

Chapter 2

Spontaneous Transformation as an Integral Phenomenon of Inhabitation

Abstract This chapter is a literature review on the phenomenon of Spontaneous Transformation, which is defined as any alteration, addition, extension or modification of a house. Spontaneous Transformation has been identified as an integral part of inhabitation. However, in large scale housing, users, even if they are owners, do not have much authority to transform. In the context of self-built houses, especially in the developing countries, studies show that there is abundance of transformation incidents. With the owners being the actors behind them, this chapter tried to relate this phenomenon of spontaneous transformation with human behavior.

Keywords Spontaneous transformation • Human behavior • Self-built housing

2.1 Introduction

At this point, the focus of this study moves to the particular phenomenon of spontaneous transformation. Spontaneous transformation can be operationally defined as alterations, addition, extensions, or modifications of a house, both in terms of the form and the interior spaces usage. Though it is regarded as an integral phenomenon of inhabitation irrespective of the type of housing, it is likely to occur more frequently and in bigger scale in self-built houses (Carmon [2002](#)). In the specific case of self-built houses in the confused sprawl in the city of Dhaka, the study further looks for any existing physical patterns, and thereafter for the explicit behavioral patterns of such transform incidents. However, the phenomenon of spontaneous transformation is investigated by several notable researchers. A brief overview of those literatures would be useful here before moving on to the context specific issues.

There have been attempts to relate human behavior with many issues such as food habit, choice of clothing, bias to pets, choice of furniture etc. Human behavior is a resultant of a complicated process, and there is always a risk to draw such straightforward or simplified relationships. However, spontaneous transformation is not a phenomenon that occurs suddenly. It involves a long process of thoughts between the members of the households. Therefore, it might show some reflection about the behavior of the household if not of the individual.

Outcome of human behavior can be expressed in different ways. More commonly known as control theory, as developed by Reckless (1973), human behavior is not caused by outside stimuli, but by one's internal needs. Caniggia (2001)'s theory of human actions for co-existence also highlights the role of one's own needs. These needs, however, can be shaped with or without the presence of the outside stimuli. Moreover, it also states that people tend to act rationally, but if there are given the chance to act deviant, they would. Therefore, be it rational or deviant, the first task would be to try to identify the internal needs. Then there could be an attempt to relate them with transformation issues.

Glasser (1998) identified five particular internal needs that shape our behavior. They are:

1. To survive
2. To belong
3. To have freedom
4. To have power and control
5. To have emotional fulfillment.

However, while translating them through transformation incidents, overlapping can be discovered between the needs to belong, to have freedom, and to have control. The following sub-sections try to relate these needs with the phenomenon of spontaneous transformation.

2.2 Transform to Survive

Few households are likely to remain completely satisfied with the same house indefinitely since the needs for survival of family life constantly change (Seek 1983). This endless and ever-changing list of 'housing needs' creates a 'housing gap' between current level and preferred level of 'housing consumption'. Demographic issues are considered as one major contributor which brings in this gap (Tippel 1999). However, other issues such as changes in household's socio-economic circumstances or changes in tastes and preferences, changes in housing prices, changes in the need for rental income and other external influences such as decisions related to land use, transportation etc., all contribute to increase this gap (Khan et al. 2010), and therefore disturbs the household's equilibrium state. Like any other state of disequilibrium, the stakeholders, in this case the households, constantly search for solution to stabilize the state. But the housing gap can seldom

be covered up immediately. Seek (1983) argues that the actions to be taken for housing adjustment is unlikely to be immediate and prompt. Therefore it leads to 'Housing stress' along time.

2.2.1 Housing Stress

Housing stress mounts gradually, and gathers momentum over a fairly long period of time, at least over some stages of the family cycle. Almost every reaction to housing stress is likely to involve considerable amount of money. Therefore, affluence might hold a key role on the amount of work initiated to overcome that stress. As progression through life also brings in career advancement and increase in wealth, most households become ready to respond to the housing stress as they approach their middle ages. However, a thematic explanation was developed by several researchers which is as follows.

2.2.2 Level of Tolerance and Critical Point

As mentioned, housing stress does not necessarily bring in any immediate change or to cover up the gap between actual and preferred level of housing consumption. Every household has a 'level of tolerance' until which point no action is taken. Household initially adapts to the situation by changing its 'housing aspirations' i.e. sacrifice the aspiration to reach the preferred level of housing consumption (Michelson 1977). However, this tolerance level can be shifted upward or downward. For example decrease in income, wealth or status can shift the tolerance level upward. Again, there are 'shocks' which can be discrete events into an otherwise gradually changing situation of housing intensity. For example the birth of a child can drop the tolerance level abruptly as the stress level curve can take a stepped shape instead of a smooth curve. Therefore, the level of tolerance can be reached much earlier than anticipated. When the level of tolerance is reached, it can be called as 'critical point' when actions are needed for necessary 'housing adjustment' in order to cover the housing gap.

