Editorial

Shift in the Urban Condition

Gerard Rey A. Lico, Ph.D.
galico@up.edu.ph

Our lives have drastically changed and continue to adjust as we navigate a world gripped with the dangers of the novel coronavirus. The ever-evolving nature of COVID-19 has fostered an environment that proves more and more precarious, leaving many of us vulnerable to the inhospitable realities of urban life. The prolonged need for vigilance towards our surroundings has made us more aware of the issues our urban condition faces. Environmental issues become more pronounced as the threat to human life is compounded with every onslaught of calamity. Bureaucratic red tape becomes more exasperating as we witness the birth pangs of automated government processes, only to be forced to take our spot in line at government offices—social distancing measures notwithstanding. The yearning for the outdoors necessitated more open spaces, better connectivity, and people-centric development is more apparent as we are encouraged to conduct our activities out in open air.

These circumstances necessitate the reexamination of how we interact and interface with our spaces—and challenge us to improve them. This volume of Muhon offers a refreshing glimpse into the potentials of the Philippine designed and built environment, offering analyses on various aspects of the urban condition and possible policy and design interventions to address certain issues within.

One of the issues presented pertains to efficiency of materials utilization. Some industrial by-products from metal production eventually contribute to the larger issue of waste management. Manoloto's research on slag cement as a partial substitute for Portland cement in concrete presents the possibilities of using a waste by-product of iron and steel production as a suitable and economical additive for local construction. The addition of slag cement contributes to increased strength and lower costs for concrete construction, while contributing to a better utilization of resources from metal production processes.

Streamlining of government bureaucratic processes is one of the main arguments for the shift to systematic automation. Parametric design and visual programming software offer a viable solution to aid in this automation process, especially for architectural safety and code compliance evaluations. Lopez and Balane explore the adaptability of Building Information Modeling (BIM) visual programming software as an automated code compliance check mechanism for R-1 or residential construction projects. The use of parametric design strategies for streamlining administrative processes is a crucial tool which would ensure better code compliance, while aiding local building officials in making construction approval procedures and code compliance more efficient and effective.

Flooding has been a perennial problem in the Philippine urban environment. Various measures over time have been implemented in varying degrees, and an encompassing evaluation of these interventions are now necessary. Rinen and Maki present a comprehensive overview of flood control and mitigation strategies implemented in the Philippines over the course of its history, analyzing the advantages and pitfalls of each major intervention presented in the paper. This is reflected along with the socio-political situation of each period presented, offering a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by the country regarding flooding and what kinds of strategies have been prioritized overtime. The authors later offer recommendations for improved response and avoidance of such calamities for future implementation.

Informal communities are the most vulnerable sectors of the city, and often the target of relocation activities. Many such relocation projects however have failed due to their lack of consideration for the community's socio-spatial dynamics and its economic implications. Sicam's comparative study on the dynamics of spatial organization of resettled urban informal communities vis-à-vis their relocation sites emphasizes the often-forgotten economic implications of spatial transplantation in the lives of informal communities. Springboarding

from Ulingan in Tondo, Manila and St. Martha Estate in Bocaue, Bulacan as case studies, the study underscores the need for more holistic design and planning strategies that go beyond addressing the need for security of tenure—taking into consideration the innate abilities of communities to self-organize and foster communal networks for shared capacity development.

Finally, this pandemic has placed most students to do online learning and work-from-home arrangements for employees, which contributed to less traffic in major cities like Quezon City. the Philippines ranked ninth in terms of the poor traffic situation in our country. Thus, the government should also have a plan on how to reduce traffic in the metropolis including traffic noise, which can cause health risks to commuters due to stress.

The study by Del Barrio, Sebastian III, Goduco, and Bo-ot tackle the potential of the Traffic Noise Model version 2.5 (TFNv2.5) in simulating and predicting traffic noise pollution levels using three sites within Quezon City as case study. Traffic volume count from the selected key locations were obtained to determine the impact of traffic noise. As cities develop through urbanization and in-migration, noise pollution can worsen. Computer programs like the FHWA Traffic Noise Model could offer innovative ways to solve or lessen the noise pollution during traffic.

Overall, this volume of Muhon proposes shifts in our urban condition, giving us possibilities that can be achieved through judicious and participatory design approaches, planning, and policy framing. Shaping the designed and built environment is grounded in the intersection of these processes. As we are faced with the uncertainties of the new norm, we are challenged to hope and create a better future framed in space for future generations.