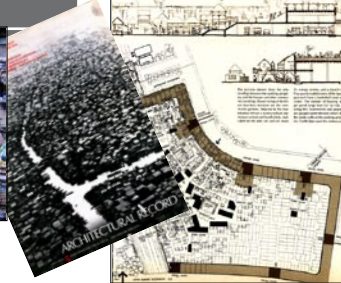# The ROAD From MANILA

A Workshop Revisiting the Tondo Foreshore Projects in Manila

January 7-22, 2006
SIGUS - Special Interest Group in Urban Settlement - MIT
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING, MIT
in collaboration with the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, and the NGO Gawad Kalinga.

Why would a prestigious institution like MIT interview former squatters, instead of examining high-level policies and programs? Why reach down when it could be working with government and international development agencies and NGOs? The answer is simple and obvious: a policy that does not show results 'on the ground' is a failure. After all is said and done, the benefit to the families is what counts.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) post-graduate students were joined by students from the University of Santo Tomas in revisiting three projects of the mid-1970s in Manila, which became famous the world over for their lessons for housing the urban poor. The Dagat-Dagatan development, the Tondo-Foreshore upgrading project and the Habitat Demonstration Project 'Kapitbahayan' were the focus of two weeks of survey and documentation. These projects were presented at the 'United Nations Conference on Human Settlements' in 1976 in Vancouver and recognized the world over.

The three projects surveyed represented a momentous milestone in a global 'paradigm shift' toward celebration of the informal sector – known as 'squatters' by many. These events formalized international recognition of the energy and opportunity that the informal sectors offered and highlighted the need to work with them instead of against them. The conference led to the establishment of UN Habitat, dedicated to human settlement development, and new approaches to housing were initiated. The Tondo-Foreshore project was a first attempt to tackle some of the major problems facing metropolitan Manila, and was envisioned to "demonstrate the practicality of this approach for upgrading the standards of living of the those living below the subsistence level" in fast growing urban areas. The project became a model for the world, and Manila became the focus for intense development study.

Also presented at the Vancouver conference in 1976 was the parallel 'Manila-Tondo Foreshore International Architectural Competition' which challenged the world to brainstorm new ways of approaching community, house, and income issues of low-income families. Over 3000 architects registered from approximately 68 countries, and about 500 formal entries were received. A New Zealand entry was the first place winner, and a model house was built at the Vancouver Conference.

Now 30 years later, the MIT/UST team revisited the original projects to explore whether the lessons of 1976 are still valid and that the approach still provides a viable housing strategy for the world's urban poor. Architect 'Nandy' del la Paz was the UST coordinator. Extensive support throughout the 2-weeks was provided by the NGO Gawad Kalinga, guided by Tito Cajulis, and by staff of the National Housing Authority. Illac Diaz, a rising young entrepreneur in Manila and at MIT for focused advanced studies, was the key liaison between MIT and Manila.

The MIT/UST project has been labeled "The Road from Manila" workshop, reflecting the long way that housing policies have come since Manila. MIT students were mostly from the architecture and planning departments, from 8 countries representing the diversity of the school. UST students were mostly from the architecture department. This is the 15th annual workshop abroad organized by SIGUS (Special Interest Group in Urban Settlement) at MIT, an education/ research group that champions new approaches to practice and service targeting the poor and underserved.

The projects targeted two areas: 1) the family and house, and 2) key participants in 1976 that formulated policy and made the projects a success.

For the family and house, teams of students undertook surveys focused on the physical, social and economic changes since the start in the late 1970s. Teams were asked to interview families that clearly had been successful, as indicated by the quality of the house and the expansion. And conversely, teams were asked to interview families that are clearly still evolving. The interest was in understanding what factors contributed to the success, or non-success. Unique was the focus on a long-term perspective of change in the past 30 years using both the physical form of the house and the parallel family circumstance, as opposed to the common 'snap-shot' usually undertaken in surveys.

For the interviews of the key participants, three questions were posed: What were the key concerns in 1976? Now 30 years after, how would you modify your approach in today's context? And lastly, what do you suggest that would be appropriate to teach in schools in preparing emerging professionals to deal with the increasingly difficult housing problems of today? The interviews took place over the full two weeks, and included prominent community organizers from the 1976 projects, architects who designed the projects, and even the Former First Lady Imelda Marcos, in her role as head of Human Settlements. The interviews were filmed, and it is being considered to make a short film for distribution to schools and others interested.

The second week was dedicated to working with the NGO Gawad Kalinga, in building houses for the poor in Baseco. This gave an opportunity for the graduate teams to understand the effort and difficulties that community members were faced in the building of their houses in the Tondo Foreshore and in Dagat-Dagatan. Several other Gawad Kalinga projects were also visited to better understand the full range of housing offered, all which revolved around the development of the all important rebuilding of 'identity' of the family.

At the end of the two weeks, a presentation illustrating examples of the surveys, and the sharing of reflections was held at the University Santo Tomas, followed by a reception and informal discussion of the findings.
Some of the reflections that were noted:
- Perhaps not surprising, families are willing to accept intolerable conditions in order to maintain their community. Families are strongly community-centered, and this must be a vital consideration in any project
- For architects and planners, flexibility must always be considered as a design input, even if the house is designed complete and finished. We found families that due to circumstances were forced to subdivide their houses into small rental rooms in order to survive. Rental is one of the most common way that the poor make ends meet. Needless to say, the original design did not lend itself to change and the result was poor for all.
- We were surprised at the very major role of remittances. The successes of the families essentially all relied on remittances to upgrade the quality of their house.
- Perhaps a strategy of 'continuous upgrading' would be appropriate. We found that clear successes at the beginning were often lost over time, and 'upgrading of upgrading' would be needed.

And some general reflections:
- What is the appropriate role of the professional architect and planner in the largely self-built/self-managed world of the vast informal sector? We are the only spatially focused professionals, and how can we participate? We seem to have abdicated our role to the detriment of the city, the communities, and the families.
- Is the focus and strategies of 30 years ago still valid in today's explosion of population and expansion of cities?
- And related, how to balance the desire for an individual piece of land against the demands of increased population and urban land scarcity?

The survey and documentation will be used as a resource in an open panel presentation and an exhibit at the UN World Urban Forum III in Vancouver, June 19-23, 2006. The World Forum will again be in Vancouver hosted by the Canadian government, and celebrates the 30 years of the new housing approaches. This international event gives the opportunity for Filipino's to again present their housing ideas to an international audience.