late 1800s wherein rooms were filled and walls were covered with a wide variety of objects. Lidwell, Holden, and Butler (2010) relates this fear of empty spaces to value perception.

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