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Expanding Hope in Payatas

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EXPANDING HOPE IN PAYATAS

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Expanding Hope In Payatas

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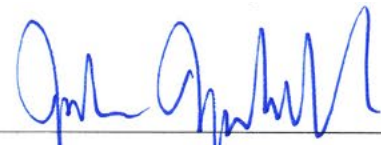A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
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Spring 2015

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Visualize

Imagine living in one room with your whole family; parents, children and grandparents. Your house is made out of garbage scraps, such as recycled cardboard, bits of wood and plastic, and has little ventilation, no running water or electricity. Visualize your home next to a railroad track, a flood prone marshland or river, or a dumpsite. The growth of population in urban cities is causing many families to live in these poor conditions, known as informal settlements, squatter settlements, shantytowns, or slums. The challenge is to provide a better quality of life, both physically and socially.

An ideal solution might be to redevelop the entire settlement by designing sustainable housing with solidly planned infrastructure. While this would make a real impact on the quality of life, it could only happen when it is economically feasible. It would also displace the residents of these informal settlements, destroying community, livelihood and the richness of place present in many informal settlements. Instead, we should consider ways of building and improvement that preserve these communities through smaller, incremental changes that strengthen the existing cultural and physical urban fabric.

In this essay, I am focusing on an informal settlement called Payatas, which I was able to visit in March 2015, through the generosity of the Dean's Office, College of Arts and Sciences, at USF. Payatas is located in the district of Quezon City, which is in Metro Manila, Philippines. In this area, informal settlements are very dense and are located in undesirable and dangerous zones near flood zones, highways and garbage dumps. These communities are known to have the most vulnerable populations, especially during rises in water level, and extreme weather events.

Enhanced public spaces in the informal settlement such as parks, community centers, and community gardens would enable people to better gather with one another. Having these centers would also help these people feel less vulnerable since it would strengthen their support for each other. These public and communal spaces would provide resources, assistance, and community training programs to raise awareness within the community, and eventually lead to larger steps toward improving health conditions, sustainable living, and then the end of poverty.
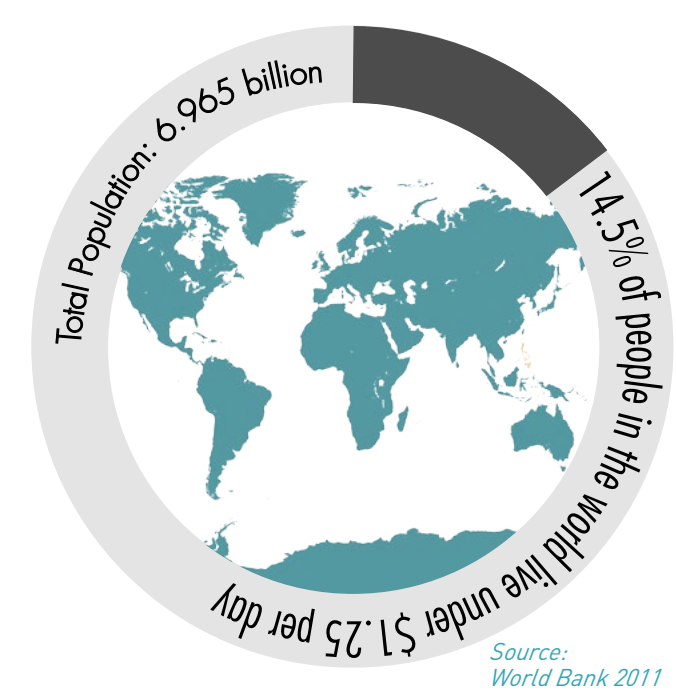
Thesis Statement

In the informal settlement of Payatas, many residents are living in unsafe and poor conditions, which lack basic infrastructure. Instead of relocating and redesigning an informal settlement, designers need to view these informal settlements as an architectural landscape and work to identify and reinforce the strong elements that bring the community together. By identifying the positive elements that strengthen the communities and by building upon them to develop social impact, the physical and social quality of life can greatly improve.

Why I picked this topic and my objectives during my trip to Payatas

As a Filipino American student, I am continuously learning more about my own culture. I learned that family and giving back are highly important values of the Filipino people. This trip gave me a better understanding of what it truly means to dig back in your roots and to find ways to help your community. This topic was challenging since it is hard to grasp the reality on the ground not having seen an informal settlement before.

I was fortunate to be able to visit Manila during my spring break of 2015, in order to work with the community of Payatas. My goal was to collaborate with the community of Payatas and learn how I could be useful to them. It was beneficial to utilize community participation in my research by talking to individuals because I learned what strengths and issues the community has. Immersing myself helped me get a better understanding of their culture and social issues. My other main objective for this trip was to physically document the neighborhood to get a better understanding of their living conditions. My main concern was to find a way to map out Payatas, focusing on the community's gathering spaces and types of land use.

