

# Engage the Public in Conversation

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**Design professionals are used to talking.** We have been trained to present our design concepts, to convince our audience that we have the best intent and solution to their spatial issues. We have become so engrossed in becoming experts in design, computation, and architectural planning that we sometimes fail to notice that we have been listening to our own voice all along. In the process, we are forgetting the art of listening.

**Conversation requires the listening.** It is essential to listen to what is being said and what remains unsaid. The eloquence of conversation goes beyond just sending the message across, but by having a dialogue that brings engagement from both parties at the same level. Being (building and/or landscape) architects do not mean that they have the formula of knowing what the public's spatial needs are, but rather they should have developed the skills to facilitate this conversation. The ubiquity of architectural space has made it one of the most familiar disciplines to the public, albeit often misunderstood. Its familiarity has made some people too confident to speak of the anatomy of architecture, diagnose its malady, and even prescribe its "recovery". It has often become a topic of discussions but rarely the topic of conversation. A lot of prescriptions have been offered, but most of the times what they are describing are the symptoms, notably that of society, but not the main issue.

We easily get impressed by majestic and massive structures. We see them jutting out of the skyline, usually without respect to the surrounding buildings. We often expressed amazement upon seeing meticulously designed post-modern landscapes carved out of natural wetland. What we are witnessing is the lack of conversation between our work and the context. We often deal with our work as projects, oftentimes devoid of context and substance, but impressive. Do we deserve a city that lacks coherence and legibility just because we are in the regime that promotes aggressive building frenzy? Or do we just find meaning out of chaos, hoping that there is redemption at the end? The academe has never been absolved of this obsession as it rides this trend of accelerated development at the expense of engaging different stakeholders in the process. Environmental governance does not limit stakeholders to humans and present generations but also considers those that lack the ability to be present and without the capacity to

eloquently put their agenda on the table. Those involved in the education sector are also guilty in propagating the ego of the "expert" as they mold students to constantly break from the mold of the ordinary and to be the merchant of the "new". We sometimes forget that we do not have the monopoly of ideas and that there are other sources of information beyond theories and professional business cards.

This year's edition of MUHON readjusts its lens as we engage our public in a conversation. Our public ranges from the marginalized sector, to the church, and even to the everyday pedestrians. Lanyi discussed the efforts and the issues of the church in heritage conservation in his article "**Cebu Archdiocesan Commission for Cultural Heritage of the Church - in Service of Professional Heritage Conservation**". He exposed the misconceptions in the practice among the different stakeholders and how inefficiencies can be addressed by coming up with a set of guidelines. The ever pressing issue of lack of open spaces is the subject of Morales' paper "**Role of Cultural Development and Public Space Usage for the Poor: Impact to Government Policy and Community Relations (A Philippine Case Study)**". With very limited accessible open spaces, conflicts and overlaps often exist among various stakeholders. Many purveyors of cultural activities have been identified to contribute to the vibrancy of these open spaces. However, their spatial needs are often neglected due to various reasons, mainly due to the lack of appropriate policies and proper appreciation of these stakeholders.

The multi-nodal development of Metro Manila, driven mainly by private sector initiatives, has resulted to a metropolis that is plagued by mobility and economic inefficiency. The lack of government programs to address these issues has led to more economic opportunities for private developers. Bouquet's "**Landscape of Mobility in Metro Manila's Business Districts**" traced the evolution of transportation-driven developments and emphasized the case of Metro Manila. Many transportation nodes have been transformed into new townships, vertical in orientation, leading to the densification of residents and gentrification of different districts. Liu and He, on the other hand, focused on a specific district in Tianjin, China, on their paper "**Pedestrian Environment Optimization of Xiaobailou District of Tianjin**". With their meso-analysis

on pedestrian behavior, they pointed out the importance of the presence of choice and the sense of security in order to encourage pedestrianization.

The public market often serves as the center of social and community activities in various settings. It serves as the convergence point of people from different socioeconomic strata, making it important to optimize this very strategic space. Manegdeg, et al's "**Public Market Energy Intensity and a Design of an Energy Efficient, Effective, Healthy and Vibrant Public Market Infrastructure**" assesses energy intensities of public markets. Part of the study is the proposal for a public market design which would result to total lower energy intensity. Related to this is the popularity of the use of solar bottle bulbs as an alternative light source for residences without access to electricity. Bot and Redulla's "**Distribution of Light Intensities of a Solar Bottle Bulb**" tested the solar light bulb in order to verify its performance in terms of the light quality it provides in many of underprivileged areas.

In recognition of the changes in the landscape of the discipline, the college has inaugurated its new building, which would hopefully open more conduits and venues for collaboration with its public. Former UP Diliman College of Architecture Dean Mary Ann Espina sat for an interview with the editorial staff to discuss the challenges and the process in the making of the new building. The special feature highlights the importance of the setting in the process of creation and in ushering the future of the university and the college. The new building served as the subject for this edition's cover, which was selected from the photography contest launched by the College. This is part of the effort of the College to engage the public in the process of realizing this journal. It has also launched ARCo or the Architectural Research Colloquium to provide additional venue to share their thoughts, researches, and ideas, and to set for future collaboration among faculty, students, and any interested stakeholders. We want to open the conversation with our public and break the walls that have separated the institution from its people. It is important that the institution re-examines its role in society and how it can reflect the changing dynamics of the different themes under the discipline of the designed and built environment.

The different settings - from the macro scale metropolitan area, to the meso-scale urban district, down to the micro scale residential house - require a proper and effective interface with our public. The papers of this edition of Muhon emphasize the need to listen more to make the designed and built environment discipline responsive and relevant. We need to go outside and open ourselves to conversations in order to avoid being confined in an echo chamber of "experts" and decision-makers. As information becomes available and accessible in a seemingly marketplace of ideas, more voices require to be heard, and be included, so that we heed the call and be conversant where it matters.