2.2.3 Tradeoff Between Action and Non-Action

There are differences of actions according to tenure. If the households are tenants, they usually do not have the option to improve by themselves, so they can either tolerate or move out. In case of the household are owners, they have several options such as making improvements to the existing dwelling, move to another suitable dwelling, or move and then improve the new dwelling. Whichever alternative to be

selected depends on the relative costs and benefits associated with each of them. The benefits must be sufficiently large before any action is taken. The costs associated with either moving or improving can be quite high (Tipple 1999). A last minute uplifting of tolerance level can also occur, which can be termed as ‘non-action’. The difference between the uplifting before and after reaching critical point is that it might leave an undesirable permanent mark on the household in some way or other.

2.2.4 Decision to Move or Improve

If actions are taken, a fair comparison between the two basic options of moving and improving shows that ‘moving’ costs are significantly higher. This prevents households from frequent moving (MacLennan 1982; Fallis 1986). The costs involving improvement are also not negligible. As a consequence the majority of householders at one time are not expected to fulfill the gap totally (Littlewood and Munro 1997). That infers that they are likely to continue to suffer further states of disequilibrium in near future. A cumulative cost of part-by-part improving may involve far more expenses.

Goodman (1995) in his research estimated that moving cost increased housing expenditure by 3 % in a year. Not surprisingly, in another research, housing expenditure due to cumulative large scale improvements was increased by 40 % in a year (Edin and Englund 1991). However, housing satisfaction does not always relate to the expenses directly. Littlewood and Munro (1997) pointed out that moving is directly related to the housing market by studying the trend of recent movers. Households are more mobile at certain stages, while not so in some other stages. Therefore, the second alternative i.e. improving the house has a significant role in housing adjustment. Different studies on decisions about housing adjustment describe the decision to improve as a distinctive alternative to moving (Montgomery 1992; Potepan 1989; Shear 1983).

In some theories, improving is postulated to be an inferior form of housing adjustment to moving as the potential change in consumption is presumed to be less and improvement costs per adjustment are usually lower. The inferiority of this choice is argued to result in a reducing tendency for home improvements and a greater likelihood of moving as incomes rise (Potepan 1989). But this is actually a market policy to highlight the term ‘inferiority’ as it tries to relate moving as an improvement in status. But Seek (1983) already pointed out that the home owners all over the world tend to live in the same house for a long time whether they are rich or poor. This inference was further evident in the results of the ‘Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs’ conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1980). Contrary to the exploiters in the housing market, improving has been regarded actually as a way of reducing the loss in consumer surplus which can occur where a household in a sub-optimal housing situation does not move (Seek 1983). Littlewood and Munro (1997) concluded that improvement is a larger practiced phenomenon and moving into the ‘right’ house is also very common.

However, with the evidences that moving into a new house might not provide the households gain an outright equilibrium, they also may undertake significant improvement expenditure on their newly acquired house.

However, most of these researchers chose the term ‘improving’, which takes into granted that there has been some positive upgrading. In reality, it may not be always like that. Improving refers to alteration, with the necessary gap to be covered. But, in some other aspects, it may not refer to positive upgrading. Therefore, the term ‘transformation’ used by Tipple (1999) seems to be more suitable for this study.

2.2.5 Explicit Reasons of Spontaneous Transformation

There have been studies to relate the transformation incidents with different issues, for example, demographic, economic etc. This section does not go into details, but just mention them citing from literature.

2.2.5.1 Demographic Issues

Demographic issues have been universally recognized as major reasons behind transformation. Some of them were identified so far by researchers are:

- Increase in number of households (Tipple 2000)
- Children getting older (Seek 1983; Tipple 2000)
- Better arrangement of spaces to suit changing family needs (Tipple 2000).

2.2.5.2 Economic Issues

Economic issues come next. In houses where the owners are the only inhabitants, the demographic issues are the prime concern for transformation. However, some other researchers have found out transformation to be related to more other concerns generated from other issues also. Especially in houses where owners do not need the whole house for themselves, they can transform part of it for rental income which would benefit to their survival issues. Mentioning them as ‘economic issues’, Tipple (2000) studied transformation in different parts of the world where people transform a lot due to the need for extra income. They can be summarized as follows:

- To increase rental income in the form of habitable flats
- To increase rental income in the form of renting shops, or offices
- To increase income by transforming part of the house for home-based enterprises.

