



ASSEMBLEA: An Online Journal of Political Science
Volume 4 Issue No. 1

2023 POLICY BRIEF SERIES

Pateros' Revival and Sustainable Development of the Balut and Maalat Industry

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Informal settlers are birthed by choices produced from poverty. Poverty produced by homelessness. Social housing promises upward mobility for informal settlers by offering tenurial security of their homes, improved living conditions, and better access to socio-economic opportunities. However, in the process, it could uproot community networks, unique cultural histories, and self-identity formed in relation to place. This results in challenges acclimating to new settlements, which hampers social development. This thesis explores the transition experience and coping mechanisms of informal settlers to reveal the challenges to community attachment that emerge from the process of relocation and adaptation to new resettlements as planned and administered by the local government; consequently, the responses of the informal settlers and the community that they reside in to address impediments in social development and the effective implementation of the transition process. The aim is to offer a descriptive account of the socio-political relationship of actors, including the local government unit, informal settler families (ISF), and other relocatees.

Using data collected through 4 focused group discussions of 30 family units of Manila's Tondominium and Binondominium housing projects, as well as key informant interviews of relevant local authorities and supplementary document analysis, a qualitative comparative cross- case analysis is used to determine the effect of community networks and government policies on community attachment. This research study shows that mandatory rent-savings payments are the primary source of conflict among ISF residents, non-ISF residents, administrative authority, and housing rules. The lack of housing associations and leadership roles limited to information dissemination results in continued conflict and challenges. Despite this, the improvements in safety, health, and aspirations of ownership are sources of attachment, albeit minimal. Furthermore, sustained social relations of ISF residents formed from their previous settlements act as a significant support network during the transitional and coping period. The findings may contribute to the growing literature on transitional experiences of individuals moving from informal settlements to social housing projects and may provide an incorporated structure for implementing co-creation of inclusive and transformative processes of housing delivery.

Keywords: *Pateros, balut, salted eggs*

Recommended Citation:

Caro, D.J., David, L.K., & Ramos, R.P. Pateros' Revival and Sustainable Development of the Balut and Maalat Industry. Assemblea, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 46-53

BACKGROUND OF THE POLICY

Community attachment is a complex place of social cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, in response to environmental disruptions or threats that feed into an interpretive process at both the individual and community level and that lead to collective, community-level actions, adaptations, or acceptance of the disruption as it relates to the neighborhood, town, or city as a whole place (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2014). According to Plunkett et al. (2018), the shared experiences and shared meaning of experiences leads to bonding or attachment with the place in which these experiences occurred. As shown in the study of Manzo (2014), place meanings and attachments are formed through socio-political processes, i.e., the interplay of policy and rhetoric with the active processes of meaning-making among residents.

In this case, informal settlements, in spite of the fact that most are in substandard conditions, are still rich in shared experiences that drive community-attachment. Since informal settlements are self-built and also improved through the relations of mutual aid that residents have with neighbors, such locations become tailored living spaces, which is precisely how they become unique locations marked with particular histories (Tomonori, 2016). The failure of the state to provide just housing (De Guzman, 2022) and effective implementation of housing relocation push resident's transitioning towards situations where they are likely vulnerable to multiple losses and risks.

In the context of the transitioners in Metro Manila, relocatees are confronted with socio-political, economic, and cultural challenges that hinder their capacity to empower and transform their community.

Backing these up, Gomez (2020) posits that a lack of awareness and inefficient communication of the risks of transfer hampers human security and the ability of individuals to make informed choices to act on various aspects of their lives.

Additionally, disruption also hampers the social networks that are sources of support to individuals, particularly in low-income communities (Devine-Wright, 2009). In a short span of time, the community that has existed, and has personal significance to them, is in the process of decline, radical change, or even destruction (Puddifoot, 1996). This puts informal settlers through feelings of anxiety and disharmony with the new community. Mobility results in a divided sense of belonging, symbolic placelessness, and identity conflict engendered by loss of community imagery interpreted as self-imagery (Hummon, 1986). In this regard, housing projects provide solutions in certain burden areas but introduce new novel challenges in transition, hampering personal and community development.

