

Rooted Futures: Reimagining the Designed Environment through Local Ecologies, Cultural Memory, and Situated Pedagogies



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“In the tropics, space is not only built—it is grown, weathered, remembered, and lived.”

The designed environment in Southeast Asia is undergoing a quiet but profound transformation. As architecture continues to grapple with climate emergency, postcolonial critique, digital overreach, and cultural amnesia, this issue of *MUHON* convenes a collection of papers that propose an alternative paradigm: one grounded in ecological intelligence, cultural continuity, and pedagogical renewal.

From native trees in Mt. Makiling to the philosophical walk through the streets of Intramuros, from the shopfronts of Marikina to the affordances of tropical materials, these works insist that design is not universal—it is situated. Together, they invite us to build not for abstraction but for climate, context, and community. They speak of futures that are not speculative fantasies but deeply rooted possibilities.

Ecological Intelligence: From Forest to Footpath

In a world of engineered landscapes and imported species, Albert Piñon, Zenaida Galingan, and Madonna Danao return to the forest—specifically, the richly biodiverse slopes of the Mt. Makiling Forest Reserve. Their study catalogs the layered canopies of native species with the intent to reintroduce these into the urban landscape. Beyond botanical mapping, the paper performs a political gesture: reasserting the value of native ecology in design, countering the dominance of ornamental exotics often used in city planting schemes.

Complementing this ecological lens is Patrick Gozon’s survey of *Plumeria pudica* in Siquijor. His work navigates plant migration not as a horticultural curiosity, but as a socio-environmental phenomenon—tracing how one species becomes embedded in domestic gardens and public spaces, signaling a shift in aesthetic values and regional identities.

These papers remind us that landscapes are cultural—they record human choices, colonial residues, and evolving environmental ethics. They propose that in order to green the future; we must first see the forest within the city.

Architecture as Cultural Infrastructure

Dominique-Anne Caranto and David Xander Lacson’s *Ang Bagong Salamyaa* reimagines Marikina’s shoemaking heritage as a spatial and cultural engine. By blending commerce, craft, and communal engagement into a hybrid third place, their proposed Shoe Complex challenges the conventional typologies of retail and industrial zones. Here, architecture becomes economic strategy, cultural storytelling, and social glue.

Meanwhile, Lawrence Intalan brings attention to Angono, Rizal—a town where cultural history meets the threats of urban development. Through the use of space syntax analysis and participatory mapping, Intalan shows how formal data and community narratives can intersect to guide conservation. He demonstrates that heritage is not simply what stands the longest, but what is remembered, used, and moved through.

These works expand the role of architecture beyond the object—toward a platform for cultural continuity, adaptive reuse, and economic revival.

Design for Heat, Air, and Human Experience

Climate change has made thermal comfort a global concern, but in the tropics, this has always been a primary design challenge. Jean Michael Diosma and collaborators offer a comparative study of *The Corner House* (Manila) and *The Commons Thonglor* (Bangkok), showcasing how passive strategies—shading, cross-ventilation, material choices—can result in aesthetic and sustainable comfort. Their hybrid method (quantitative testing + user feedback) underlines the value of user experience as a metric of performance.

Expanding the environmental lens into behavioral psychology, Crisostomo Miguel

Ordoño et al. introduce the theory of affordances to tropical material design. From steel to wood, they investigate how materials “speak” to users—inviting or deterring action. Their paper reveals that materiality is not just technical, but communicative and embodied, shaping not only what space *does*, but how it is *felt*.

Together, these studies reframe thermal and material design as a site of experiential ethics—where comfort, function, and perception must converge.

Pedagogy, Memory, and the Theoretical Turn

At the core of design is thought—and the structures that shape it. Leonido Gines Jr. confronts the limitations of architectural theory education in the Philippines. He critiques the lingering hegemony of Vitruvian, neoclassical, and Western modernist frameworks, calling instead for a transdisciplinary, provincialized, and Southeast Asian-centric pedagogy. His work is a call to intellectual independence: to rethink what—and whom—we cite, teach, and emulate. This need for rooted creativity also animates Sarah Moussavi’s defense of freehand drawing. In an age where digital rendering has become normative, she reasserts the pencil as a tool of thought—cognitive, haptic, cosmological. Her advocacy for the hand-drawn line is not nostalgic but critical: a reminder that design begins in the body, not the software.

Finally, Jovino Miroy leads us into Manila through the lens of heritage and philosophy. In *Manila as Sophie’s World*, he proposes the philosophical walk as a method of spatial engagement—connecting place, wonder, marginalization, and critical reflection. His heritage map of Intramuros is both literal and metaphorical: a reminder that to walk the city is also to think the city, and to think the city is to remake it.

Conclusion: The Ethics of Situated Design

Each of the contributions in this issue of *MUHON* reflects a core proposition: that architecture and landscape, at their best, are acts of care—for place, memory, materials, and the communities they shape.

This care is not passive nostalgia. It is an active, design-driven politics that insists on the specificity of context: the heat of tropical air, the lineage of native trees, the social history of shopfronts, the pressure of pedagogical imperialism. It resists flattening. It reclaims roots. In reimagining futures that are deeply embedded, adaptive, and contextually astute, this issue offers not just scholarship—but scaffolding: for new curricula, new practices, and new relationships between people and place.

We invite you, our readers, to walk through this issue as you would a familiar city—with curiosity, memory, and wonder.