Total Population: 6.965 billion
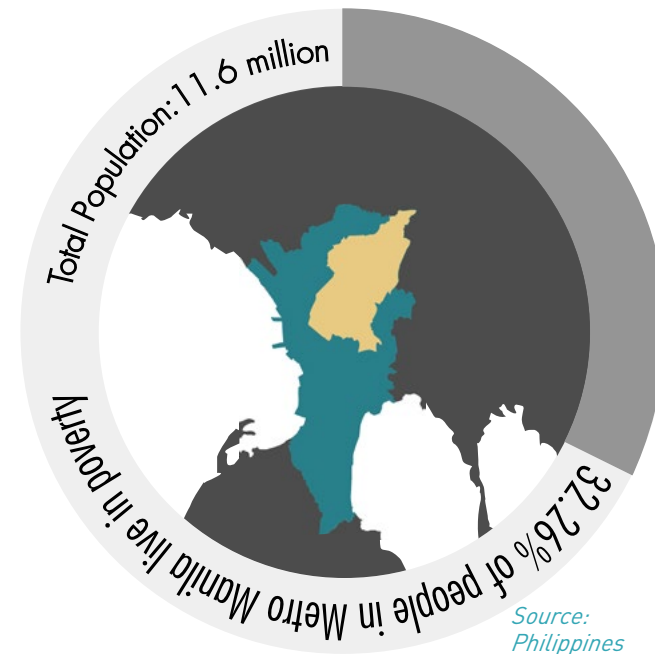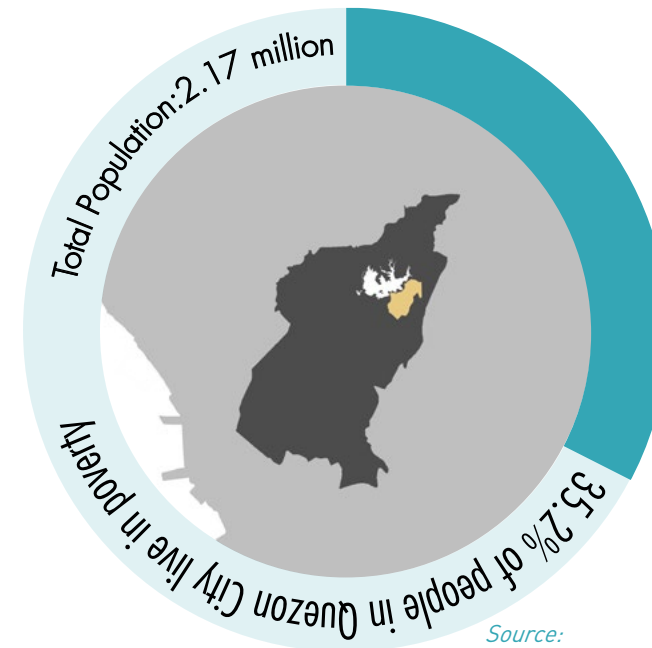
14.5% of people in the world live under $1.25 per day

Source:
World Bank 2011

Total Population:96.7 million

19% of people in the Philippines live in poverty

Source:
World Bank 2012

Total Population:11.6 million

32.26% of people in Metro Manila live in poverty
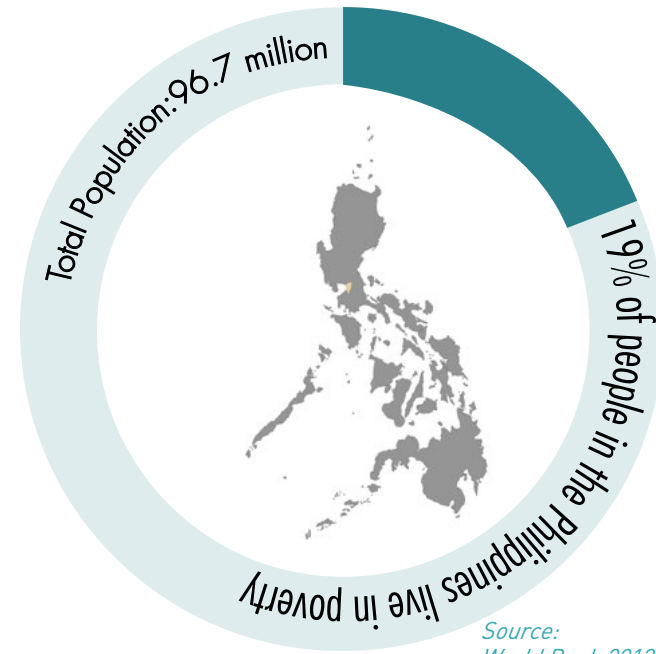
Source:
Philippines
Statistics
Authority 2014