Critically, it is important to assess the role of local governments and the capacity of institutions to rebuild community attachment, induce development and in the contrary, flare up conflicts that hamper the socio-political well-being of individuals. According to Rakoff (1977, as cited in Manzo, 2014), it is imperative to study the socially constituted, subjectively experienced knowledge of political economic institutions to fully understand the impact of those institutions on people's lives. In this regard, the involvement of the individuals in the design process, community participation, and by involving them in the construction and development of their living environments drives self-build processes to occur (Hasgöl, 2016).

Likewise, it facilitates a collective sense of active mobilization of other residents in exposing the absurdities of the program and calling for better living conditions (Ortega, 2020). This points out that the construction of community attachment and advancement of development is influenced by the complex dynamics of social relationships comprising the community.

Although the literature suggests that transition experiences affect place and community attachment (Manzo, 2014; Gomez, 2020), the description of transition experiences remains ambiguous. Identifying the conditions inherent within the transition is essential to determine the likely social dynamics and its outcomes during the process. In line with the aims of the research, the study aims to observe and examine the transition experience of residents to reveal the challenges to community attachment that emerge from the process of relocation as planned and administered by the local government unit; consequently, the responses of the residents who transitioned and the community within Tondominium and Binondominium. Furthermore, the study's focus on community attachment allows a more participatory social approach in policy creation and development. This serves as an alternative to current strategies on urban restructuring. More so, the study provides a comprehensive analysis in determining the trends and patterns that arise from the complex relationships of actors such as the LGUs, housing associations, and relocatees that help map out the path of transition the community will take.

Empirical data is collected by interviewing families located in these housing policies. The framework will be based on the sense of community theory by McMillan and Chavis (1986). It utilizes four key elements: a) membership, b) influence, c) integration

and fulfillment of needs, and d) shared emotional connection.

This paper initially describes the transition experience as molded and influenced by political structures- such as the LGU's policy, housing associations, and community cooperation- encompassing the relocatees before examining further the direct and indirect effects of the transition experience in developing community attachment. The study ends with analyzing relocatees' acclimation and adaptation strategies concerning societal and personal development.

By producing a comprehensive description of the transition experience and acclimation strategies of informal settlers, as its modest aim, this research attempts to provide an incorporated structure for implementing just and sustainable housing policies.

CONTEXT AND ORIGINS OF THE PROBLEM

This paper seeks to study the housing transition experience of the urban poor, particularly informal settlers in Manila, who were relocated to Tondominium and Binondominium housing projects. Among the problems that the study will focus on is the issue of residents transitioning and their societal development concerning their community attachment and the challenges they face during the various stages of housing transition.

Main Problem:

The main question is how residents who transitioned to Tondominium and Binondominium develop meaningful social relations and acclimate to their new resettlements?

Sub-Problems:

1. How do government policies affect the transition process, likelihood of exposure to conflict and

- developmental challenges of transitioners?
2. How do conflicts and developmental challenges arise during the transition experience?
 3. How do government support and regulation affect the community attachment of the residents that were relocated to the housing projects?
 4. How do the residents respond to the development and community challenges faced amid the housing transition?

Literature Review

This literature comprises works about the varied experiences of informal settlers and housing projects and the transition from a mix of local and foreign authors. De Guzman (2022) provides a backdrop that explains that Manila's government has been focusing on responding to overpopulation and rapid urbanization through public housing developments wherein Condominium and Binondominium can be classified as forms of megaproject solutions (Flyvberg, 2014). The proliferation of informal settlements and slums has increased and were characterized as having conditions with low to negligible service levels (Jones, 2017). Edelman (2016) suggests that the emphasis on upgrading housing and slums, recognizing local assets and livelihood networks, and a shift towards more consultative and informative approaches to the community is necessary (Racelis, 2011). The area of transition and acclimation has been characterized by disruption due to the place change (Devine-Wright, 2009). The standard agreement in most literature is that there needs to be more focus on community organizing and participation for a just implementation of housing and resettlement (Calamba, 2019). The inclusion of any form, such as the

presented research gap, is being addressed through engaging with the newly resettled community of Condominium and Binondominium, which is an effort to empower people in decision-making, planning, and implementation of their societal transformation.

Plunket et al. (2018) and Manzo (2014) highlighted that shared experiences and meanings lead to attachment and bond to places and through socio-political processes among communities. In the study context, settlers relocated to the housing projects are confronted with socio-political, economic, and cultural problems that may hinder their development. Although findings in the literature suggest that transition experiences affect community attachment, the description of transition experiences remains ambiguous, and identifying these conditions is essential to determine likely social dynamics and housing policy process outcomes. The study's focus allows room for a participatory social approach in policy creation and development as it can determine patterns that arise from complex relationships between the LGU, the administration of the housing projects, the barangay, and the relocated residents.