2.2.5.3 Other Issues

Several other issues were also found to be related to survival issues resulting in transformation. Since the studies on transformation are quite limited, and the contexts chosen for those studies do not have wide range variety of reasons to necessitate transformation, we got only the followings:

- To overcome cramped conditions
- Change of ownership.

2.3 Transform to Belong and to have Freedom

However, survival alone is not the sole motivator for transformation. Turner (1972) stated that people want to make own decisions on how they would live, It brings them satisfaction that brings a sense of self-belonging. Transformation incidents are often outcomes of such decisions, where a strive for achieving self-belongingness and freedom are expressed. These two phenomena were revealed more elaborately by his three laws.

Housing is a universal human activity, and transformation is one significant part of that. Irrespective of affluence, education level, cultural level, or whatsoever the status of a person, housing is one's essential activity. However, as Colin Ward stated, once this activity is defined as a problem, and a particular group of experts, bureaucrats or researchers are engaged in solving that problem, their very existence is a guarantee that the problem will not go away (Turner 1976). But the lessons from Turner, perhaps more than anyone else, have changed the way we perceive any settlements. Originally starting to learn mostly from illegal squatter settlements, he showed that from the poorest to the richest people, there are some universal truths about housing. This can be summarized through his 'second law' that dweller satisfaction is not necessarily related to the imposition of standards. Probably most important is the third law, which states that housing is infinitely more tolerable if they are the user's responsibility than if they are somebody else's.

Seek (1983)'s postulation of the housing stress curve actually synchronized with the third law, where he stated the level of tolerance is adjustable. Turner's statement also implied that needs apart from those generated from the family needs, are not strong enough if users have the responsibility of their housing. It is supplemented by the second law, where dwellers remain satisfied not with the standard in which they live, but with having the control over major decisions in design, construction, and management. Thus, only when group of experts starts dictating housing decisions to users in a way that strips them off their authority, only then that adds to the stress generated by family needs, and pushes the level of tolerance further lower to aggravate house improvements.

In his first law Turner (1972) already mentioned about the necessity for the dwellers of having the control the major decisions, and urges to let them become free to make their own contribution to the design, construction, and management. Significantly he did not imply that only the poor will be the ‘do-it-yourself’ house-builders, and the rich will hire the professionals. It is irrespective of the affluence, he reiterated. It is not the kind of idealization that might relieve public authorities of their responsibilities for providing housing aid for poor, but is that kind of idealization that does not deprive the poor off their control by trapping them inside the culture of mass housing and cultivate their poverty, which in terms become a barrier to personal fulfillment, and a burden on the economy.

2.4 Transform to Belong, and to Control

Habraken’s theory on territorial control can be related to transformation as well. Human beings play control games every day, probably every moment, and have a good grasp of control patterns in operation (Habraken 1998). Not only humans play the control games, they are expert at recognizing who controls what in the environment. Habraken’s attempts to show it in the built environment is harmonious to social scientist’s study on human behaviors which shows man needs a certain degree of power and also needs to express that power in order to establish his importance or existence. To show this power, man wants to have control on certain things around their surroundings. In a family, the head might show that power over the rest of the family in making certain kind of decisions, in an office the head of a department needs to show that power over the others in the department in the form of different decisions, and so on. However, there are levels of hierarchy and the actors need to understand that. Usually, if an actor at a certain level is happy with the designated boundary of the level, and is allowed freedom inside that boundary, it results in satisfaction. This is the same satisfaction that was revealed in Turner (1976)’s laws, which also leads them not to worry much about the standards, and allow them to control their design, construction, and management. However, satisfaction is not the only things at stake, that freedom also gives the actor a sense of recognition.

2.4.1 Horizontal and Vertical Levels of Control

Talking about the boundaries and levels, the definitions are not that straightforward. For example, in a family, a father and a mother might belong to the same vertical level of control, and at a higher level than their children while guiding them. But, they might control the children on mutually inclusive or exclusive issues. That means the horizontal boundary of the parents might be separated or overlapped, though they are in the same vertical level. And again, when it comes to respect their own parents (i.e. the grandparents of the children), they are in a

lower vertical level than that of the grandparents. Considering an organization in an office, the managers of different branches might be considered as acting on the same level while controlling the subordinated on a lower level, while the general manager is on the highest level.