An Issue Throughout the World

Poverty is massive and growing issue throughout the world. According to the World Bank's poverty research in 2011, out of the world population of over seven billion people, 14.5% live with or below $1.25 per day. In developing countries, 17% of people live in poverty. The percentage may not seem as high, but that means there are over one billion people living in poverty. In *Design With the Other 90% Cities*, author Cynthia Smith estimates the population of people living in poverty will double in the next twenty years (4). Mike Davis states in his book *Planet of Slums*, there are more than 200,000 slums across the planet (26). These statistics represent a serious and growing global problem that needs to be addressed.
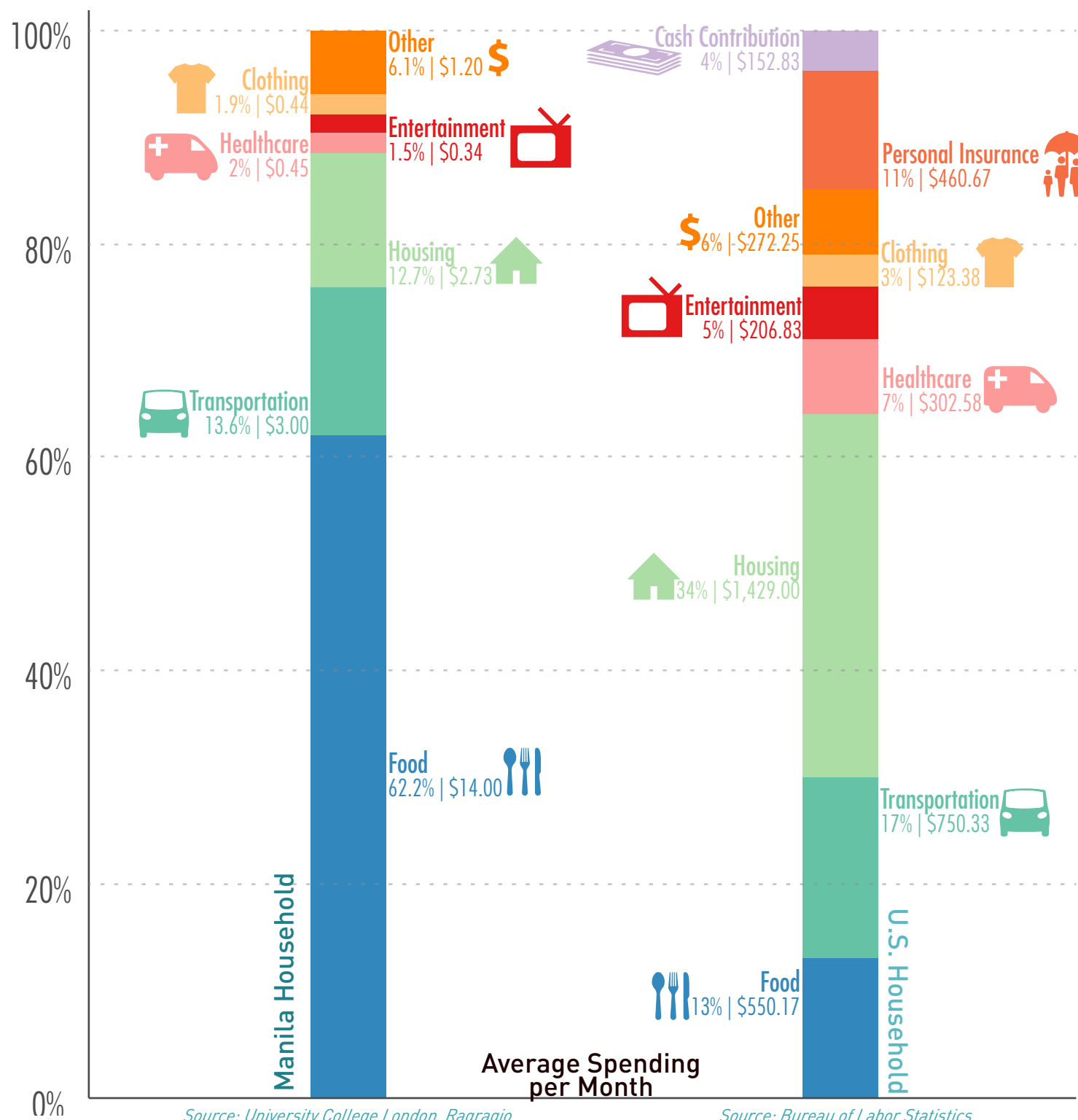
Philippines and Metro Manila Context of Poverty

In the Philippines of 2012, 19% of the population lived in poverty. This means out of the 96.7 million people, about 18.4 million people lived in poverty (World Bank). If we focus on the capital of the Philippines, Metro Manila, in 2014, out of the population of 11.6 million, nearly a third live in poverty (World Population Review). In the district of Quezon City, in which Payatas is located, 35% of the population lives in poverty. That is a total of almost 1 million people out of the 2.7 million people living in Quezon City. Quezon City is actually the largest district in Metro Manila (Ragragio 9).

The Rapid Growth in Cities

Metro Manila's population has been booming throughout the 20th century. The population increased four-fold from 1948 to 1980, from 1.5 million to 6 million people (Martin Marco 8). By 2014, the population had grown dramatically and reached 14.6 million people (Davis 4). It is so dense because Metro Manila is the center of all politics, economics, and social activities in the Philippines. The cities in the Philippines are rapidly growing because of the immigration from the rural areas. Many are moving from the province to the city in order to find jobs and earn some sort of income. Even though earnings may be less than a dollar a day, it is better than earning nothing at all. The cities are attracting many families because Manila started to develop major industries, culture and education. The city has better transportation and communication systems and many services such as schools, hospitals, and clinics. The people from the countryside are moving to the city in order to seek new opportunities. According to Marie Aquilino in *Beyond Shelter: Architecture and Human Dignity*, there are 4,748 people per square mile in Metro Manila. By this year, she suggests 68% of the Philippines' population will live in cities (142).

City populations will continue to grow even faster because they are perceived as a better place to live. As of 2009, there are over 400 cities with one million residences (Smith 15). Davis proposes that by 2015 throughout the world, there will be at least 550 cities with a population of more than one million people (1). Although many choose to move and stay in the city because of the many opportunities, there is a challenge of economic inequality. Most people do not find fair paying jobs, leaving them no choice but to live in informal settlements.

Total Population:2.17 million

35.2% of people in Quezon City live in poverty

Source:
University College
London: Ragragio
2002

Chart: Average Spending per Month

Manila Household

- **Other** 6.1% | $1.20
- **Clothing** 1.9% | $0.44
- **Healthcare** 2% | $0.45
- **Entertainment** 1.5% | $0.34
- **Housing** 12.7% | $2.73
- **Transportation** 13.6% | $3.00
- **Food** 62.2% | $14.00

$22.70 per month
Manila Household

U.S. Household

- **Cash Contribution** 4% | $152.83
- **Personal Insurance** 11% | $460.67
- **Other** 6% | $272.25
- **Clothing** 3% | $123.38
- **Entertainment** 5% | $206.83
- **Healthcare** 7% | $302.58
- **Housing** 34% | $1,429.00
- **Transportation** 17% | $750.33
- **Food** 13% | $550.17

$4,258.33 per month
U.S. Household

Living Under a Dollar a Day

So what does it mean to live under a dollar a day? In Metro Manila, in an average household of 5-6 members, the household makes about $22.70 per month (Ragragio 11). By comparison, an average U.S. household has 2-3 members and earns an income of $4,258.33 per month of income (Bureau Labor Statistics). A typical U.S. and Manila household spends their money. The major difference between families in Manila versus the U.S. is the percentage of expenses for food and housing. A family in Manila spends 62% of their income on food, which is only $14.00 a month. In the U.S, one can easily spend $14.00 for a single meal. The families in Manila are living to survive on bare minimum, so most of their money goes towards food since it is a necessity of survival. Their spending habits reveal how resourceful they are. They make do with what they have in order to live near the city.
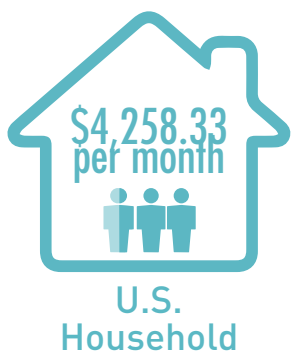
Relocating the Community

In fact, the government tries to relocate the people that live in informal settlements by building better quality homes away from the city. Even though it will provide the people a durable house, the residents would not have reasonable access to business and income because they are too far from the city. They moved to the city in the first place to find sources of income. The government would need to develop more rural industries if they were to relocate the people or eventually the residents of these new developments would move back to the city to find a job.

