
Wellbeing in Future Urban Landscapes in the City of Manila

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Abstract

Wellbeing in future urban landscapes are distributed and connected green spaces intertwined with architecture and urbanism as networks and lattices of urban biodiversity. Wellbeing and spirituality in the Filipino culture relates to the calm and peace that can be found in natural surroundings and access to basic needs.

This study aims to forge partnerships with major stakeholders, identify best practices and consult with experts on possible wellbeing interventions in Manila's future landscape. Furthermore, this study intends to utilize existing community resources to design grassroots innovations for wellbeing in the current and future tense. A series of focused group discussions and community meetings links collaborative efforts in engaging the different stakeholders in the study area.

Results show that a linked green infrastructure is best achieved from a bottom-up initiative reinforced by technical experts in showcasing grassroots best practices that sustain programs on wellbeing in future landscapes. Devolving leadership at the barangay level strengthens cooperation of public, private and other agencies. Information and communication technology is vital in maintaining linkages during this time of multiple disruptions. An openness to multi-sectoral collaboration and extending technical expertise to communities are deeply rooted in the Filipinos "bayanihan" spirit.

Keywords: wellbeing, future, urban, landscapes

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I. Manila's Urban Landscape

The Spanish flu (1918-1920) legacy of universal health care (Spinney, 2017) calls for similar attention in optimizing urban infrastructure for healthy spaces. The "bahay kubo" (Filipino indigenous house) connects the local song to health and nutrition that is descriptive of Filipino wellbeing and landscape. Each Filipino home used to be self-sustainable in their simple way of life. The bahay kubo song strings a number of vegetables that are present on the site of the modest dwelling, such as eggplants, pumpkins, onions, tomatoes, garlic, ginger and others. Twenty first century Manila has evolved settlements into tight worker's lodging spaces for ease of mobility to workplaces. Hence, the loss of horizontal green spaces and taller vertical infrastructure development has eaten up most of the remaining urban landscape.

Manila draws its name from nilad or nila? flowers that used to be abundant along the banks of the Pasig River. Today there are limited landscaped spaces as most developers considered the highest and best use of Manila's land area in commercial developments rather than parks and open spaces. The covid19 pandemic has drawn those who can to stay away from crowded urban places and go back to their hometowns with more healing landscapes of open spaces. Most dormitories are now almost unoccupied with the work and study from home arrangement.

Manila as the country's capital has grown beyond the scale of its locality into a megacity that has been identified as one of the densest places. It would be a rare occasion to find an uninhabited space in the city (Jensen, S., Hapal, K. & Quijano, S., 2020) before the pandemic. There may exist underutilized and abandoned areas in the vicinity that may easily transform into productive ventures, given the high gravitational leverage Manila has with the neighboring cities in the metropolis.

España Boulevard corridor in Sampaloc Manila is one of the major choke points of traffic as a gateway from Quezon City to the University Belt and the country's capital. This is a predominant dormitory district where a number of transients used to prefer to stay to avoid the daily commute to school and work. The central place theory captures the urban hierarchy of Sampaloc with its access to services and employment opportunities provided by urban centers (Cattaneo, Nelson, & McMenemy, 2020).