Different challenges arise during the housing transition. Malaque et al. (2018), for instance, noted that many people who reside in informal settlements are disadvantaged and face job insecurity, which can be further exacerbated by threats of eviction or displacement even if they are in housing projects as they may have struggles in paying for rent and maintenance fees. Another problem is the remoteness of the newly developed relocation sites, which may need more access to essential public services such as food markets, schools for children's education, and hospitals for the healthcare of the resettlers (Gomez, 2020).

CRITIQUE OF THE POLICY

The study's comprehensive analysis of the transition experiences of the urban poor transitioners in Tondominium and Binondominium housing projects had different themes that align with McMillan and Chavis' sense of community theory. The following theoretical discussion discusses the main findings using the sense of community theory.

Firstly, regarding membership, which assesses neighbor interaction, participation, and identification with community members, residents were noted to have strong relations with their fellow residents within their community before their transition. However, after the transition's pre-disruption and disruption phases, the sense of membership within residents in their new community weakened, as characterized by minimal neighbor interaction caused by strict rules enforcement, lack of community participation, and animosity between ISF and non-ISF residents. The tension between the ISF and non-ISF was reported in the FGD to be rooted in social class disparities, with ISF residents stating that they believe that the non-ISF resident units should be given by the Manila LGU to ISFs who were not allocated units. They also cited that the non-ISF residents are affluent, as the non-ISF residents have well-furnished homes and cars which they stated to be a reason for them not to deserve the housing. Despite the weakened membership with non-ISF residents, ISF residents stated that they still have reliable attachments with people they knew before the transition. This includes close friends and relatives whom the ISF residents stated they could ask for assistance with food, watching their children while outside, and even financial assistance. This uneven dynamics among different groups indicate a significant

challenge in forming a cohesive community tied to membership within the housing projects, hindering social integration and collective engagement.

Secondly, regarding the influence aspect, as per McMillan and Chavis' framework, data sources reflect limited power and authority among the transitioners. Despite attempts at collectivization, the prohibition of housing associations and the weak response to residents' complaints or requests contribute to powerlessness, frustration, and non-action. Residents' ability to influence policy or decision-making processes related to employment, education, and housing regulation still needs to be improved, further impacting their sense of agency and community empowerment.

The third element concerning integrating and fulfilling needs emerges as a critical challenge in housing transitions. The transitioners' economic struggles lead to difficulties accessing essential services. It also exacerbates social and economic disparities. Regarding access to educational, healthcare, and market facilities, the residents reported overall satisfaction as they stated that the housing projects are located nearby schools, hospitals, and local grocers and markets. In this case, ISF enjoys their right to the city (Tomonori, 2016). The most prominent issue is that ISF residents' need for financial capacity to abide by the mandatory monthly rent savings due to poor working conditions and wages, hindering their ability to pay their unit fees on top of energy and water bills. Aside from having low-paying jobs, the residents are dissatisfied with the housing conditions, as the units are not rent-to-own, and the monthly payments are subject to increases, further discouraging them from investing in the housing units for the long term. The study also highlights restrictions and limitations on businesses within the

housing projects. Though residents were eventually allowed to establish their small businesses, they complain about having a limited consumer and market base because the confined characteristics of their units limit them to mainly having fellow residents as their primary customers, in contrast to their former settlements where they have more customers as they are located in public spaces. Aside from a single sewing establishment in one of the housing projects, the key informants stated that no ongoing training programs, job opportunities, dedicated business space, or financial support were offered to the residents. Additionally, miscoordination among government agencies leading to the cancellation of 4PS led to hardships and difficulty for parents with multiple schooling children. Since fulfillment of needs are critical in the releases of productive energies of poor people (Porio&Crisol, 2004), these developmental challenges that ISF encounters could lead to a decline in how they interact around their community. These challenges, therefore, underscore the importance of comprehensive support services and social and economic integration opportunities to enhance residents' well-being.