During my stay in the Philippines, I was able to visit my uncle in the province of Luzon. It was interesting to see the contrast of the population and land use between the province and the city. As we were driving towards Baguio City from Luzon, I stopped when I noticed homes being constructed in the middle of nowhere. It made me wonder if these homes were being built to relocate the people from the informal settlements in cities. If so, these homes are located in an empty location with little in the way of resources or transportation, isolated from an ecosystem in which people could develop sustainable lives.

Urban Segregation

There may be many class conflicts within urban spaces, but the poor are in desperate need to live in the city for a source of income. Davis quotes Erhard Berner's description of Manila's inequality of urban space for the poor.

Metro Manila [is] one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The price of one square meter anywhere near the commercial centers far exceeds the annual income of any jeepney driver or security guard. Yet, the very nature of the income-generating possibilities requires one to stay close to where the action is, because distance from place of work means prohibitive cost in time and money... The logical result is wide-spread squatting. Virtually all gaps left open by city development are immediately filled with makeshift settlements that bear every record in population density (99).

In Metro Manila, there is a huge gap between the rich and poor, which I saw in clear urban segregation during my visit. Along the freeway, I saw informal settlements lined up along the roadway, but behind them in the distance I saw new high rises being built.

The rich and the government build high walls with razor and barbed wire to block the growth of the informal settlements. My host took me in an informal settlement called "Park 7" and it was located in neighborhood filled with new development and houses. In order to prevent the community from growing, the government built tall-massive brick walls with barbwire around the community. They also added a fenced wall at the end of Park 7, meaning they only have one entrance and exit since they are blocked from all three sides. Based on the government's action to block the community, it seems the more privileged are ignoring the fact that the poor are their neighbors.

Defining Informal Settlement, Slums, Squatters

The Untied Nations Habitat Program describes informal settlements as "residential areas where a group of housing units has been constructed on land to which the occupants have no legal claim, or which they occupy illegally; or unplanned settlements and areas where housing is not in compliance with current planning and building regulations (unauthorized housing)" (Smith 14). An informal settlement household is usually a single-room space that has multiple purposes such as sleeping, cooking, dining, and entertainment. The family learns how to make use of their daily life in a six square meter space (Lico 59). The slum community lacks basic service and infrastructure such as electricity, water supply, roads, and a sewer system. The UN-Habitat defines a slum household lacking at least one of the following elements: **durability of housing** (adequate building that protects in extreme disasters), **sufficient living** (less than three people share a room), **access to safe water** (having sufficient water that is easily accessed and affordable), **access to sanitation** (reasonable number of private and public toilets based on the amount of people), and **security for tenure** (having documentation to protect from evictions).

Conditions

Residents of informal communities find ways to survive by using whatever resources they can find. "Skillful and resourceful people living in a rationalist architectural culture who are instead forced to use vernacular modes of building," meaning vernacular architecture, is designing with "one's own hands" (Lico 53). In the Philippines, an informal settlement usually consists a wooden platform on timber stilts. The materials the people use to build their temporary homes are usually recycled cardboard, scrap wood, or plastic. For roofing, they find metal sheets or corrugated fiberglass to make a sloped roof. Because they don't have access to nails to hold the materials down, they use concrete, stone, blocks, and car batteries as weights. The settlements have a unique aesthetic characteristic to their community since they only use recycled materials. Even though these homes are not as durable, the community has, out of necessity, developed the skills to make use of whatever materials they have to build their homes in a challenging location, despite having little training or educational background.

Seeing an informal settlement with my own eyes was indescribable compared to just hearing about it or seeing pictures. From the moment I arrived to the city, all I could smell was a constant gust of exhaust coming from all the transportation. I was suffering the whole week I was there, but I realized that the locals are used to inhaling this pollution everyday of their lives. Along the busy streets, I saw two to three story buildings and I wondered how the buildings were to stand with the use of such seemingly flimsy materials. Everything was poorly constructed and unmaintained, but still somehow functional for the residents living in these communities. The hazards of landslides, fire, and floods are easily noticeable as I walked through the informal settlements. I saw exposed bundles of live electric wires that are hanging just five feet above the ground, within easy reach of children. There are homes built along a steep hill, without sturdy construction to keep these homes from collapsing.

When I went inside some of these homes, the rooms were packed with furniture in tight spaces. It is crammed, but they make do with the space they have to gather and entertain. The kitchen is tiny with no stove or microwave, but that does not stop people from cooking and entertaining. They usually go to the market nearby to buy their food and will cook it over a hot plate or a tiny charcoal grill. Some of the homes have water faucets, but they usually have a barrel of water and use a small bucket (also known as tabo) to wash their dishes, use the bathroom, and to take a shower. Most of the houses I visited did not get a lot of sunlight due to the lack of windows. It was hard to stay indoors for most of the day because of the lack of airflow. It is understandable that the house is used primarily for cooking and sleeping, as I see most of the people working or gathering outside under the shade.

11

Lupang Pangako

Area B

Area A

Legend:
- Main Roads
- Pathways in LP
- Creeks
- High Risk for Flooding
- Moderate Risk for Flooding
- Low Risk for Flooding
- High Risk for Landslide
- Moderate Risk for Landslide

100ft

from rising land values in the city.' Such sites are poverty's niche in the ecology of the city, and very poor people have little choice but to live with disasters" (Davis 121-122). They are willing to live along floodplains, volcano slopes, dumps, muddy hillsides and railroads in order to have some land near the city. These communities are some of the most vulnerable because of the living condition and the lack of resources after encountering an extreme disaster.