II. National and Local Collaborations

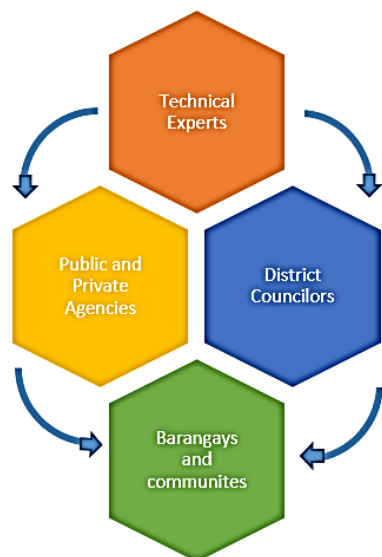


Figure 1. Initial Study Framework
Source: Villanueva C. 2021

The initial framework constituted a top to bottom paradigm where national agencies and district councilors were first engaged to streamline wellbeing in future urban landscapes to the community level. The Manila North District of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the United Architects of the Philippines (UAP)-Manila Atelier, the office of Sampaloc District Councilor Atty. Wardee Quintos and Science of Identity Training and Educational Center (SITEC), a non-government agency (NGO) are among the agencies consulted in this endeavor. Partnerships with these mentioned agencies had been previously established with similar undertakings in the vicinity of the study area on the transformations of urban space in community and pedestrian wellbeing (Villanueva, 2019). These existing linkages were revisited with possible collaboration for this study.

A consultation meeting with the Philippine Association of Landscape Architects however advised to strengthen ties with communities by forging a memorandum of agreement with the LGU to gauge their reception to proposed community gardens in the urban landscape.

Similarly, the Philippine Institute of Environmental Planners (PIEP) also advised strengthening partnerships with the local government units (LGUs) as the proponent in sourcing possible funding for the undertaking.

Currently, there are thirty-two barangays identified in the study corridor of España Boulevard. Contact information for the barangays were validated with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and Manila Barangays Bureau (MBB) websites. The use of popular social media tools was utilized to communicate the

intention of the study with the local government units (LGU).

Findings show that data of barangay officials are more updated in the DILG website than the MBB. The MBB website was created during the previous administration of Former Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada and has yet to be updated by the succeeding administration. The MBB does have a Facebook page with phone numbers on the different districts of Manila to direct specific geographical concerns. The use of social media was widely used by the current administration. Facebook can establish mutual connections who can mediate ties with the barangays for the purpose of this study.

III. España's Barangays

Smart cities are spurred by rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (Yang & Lam, 2021). During the course of cold communication through emails, text messages and Facebook messenger, there had been only three who responded and only one of them was most engaging. Of the three who responded one sought a face-to-face meeting. Another one has already been relieved of her duties. Some barangays though not included in the list were engaged through mutual connections but have experienced challenges in finding spaces for possible landscape intervention and seek collaboration with nearby institutions who may have potential areas for community gardens.

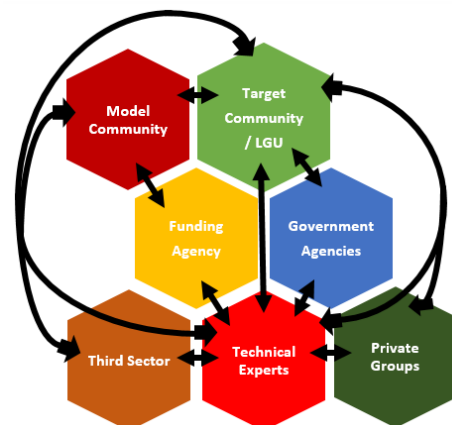


Figure 2. Cyclical and Multi-Sectoral Collaborative Framework
Source: Villanueva C. 2021

The most engaged LGU is Barangay 530 under the leadership of Honorable Barangay Chairwoman Marjorie L. Melchor. Chairwoman Melchor immediately responded to communication sent via email through a text message. Their barangay has participated in various greening programs and has even been recognized locally for their efforts in sustaining these programs. Barangay 530 is located at the entrance of the eastern corridor coming from Quezon City. It is predominantly characterized by low-rise residences and not as congested as the LGU's further down

the corridor. This has yielded them a more relaxed landscape unlike their contemporaries in the district.

IV. Grassroots Innovation

The need for good urban governance to draw on an improved understanding of the potential of localities', place-based social capital building, and new social practices are emerging in local third sectors (Imai H., & Ji Y, 2021). During the covid19 pandemic a number of communities have intensified their urban gardening programs to promote good health and wellbeing in their locality. The benefits of these landscape elements are of exponential values despite the frugal set up. Barangay 530 has improvised containers from old tires, food tubs, pet bottles and others.