The fourth is the shared emotional connection, a vital component of communities, which was observed to be weak among transitioners in the housing projects. A division exists due to economic constraints and a lack of trust and reciprocity within the community. Residents express dissatisfaction with the constant financial pressures, strict rules and regulations, and limited opportunities for meaningful engagement or collective action. Several residents were noted to have inclinations to form a formal group to complain or demand the housing administration effectively, but to no avail; they cited that most residents are afraid of

criticizing or making demands as they think that they might lose their housing units, effectively hindering a collective group from being formed. Residents were also observed to be discontented, as they stated that there is a variation among the residents' mandatory monthly rent-savings, with others paying only PHP 2,000. In contrast, others pay a higher PHP 3,000, with many paying the higher fee complaining that most residents manipulated their declared incomes during the census, believing they may not be eligible to receive the housing if they reported their lower incomes. These emotional challenges that arise from the conflict and problems that ISF face impact individual well-being and hinder the development of a cohesive and supportive community environment necessary for a sense of belonging and shared identity.

Using the theory of McMillan and Chavis' framework, it shows that there is a weak community attachment in both sites. This is due to rent insecurity, lack of political power to enforce change, division among residents, and emotional turmoil that stems from tenorial insecurity and financial incapacities. However, the sustained social networks of ISF residents becomes a stable foundation during this process of transition and coping. These networks assist in day-to-day problems and in areas of collectivization. Additionally, community attachment exists, albeit minimal, due to improvements in health and safety, security, and fulfilled aspirations of home ownership away from informal settlements.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

For the practical discussion, the study's findings suggest several recommendations to enhance community development and address challenges effectively. The transition process of urban poor transitioners to Tondominium and

Binondominium housing projects revealed significant communication, engagement, and implementation gaps by the Manila LGU. A crucial area that needs to be improved is the Manila LGU communication strategies; the study emphasizes the need to bridge communication gaps through transparent and regular updates to prospective and existing residents, with a much more frequent census in order to make sure that all residents are given chances to get housing units. Regular assessments through annual interviews and a resident checkup are also recommended to ensure a more gradual and humane transition and post-transition processes and mechanisms. These suggested measures can ensure a fairer and inclusive selection process for housing and a smoother housing transition while mitigating frustration among residents by providing them access to essential information and a steady platform to provide their insights to other residents and the administration regarding their demands and requests.

Another critical aspect and recommendation is a formal grievance redressal mechanism. Residents constantly face challenges in their concerns and complaints, often resulting in conflicts and hindering community cohesion. Establishing a structured process for residents to address grievances and engage with the administration can build trust, improve transparency, and empower residents to be involved in decision-making. Additionally, a related recommendation is to amend the housing handbook, the Manila LGU housing ordinance, and MUSO operation in such a way that all three mentioned will allow the existence of a unit owners association similar to a homeowner's association that can enhance community organization and provide a platform for collective action and dialogue

with relevant stakeholders instead of conforming to the current floor-leader designations. A revisit of several policies related to granting more unit owner rights and benefits can be helpful on top of standardizing policies. There is a need to standardize the housing policies implemented by MUSO consistently in the two housing projects, such as the provision of early warning systems before final eviction warnings to the residents, in addition to the establishment of clear rent payment policies such as offering a choice between full payment or the more flexible installment setups for residents.

Furthermore, housing allocation policies should be reviewed based on needs assessment to promote inclusivity and equity. Community empowerment programs post-transition are also important recommendations as they support residents' social and economic integration. There must be opportunities for skill development, job training, as well as dedicated spaces for possible businesses, and access to essential services from the Manila LGU to contribute to residents' well-being, enhance their life quality, and develop their sense of belonging within the communities.

Despite several insights presented within this paper, there is a need to acknowledge its limitations. A significant limitation of this study is its study's sample size due to time and resource constraints. Additionally, its participants are only limited to informal settlers. Taking into consideration the experiences of non-ISF residents and their circumstances would provide a more comprehensive snapshot of the dynamics within these communities. Future research efforts should consider these limitations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of urban poor transition experiences in housing projects. Potential future research paths can explore different

methods such as longitudinal studies and quantitative analysis, a policy and program evaluation within the housing projects or those involved in its operations and considering cross-sectoral partnerships with organizations like NGOs to do further studies and advocate solutions, among others.

NOTICE:

The views expressed in this paper do not represent the official views of the authors' institutional affiliation. The findings and insights in this study are offered as means and resource to be considered by the respective stakeholders. The researchers are solely responsible for the errors.

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