In Payatas, most of the areas are known to have a risk of flooding due to garbage that clogs the sewage systems and streams. Payatas is also vulnerable to landslides, garbage slides, and fire. There are some homes built along a steep muddy hill that commonly slide during the many storms throughout the year. The nonprofit Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB explained below) working with the Environmental Science for Social Change organization to map out the most vulnerable and high hazard areas.

High Risk Location

The Philippines is located in a prime high risk location for earthquakes, and also suffers floods, droughts, and storms. The archipelago sits along a typhoon belt, which causes many topical storms through out the year. The Philippines have an average of twenty typhoons a year, in which half are disastrous (Aquilino 149). On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines with storm strength of Category 5, which is the strongest tropical cyclone that hit land. Typhoon Haiyan affected 16 million people and displaced 4.1 million people in the Philippines (US AID). Informal settlements are typically located in locations of highest risk. The risks are both natural and manmade.

Many informal settlements are located in hazardous locations because it gives the people a sense of security from eviction. The poor would rather stay in these unwanted areas because they do not want to risk someone buying and claiming the land, which could be more likely if they live on high-valued area. "Precisely because the site is so hazardous and unattractive, it offers 'protection

Most Vulnerable Communities

The outsiders and the government ignore many of these informal settlements, and it is time for these communities to be properly recognized. Designers should explore the poverty population because the majority of these people on Earth are living in informal settlements that lack basic living necessities. Designers should use their privilege of education and practice for the good of others in a world that need their help. Urban poor are struggling to live on a level of basic survival. As designers, assisting vulnerable communities, we can make a big social impact in the world.

drivers for jeepney and tricycles, which are the most common method of transportation in the Philippines. Payatas is also known for many junk shop workers because of the adjacent dumpsite.

How People Portray Payatas

Before my trip to Payatas, I only heard negative comments about this site because it is primarily known for its garbage dump. There are two giant hills of garbage, surrounded by the community of Payatas. In 2000, the dump was measured to be 130 feet high and "it would take 3,000 trucks a day for eleven years to cart all this garbage to a new engineered landfill" (Power 59). The dump is known as Smokey Mountain, and is now about 150 feet tall as it grows by 924 tons of garbage per day. In July 2000, there was a massive garbage landslide because of a tropical storm. The garbage slide buried 700 people and killed at least 200.

Residents that lived in Payatas for a while, told me that the dumpsite was flat until 2000. Many organizations came to help and wanted to close the dumpsite after the landslide disaster. But after many years the dump continued to get bigger and some people lost their houses due to the expansion of the mountain, with the government giving them minimal compensation to relocate.

What I Heard Before Visiting Payatas

When I saw the "Smokey Mountain" for the first time, I could not believe my what I was seeing. The mountain is noticeable from a distance as you walk along the streets of Payatas. The odor gets stronger as you walk towards the mountain, and you cannot escape the smell wherever you go. I spoke with students living in nearby Quezon City and none of them had ever visited Payatas even though they live so close to it. Most locals only know Payatas as one of the worst informal settlements because of the dump. But after visiting two other slums in Quezon City, I felt Payatas was more developed than other slums around the area because there were many paved roads and everyone had access to water. People tend to have a misconception of Payatas because of its proximity to the garbage dump.

Information About Payatas

Finding facts and information on any particular informal settlement was quite difficult. I was able to connect with a nonprofit in Quezon City called Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan. They are a "non partisan, Church-based, Jesuit-led organization and a network of religious priests, seminarians, and lay individuals committed to the service of the Filipino Church and the Filipino People. Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan promotes Church, and Ignatian-oriented socio-political involvement and engagement through continuing education for citizenship and good governance, issue advocacy and participation in elections. It also supports marginalized and vulnerable sectors through issue advocacy and disaster relief operations and risk reduction programs" (SLB). Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan has been conducting field research in Payatas and they provided me with most of the Payatas facts that I am citing.

Payatas is located in Quezon City and is roughly 6 miles away from Ateneo University, which is a big private Catholic university. Payatas was bigger than what I expected, it is like its own little town, covering 774 hectares (about 2 square miles.) Payatas is divided into three locations: Area A, Area B, and Lupang Pangako. Lupang Pangako is known to be the "Promised Land" because people moved here in the hope of better opportunities. According to Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan, there are 200,000 residents in Payatas as of 2010. The majority of the people in Payatas fall under the Manila's poverty threshold. The majority of the residents work as vendors, hawkers, construction workers, scavengers and scrap dealers. As I walked through the streets of Payatas, some residents were

Payatas is rich in terms of having positive home businesses, vendors, and markets. When I first arrived in Payatas, the first thing I noticed was a big market along the junction of where two major streets merge. The market is called Litex Market, where you can get any fresh produce, seafood, and meat. On my last day of Payatas, my host and I went to the market to buy all the ingredients for lunch. I was impressed with how successfully the community ran such a huge market in an informal settlement. Even along the non-busy streets, one could see many street vendors in running family businesses. In Lupang Pangako area, we bought lunch from particular street vendor known for making delicious homemade Filipino food. The people here are hard workers, working long hours everyday to make a living to support their families.

Barangay

In each area of Payatas there is a Barangay Center, which is the smallest unit of local government in the Philippines. The Barangay Center was founded in 1976 with the support of the government. They are very active in community organization, and are the center for communication. Their mission is "to provide sustainable programs for the people, in livelihood, health, sanitation and social justice." The center holds community meetings to discuss ways to solve the social and physical issues they face. The Barangays also have livelihood programs, in order to teach the young generation about traditional arts and culture. They work with Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan to create natural disaster relief planning for the community. They go out into the community to get distribute important information. The Barangays are Payatas locals that hold the community together by building relationships with the people and providing them resources.