However, control does not depend on formal relationship all the time. In fact, a set of previously unknown actors can immediately select a level, or thrive for getting to an upper level of control over the others, and the struggle continues until a clear boundary is set, and the actors are distributed. Moreover, the definition of levels and boundaries may change if violation of boundaries both at horizontal and vertical is tolerated by the upper level of actors, or the respective affected actors.

When it comes to housing, the owners become the actors who belong to the same level of control with their neighbors (owners). The authorities can be recognized as belonging to an upper level, while tenants in the house can belong to a lower level of control. In terms of transformation, regulations by authority indicate the do's and not-to-do's for the owners, thus controlling the actors at individual owners' level. However, a lapse in control or tolerance by authority might result in illegal constructions and a struggle for horizontal boundary with the neighbors.

2.4.2 The Five Levels of Control in Built Environment

Dominance and dependence can thus be expressed through behavior by people living in different vertical levels. Interpreting it into built environment, actions related to construction and transformation are expression of the actors concerned. Therefore it is important to identify the different vertical levels where all these actions take place. Habraken recognized five distinct levels and showed that nine types of dwelling can exist involving the combination of freedom in this five levels.

For example, the domed Nubian Mud brick house with no furniture or partitions inside allow actions only on two levels considering the inhabitants utensils as the first level, and the house itself as the second level. A common freestanding urban single family dwelling allows actions on four levels. A rented apartment allows dwellers to act only on partition wall level and utensil level. The self-built houses allow actions from owners on four levels. For this study, only two levels i.e. building level (BL), and partition level (PL) are considered as transformation refers to these two levels.

For each individual such house, transformation at building level are controlled by upper level of control i.e. building authorities; while transformation at partition wall level are controlled at a lower level by the owners. The tenants cannot operate beyond the furniture level according to the context, and the owners are the actors both at BL and PL.

2.4.3 *Habraken's Three Orders*

The other major significance in understanding the levels is to conceive the orders, because the orders help us understand human behaviors through physical forms and their transformations. The first order is more a physical thing where we get the idea of the physical elements that constitute a particular form. It shows how a system is built on several sub-systems.

However, the second order is more crucial when inhabitants are concerned. This is about the control of space rather than control of form. Habraken (1998) emphasized that the very act of inhabitation is fundamentally territorial. Territorial control might involve struggle for dominance between two persons either in same or different vertical level, and it can be explicit by their human interaction in the form of manner of conversation, or movement, but it is essentially the physical forms that sets the basis of the rule system of dominance.

For example, sitting uninvited on neighbor's lawn is a violence of formal order, but territorial order may allow it as it might be seen as a guest's behavior. But when one places garbage on neighbor's lawn, it is violation of both formal order and territorial order. The point is that we might set the rule as 'not to provoke neighbor', but it essentially involves the formal elements to identify the placement of that rule.

In another example, when the mother is trying to behave the teenage daughter, it is the house within which she can have more comfort to place that control rather than in a shopping mall, or in the playground. Even though the bodily presence is already a dominance in other places, but it is only so with the fact that they both belong to a house where the mother dominates the daughter inside. In case of a policeman, he can dominate any people anywhere outside, but needs a warrant to enter a home. So, in many ways, the formal order acts as the basic premise to exercise territorial order, though the border are not always the same. One more important point is that one's formal boundary may be limited, but territorial boundary can be large scale, just as man has physical community in the form of neighbors, but an intellectual community in the form of people of same profession etc.

From the other way round, a single formal boundary cannot guarantee one single territory. For example, a three bedroom flat, which currently denotes one territory as it is occupied by a single family, can become two territories if one room is rented to another person. Some other examples may include part of room becoming a shop, home enterprise, or a garage.

Again one form can represent various territorial structures just because of the user changes the habitations, and the access changes locations. Thus, not only the forms, but also the accesses can change the territorial control. A little transformation by changing the access may generate from the aspiration to control whatsoever, and can reflect traces of human behavior.

The importance of access is thus a very important issue in territorial control. While built forms show it very much explicitly, human social behaviors do not show it that explicitly. While two persons interact, one has to understand the point

of access the other has given one in order to interact. For example, a father at a higher vertical level, interacting with the son gives access through the point of obedience. If it is not understood by the son, his behaviors will not follow the rule set, and obviously the interaction will not go smoothly. But, when grown up, the same father can give access to the son as a friendly way, or when old, can give access as to asking for care, then the whole pattern of behavior changes.