In urban landscapes, resources may prove to be expensive and difficult to maintain. This requires strengthening of value systems in resource management by reviewing the community lifestyle and waste materials with the possibility of extending lifecycle to products and containers. Equipment to speed up composting of biodegradable wastes can also be considered to lessen transport of soil and planting medium from other locations. In other communities, youth movements have initiated similar vertical walls as barangay markers in their localities. These programs are well received as best practices by communities and in social media.



Figure 3. Container Gardening

Source: Barangay 530 Sampaloc, Manila, 2020

The project weaves together multiple forms of expertise, works on a local scale and in the present time. Urban landscapes distributed and connected green spaces intertwined with architecture and urbanism are networks and lattices of greenspaces. Green initiatives restore the pride in communities as a way of building their capabilities to provide underutilized spaces for food and nourishment.

The pandemic has recently called our attention to the possibility of combining short-term and local solutions to long-term and large-scale solutions. Similarly, at this time of global health anxiety, people worldwide have found respite in sustaining gardens in their proximities. In Manila, several people are living in tight spaces that have little possibilities for gardens. Community gardens can be a way of educating households on the importance of healthy and sustainable living. A multi-sectoral discussion with barangays engage them interactively on community efforts to set up gardens in their own communal landscapes.

Forging partnerships with businesses and institutions fronting these pop-up gardens instill community-based values for wellbeing outcomes. Trees and plant species have varied functionality from promoting good health, mitigating pollution, flooding, urban heat island, and promoting biodiversity.

The innovations come from blending landscape urbanism with well-being, design for health, and introducing the tradition of collective gardens, common spaces and fruit-bearing trees for health and social wellbeing. Engaging barangays, various leaders through the use of social media is a popular way of reaching communities. Health and wellbeing can be observed in a whole new set of hygiene and distancing requirements, such as anti-density, or vertical stacking of landscapes. Softscapes and hardscapes for floor patterns and markers can be introduced with recycling materials as queues on public distances. Public distancing can be queued by the location of potted plants and the transitioning of tall and short plants to delineate health and sanitation requirements of spacing.

V. The New and Better Normal

Ideas of linking the ecological capacity and social opportunities of an area have Frederick Olmsted and Ebenezer Howard as some of the first to explore this relationship (Mell, 2008). A green ribbon for jogging and relaxing, through revitalizing boulevards as "gardens of earthly delights" is the major thrust of this study. The initial linear model consists of interconnected green corridors, has evolved with model growth centers to a hub and spoke distribution. The hub-and-spoke configuration now exists with some communities taking initiatives in transforming pocket parks where possible at this current pandemic stage.

Breaking up concrete in a non-intrusive manner with boulevards lined with landscape features to make it more conducive for non-motorized transport options. Predominant concrete features in the barangays that can be altered to introduce local plant life that is most welcome in the season of the new and better normal.

Wellbeing in Manila's future landscapes is deeply connected with its cultural and historical past with the abundance of blooms, fruits where communities had their own sustenance for basic needs. Figures 25 and 26 show a wooden house that has a green wall at the corner of the street and plant boxes at the second floor window sill. With minimal horizontal space for gardens, this 20th century home has domesticated how natural and built surfaces can co-exist in architecture and urban space. The increasing risks brought by the disruptive neglect of biodiversity calls for healing urban gardens to be integrated in all spaces and developments. A multi-sectoral approach that is equitable and inclusive connecting all communities supports how future cities can respond to future risks in the new and better normal.

Future directions of the study intends to cover as much of España Boulevard as possible with edible, medicinal and ornamental local species of plants. The vision for this study extends from España's gate way toward the Pasig River. This will traverse Lerma Street and Quezon Boulevard. Unlike the España-Lerma corridor, Quezon Boulevard has very few plant boxes for landscaping. Balconies and green walls can be a form of vertically stacked local plant life in communities. In the absence of available ground space, vertical layers could also be an option for healthy spaces. Evidence shows frugal recycling of waste materials in communities, can innovate resources for greenspaces and health, and wellbeing of all.

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