Unexpectedly More Developed With Many Opportunities

"People only see that it's a dump, but someday they will see it's like a city." This was a powerful statement a local shared to me. After visiting Payatas, I would have to agree with her. Many locals informed me that prior to 1989 there were no streets, transportation, electricity, or water before. Residents mentioned that everyone has had access to a water system and electricity in their homes since 2004. In 2005, the streets started to improve by having paved roads and a drainage system.

Sense of Community

Since the settlements have developed roots over many generations, it is not a reasonable solution to split up the community since this is all they know. F. Landa Jocano wrote a book called *Slum as a Way of Life*, and examined a squatter settlement in Looban, Philippines by living with the people. He said that it is important to see the slum in context and that "anyone who enters into the neighborhood to become a resident also enters into a social world already established in the past, shared by almost all residents, and embodied in the existing beliefs, attitudes and values of the people" (Jacano 50). Squatters have built up strong relationships throughout the community. Although settlements may lack resources, they still have a sense of close community, in the Philippines it is known as kinship. The informal settlements have existing semi public spaces such as a porch or steps, which brings the community together because it opens up to the street life. If the communities are located along the rail tracks, "the length of the railroad track itself is rearticulated as a communal space suited for passage, promenade, playing, gardening, and work, and as a temporary marketplace and ephemeral plaza" (Lico 59). The squatter settlements hold tremendous value because they do whatever it takes to provide a home and community for the poor.

As I was walking around Payatas, I would see people congregating under some source of shade. Everywhere I went, I would see groups of people just hanging outside chatting with one another. Every individual that I approached was welcoming and kind. It felt as if everyone was like family. As I asked around why they wanted to stay in Payatas, all of them told me that they stay because of their family and the people in community. Regardless of their living conditions, Payatas is their home because of their family. There was a strong sense of love in the community and because of this strong connection; people are working hard to help each other. The relationships built within Payatas seem to make the people happy and hopeful.

Simple Structure Could Make A Big Impact

As a designer and architect, we have tools that can make a big impact towards social change. In *Building on Society*, I read "there is no instant solution to the extreme poverty and other deep-seated problems these communities face, the belief is that such small interventions will, over time, improve living conditions for all residents" (Lepik 16). I want to propose and develop exactly this kind of small intervention that can make a positive impact for the community long term.

Asset-Based Approach

Asset-Based seems to be a very successful approach when working with an underserved community because it focuses on the strengths within the people. In a chapter called "Designing with an Asset-Based Approach," Amanda and Seth Hendler-Voss mention the importance of designing in this way. They compared this approach with the tale of stone soup, "one person starts with just a few stones, another person lends a pot, someone else gives some water, someone donates a carrot, and so on until a delicious soup is made that can serve all" (124). This tale is similar to the approach because in the process there is contribution within the community. Here you do not focus on a communiy's needs or problem, but their strength and capacities. They argue that focusing on people's issues will cause a codependency between the provider and recipient. It is a challenge to solve the root problem as a designer, but doing an asset-based approach can establish systemic change.

This approach can be helpful because it is a way designers can build relationship with the people. Amanda and Seth Hendler-Voss talk about a public-transit shelter project done in Shiloh, Ashevile, North Carolina by a Design Corps Summer Studio and how the design team used an asset-based approach. The process of the project was one of the benefits because it allowed the community and designer to engage with one another and use individual strengths to complete the transit shelter. Hendler-Voss believes this transit shelter will remind "Shiloh residents of their capacity to get things done" (125). Exploring the individuals' assets and talents could bring the community hope by simply getting each resident to recognize the skills that could positively contribute to their community.

The asset-based approach is mainly used for community organizing and neighborhood associations. In *Asset-Based Community Development*, John Kretzmann and John McKnight believe this approach is effective because more development usually starts in a local community since the people are willing to invest in themselves. "The hard truth is that development must start from within the community and, in most of our urban neighborhood, there is no other choice" (25). Understanding the community capacities could effectively help develop the community.

How I Approached Payatas During My Visit

When I went to the Philippines and visited Payatas, I approached the community by trying to be open-minded so my time could be spent gathering as much authentic information as possible. I tried to immerse myself in order to help me get a better understanding of their true culture and social issues. Even though I was going to Payatas to do research for my thesis, I did not want to approach them with an expectation before I misunderstand what was in front of me. I learned so much form the community by being open-minded and first building a relationship with them.

I truly wanted to get a sense of their daily life, so I would share meals with the people I encountered. I was able to stay overnight with my host in one of the informal settlement homes and get a feel for their daily routine in their homes. I observed the people as I walked along the streets of Payatas and noted what stood out to me. I was able to do a few informal interviews/conversations in order to understand what those I spoke with understood as their strengths and needs. I wanted to hear what the locals had to say about their community in order to figure out how I could more effectively be of service to them.

Don't Forget About the Needs

An asset-based approach is an essential way to help develop the community, but it is also necessary to consider the problems and issues facing the community. In *Research Methods for Community Change*, Randy Stoecker suggests that doing a needs and resources analysis approach will reveal and explore the issue and determine what resources the community lacks. The main goal for this approach "is to identify the gap between the identified needs and the documented resources" (Stoecker 118). He mentions the method of participatory rural appraisal (PRA), which discovers a community's needs and the resources that will alleviate those needs. The asset-based approach is a great way to collaborate with people, but these informal settlements have fundamental needs that should not be ignored, which can happen when researchers only apply an asset-based approach.

What are Payatas' Needs?

As I talked with the community, many residents mentioned the need of having a strong education for children. Most of the children usually stop attending school at sixth grade. Having more widespread access to education is important to their community because it is a key to the community's future success. Specifically, there is a need for more local high schools because people are wasting money on transportation to attend school outside the community. The residents of Payatas show their concern of poverty being the number one reason for out of school youth because they cannot afford their kids to attend school.