Thus, the territorial control through built forms gives us a good perception about the territorial control of human behaviors. However, the control game moves to a new dimension when we consider the third order, which is introduced by Habraken as cultural order. According to him, built environment is all about the unspoken. These include regularities, customs, habits, conventions. Urban environment everywhere in the world has been set up with all kinds of unspoken rules as evident in non-urban settlements. But as density increases, implicit agreements starts to be formed, which eventually leads to formal codes or regulations. Shared knowledge becomes formalized. However, shared knowledge continues to gather on top of regulations. Thus we can always find traces of unspoken, which can only be grasped through some patterns, types, and systems. They are the same patterns that Alexander (1977) suggested to find out in order to analyze the vernacular. Thus typological patterns in urban tissue becomes the evidence of those patterns, and the sole reason behind growing up a collective pattern is that people have to co-exist, and thus need to respect one another, and thus they have to share their knowledge and as a result express in a similar way. This is just like we need to speak the same language to co-exist as a society, to dress similarly, or to eat similar food. In build forms, or in territorial control, they should develop some patterns when they need to co-exist. It does not mean new styles cannot generate. Actually new style can generate only within the cultural order because people always experiment on their own properties, just like trying some new food one day, or try a new outfit, and if they work they become gradually the part of the custom. But the point is that the whole process must go without disrespecting the existing custom. That is what the spirit of cultural order is.

2.5 Transform to Fulfill Emotional Issues

Finally, the emotional issues play a major part in human behavior. When it comes to housing decisions, emotions are not less significant. Emotions are studied more in psychology, rather than in architectural studies. But if architects can comprehensive knowledge on how important emotions role are in housing decisions, their approach to design would be a bit different. Studies related to housing decisions where emotions and psychological issues were placed at high stake are a rarity. One interesting study by Marcus (1995) showed how emotionally a dweller can be attached with their houses. She emphasized the fact that house-building is a self-expression by studying an evolving house, both its form and space.

But she also noticed that self-expression in any form may not come that easily. To express ourselves in the material world is not a light work; rather it involves a strong and constant desire. In case we are searching traces of emotion through the transformation, the other needs which are much stronger, and probably more influential behind transformation, might hide the trace of emotion behind that particular transformation incident. Marcus focused on the furniture level and the utensil level, on which a user of that space has the control. She highlighted several interesting attributes that came out through the arrangement or re-arrangement of furniture or personal utensils. In many cases she studied, people through these arrangements tend to express numerous emotional issues such as recognizing childhood home in the current home, one's problematic relationship with home, particular points of comfort in the house, to accommodate a lost part of the self etc. While these emotional behaviors were stated by the dwellers through their interview, the other way of analysis was to look at the arrangements, and find the emotional values behind them. For example, particular houses showed couple in conflict with contrasting images of home, order versus chaos in couple's behavior, home as a status, creating a fantasy dwelling and so on. Studies showed that once a dweller finds a territorial control over a particular space one calls it home, be it a part of the room, a whole room, or the whole house, one rests one's self there, and try to express one's self through the elements in hand. The degree of the territorial control restricted them to show their emotion at transformations in partition or building level. However, this study opens up the possibility to investigate role of emotions in transformation in houses on higher levels as well.

Devakula (1999) showed that being a trustworthy participant observer can also be a useful method of psychological analysis even in architectural studies in order to investigate the role of the emotions behind behaviors. By observing for days, and sharing living with them, the need to interview for hours answers becomes less significant because the information not only come through the inhabitants, but also from the researcher's own understanding as a member of the family. The role of the researcher is thus very significant in collecting data regarding emotional issues, and then analyzing and interpreting them. In data collection, ethnographic methods work well when the researcher becomes participant observer. In data description, phenomenology works well, while hermeneutics suggest a deep method of interpretation. Such a combination might just work in order to interpret human behavior through transformation through the window of human emotions.

2.6 Summary: You Are How Your House Transforms

People transform for various reasons. Alexander (1979) mentioned that the basic search of humans lie behind explicit description of the patterns. Explicit patterns form the 'gate' helping us to find the implicit 'way' we are looking for. Afterwards, we leave the gate behind, and only then we can follow the way. The search for the implicit human behavioral patterns behind transformation patterns is thus

the second part of the study, but studying the explicit physical patterns and behavioral patterns of transformation become the precondition of that study just as forming the gate is a precondition to find the way. Transformation of course is just one of many ways human behavior can be explained or can be tried to be explained. However, through this section, an attempt was made to relate transform incidents as an expression of human behavior.

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Living with Transformation

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