

Urban transformation through disaster management

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Place of fieldwork: Republic of the Philippines

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Key Words: Urban disaster, urban poor, relocation site

- Research background

Metro Manila has experienced the impact of huge disasters on several occasions. Typhoon Ondoy, 2009, significantly devastated Metro Manila and triggered the reinforcement of disaster management by the central government. After Typhoon Ondoy, the Philippines transformed their disaster management structure from focusing on rescue and relief goods to community-based disaster management and improving infrastructure in order to establish a resilient community. Moreover, the government started to relocate slum residents who had been staying in the “danger zone,” located near riversides, coastal areas, and lakesides. The government justifies slum clearance as a means to “saving their lives” and “reducing vulnerability.” This slum clearance and relocation are the main factors responsible for transforming the urban space and developing a relocation site in suburbia, Metro Manila.

- Research purpose and aim

This research poses the following question: “Through disaster management, how does the government try to manage and control not only the impact of natural disasters but also slum clearance and relocation sites?” This research discusses the One Safe Future program, a disaster management project in Metro Manila, to clarify the relationship between disaster management and urban transformation.

- Results and achievements of the fieldwork

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) conducts the One Safe Future program in Metro Manila. I obtained information through an interview with an officer of the DILG. This program involves 18 government institutions, as well as NGOs and community organizations. For example, the Metro Manila Development Authority and Pasig River Rehabilitation Committee, which have been managing and controlling the main rivers in Metro Manila, also joined this program to achieve the “one safe future” goal.

This program involves the relocation of 60,000 households from the danger zone. Disaster management has a strong narrative to justify urban redevelopment and gentrification by the government and private sector.



Photo 1: Earthquake drills in Metro Manila, July 30, 2015.

Slum clearance and demolition are the main topics of urban study. Previous studies have discussed the demolition and relocation of slum residents from the negative viewpoint of disbanding neighborhood relationships and loss of social capital. Moreover, these studies have focused on the resistance of slum residents against power and their understanding of relocation as exclusion.

In the case of fire victims in Navotas City, the victims needed to relocate to a remote relocation site in Bulacan province. Photos 2 and 3 show how the slum residents reacted to an offer to relocate from the City Mayor. From the perspective of the fire victims, they wanted to experience owning a house in the relocation site in Bulacan Province after making payments for 25 years.

This kind of slum residents' desire to legally own a home in has not been discussed by previous studies, which tend to focus on demolition and relocation as explanations for exclusion. Typhoon Ondoy triggered the acceleration of slum clearance in the danger zone. This phenomenon transformed the structure of housing supply and transformed Metro Manila itself.



Photo 2: (Left) People who do not want to relocate in-city. Photo 3: (Right) People who want to go to the relocation site in a remote area (Bulacan province).

Of course, relocation to a remote area compelled residents to commute between the urban central area and the relocation site. The move was criticized since relocated families experienced impoverishment due to the increased costs of transportation. Moreover, they faced difficulties in establishing new relationships in the neighborhood. Relocated families organized and initiated many practices to stabilize and improve their situation. For example, some families used their house as security for loans in situations when the employed members of the family lost their jobs. The employed members stayed at their work place in order to save transportation costs, and visited their families every 2 to 4 weeks. Their efforts and practices lent stability to the relocation site.



Photo 4: Relocation site in San Jose del Monte City, Bulacan, the Philippines.

- Implications for and impact on future research

I was unable to conduct a questionnaire survey in the limited time I had for the field research. I hope I will be able to conduct subsequent surveys in more detail.