Source: Slum Dwellers International

Children and Youth Development

Throughout my visit in Payatas, the children on the streets stood out to me the most. I was amazed by how independent young kids are. I would see 6-year-old wearing no shoes walking along a busy street. I saw a little boy walking around piles of trash, scavenging through the garbage to find toys. The children in Payatas were really resourceful in finding ways to entertain themselves. I saw this little boy repeatedly rolling a recycled toy tire down the hill. People used sticks as pool cues in order to play with the communal pool tables. My host also shared a video of a group of kids playing Tumbang Preson, which they throw a slipper through a recycled pipe next to a creek.

During my observation, I realized there was a high population of kids in Payatas with no actual play structure. Many of the kids would gather under a tent or in between shaded alleyways. When I asked my host if there were any play areas in Payatas, she paused for a moment and answered no. There are a few schools and many basketball hoops on the streets but no playground. I was surprised to learn there was no kids' center within the whole neighborhood. The kids would play in narrow spaces or in areas that are not safe, such as near creeks or a busy road. A simple play structure throughout this community could make an impact on the children's social and personal development by giving them a space to engage others and be creative.

Precedent Case Study: Jason Corburn- Slum Settlement in Nairobi Kenya

Collaboration between UC Berkeley and The University of Nairobi, is focused on a larger informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya called Mathare Valley. In Nairobi, 65% of the 3.5 million populations live in informal settlement. The project's goal was to, "recognize that local action alone is insufficient and broader policy change will also be necessary to improve living conditions and the lives of slum-dwellers. Thus, our approach rejects single-issue slum improvement approaches and instead focuses on the inter-relationships between poverty alleviation, securing infrastructure and services, improving housing, economic opportunities, food security, human health and safety, among other issues" (Mathare Zonal Plan 4). The researchers collected surveys for five years and worked on mapping the community. They were able to gather a lot of data in Mathare because of their close collaborations with the community. In general, this method of collaborative research is a great way to build trust and long-term commitment with a community. Because of this, the team was able to learn from the locals who are the experts in their community's needs. Designers should understand all of the interconnected issues to find innovative ways to improve living conditions. Bettering the whole community will require great collaborative effort and even doing small projects could still greatly improve their living circumstances if done over time.

Precedent Case Study: Platform of Hope

In 2008-2011, Khondaker Hasibul Kabir designed a platform while working with the families and local carpenter; they designed the platform for children who live at Korail, Dhaka, Bangladesh informal settlement. Korail, with 120,000 residents, is the largest slum in a fast growing megacity. Open space is rare in the informal settlement, where children can be found playing in narrow spaces. The 18 by 36 foot Platform of Hope is a public space that connects to a garden and allows children to play, dance, and interact. The platform is also a space to communicate, in which you could see the dwellings slowly transforming because they would exchange knowledge from one another on how people build their homes. A gathering space allows people to interact and learn from one another. This influenced my thesis because a simple project such as a platform can make a big difference in the community.

Source: The Other 90

Precedent Case Study: Kibera Public Space Project

In the informal settlement of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) has several projects that turned the land into Productive Public Spaces. Throughout KDI's process of design, they worked with the community to understand their needs. A public space should be flexible, open-ended, and driven by the community, in order to give the people a sense of ownership. From KDI's working experience with informal settlements, they define a productive public space as something that:

Transforms an environmental liability into usable public space, integrates income-generating, socially constructive uses to ensure its sustainability, adds value to a space without alienating the original community, is designed to address needs unmet through traditional channels and introduces strong design concepts to create beautiful places." (Kounkuey Design Initiative)

KDI suggests understanding the community's needs, sensitivity, and knowledge, will create a successful design. Because children make up 50% of the population in Kibera, they selected a playground as their design project. They created a safe space for the children to socialize and play. To have constant activity on the playground, they added a variety of play structures to allow the space to be flexible and open.

Active Clemente Street Full of Shops

Site of the Conceptual Design on Clemente Street

Intersection on Clemente Street

Clemente St.

Clemente St.

SITE

Guidelines When Designing

Unfortunately, because of my incomplete perspective I would not be able to complete a play structure design for this thesis without getting the community's input and concerns. However, based on my experiences, research, and observations, I have a conceptual design and guidelines on how to approach a play structure. If I were to have more time to complete a playground design, I would have the community of Payatas be involved in the process. This will open up the community's ideas and concerns and draw on their strengths and needs. Collaborating with the community is necessary for any systemic change because, as an outsider, there is more to learn about an informal settlement by building a relationship with the people who live in it. Using the asset-based approach can build long-term relationship with the community, which will ease the progress of collaboration. Having the community involved throughout the process of designing and building the structure, it will give them a sense of ownership of the infrastructure.

Within my conceptual design, I used my observations of what I saw children doing to entertain themselves. I want to build upon the children's strength of being resourceful and creative by designing a play structure that allows them to continue their creativity. I would apply the community's skills of using recycled materials in the play structure.
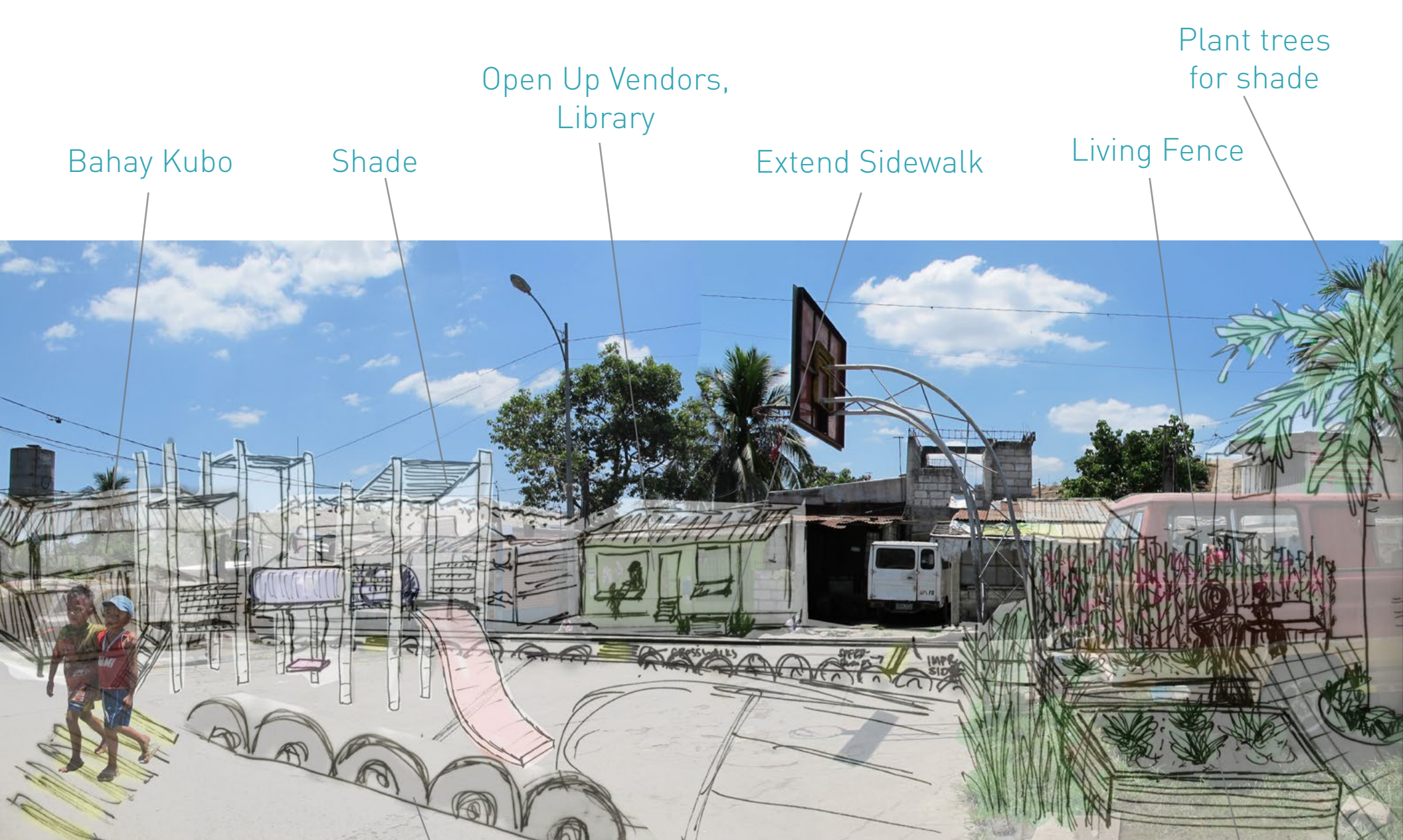
For my conceptual design, I picked a location in Lupang Pangako, where I spent most of my time in Payatas. It is an open space that was not being utilized even though there was a basketball hoop on the side. There are few open spaces, so this area will be a great opportunity to create a play structure for the children.

How a Play Structure Could Benefit Payatas

By talking to some residents, I learned that the need for more schools is their main priority. They need more education for kids because it is the key to success and to get them out of poverty by finding a good-paying job. Although my perspective for design is limited by my short weeklong trip to Payatas, designing a play structure could make an impact on the social life of the children. A simple project can create a space where the children can congregate, instead of running along the streets, narrow alleyways, or in unsafe areas. Bringing the children together gives them the opportunity to learn from one another. If the children have a sense of ownership in a play structure, it could be a safe haven for the kids and provide a sense of hope.

Analyzing the existing conditions

The site for design of the play structure is an ideal location because there are many community centers and schools nearby. The site is located on Clemente Street, which is an active street in Lupang Pangako. Along the street, there are many street venders that attract many pedestrians. Many children pass through the street as they walk to school or home. The existing site splits the street, so the space is barely being utilized. The space is relatively narrow with the measure of 100 by 20 ft. The site has great potential because it is at the end of an active street.

Bahay Kubo

Shade

Open Up Vendors, Library

Extend Sidewalk

Plant trees for shade

Living Fence

Crosswalks

Dividers

Community Garden

Conceptual Design

As I mentioned, due to my short period of time in Payatas, I was not able to do collaborative work with the community to design a play structure. But based on my observations, I produce a conceptual design on the strengths and needs within the community. Within my conceptual design, I tried to make it multi-purpose, to give the children the opportunity to be creative and interpret the space. I added a community garden to the existing green patch on the side of the basketball hoop because it could teach the children how to sustain themselves. Within the design I open up a storefront was closed down and changed it to a library, in order for kids to have easy access to books. I also added some design elements to slow down the traffic, such as extending the sidewalks, and adding speed bumps and crosswalks. From my experience, I noticed there was a lack of shade and many are suffering from the heat, so in the design I incorporated overhangs and a traditional "Bahay Kubo" housing for the children to relax. By adding elements that fits the community' strengths and needs, it adds value to the space without destroying the existing centers.

Conclusion

The best way to build up Payatas is to take an asset-based approach where we learn from the community and build on the strengths they already have. This helps develop focus in on a particular community and to build relationships with the people. But this must be accompanied by recognizing the problems that are present and matching existing qualities with addressing needed solutions. Designers should not ignore the community's fundamental needs. Ideally, to make a real change in the quality of life it is necessary to build a sustainable infrastructure, but this can only happen when it is more economically feasible. Designers should only intervene in ways that preserve the community by doing smaller interventions that strengthen existing centers. Proposing a center for the children to have a space to play, gather, and to learn is a good example because youth development seems to be important to the community. By identifying the positive elements and by building upon them to develop social impact, the physical and social quality of life can greatly improve.

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