

ProSPER.Net LP Assignment #3

Submitted 25 February 2019

By Pamela Gloria Cajilig (Private Sector)

Curiosity Design Research/RMIT School of Architecture and Urban Design

Target 11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

Featured city: Quezon City, Philippines

Introduction

Quezon City is where I was born and raised, and where I now run a design research business from afar. Quezon City is known as a residential area within Metro Manila and is considered the seat of the Philippine national government. It is also home to several major universities, as well as business centers which house business process outsourcing companies catering to clients overseas. Quezon has a land area of 16,112.58 ha and a population of nearly 3 million as of 2015.ⁱ Its population maybe smaller than that of Melbourne (4 million), but the latter notably occupies a much larger land area of 999 ha.ⁱⁱ Additionally, individuals aged 19 and below comprise nearly half of Quezon City's population, and there are around 100,000 older adults aged 65 and up.ⁱⁱⁱ While there is an almost even split between males and females in the total population, female older adults outnumber their male counterparts by almost 60%.^{iv} There are roughly 53,000 persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the city, and those with orthopedic and psychosocial disabilities account for greatest percentages.^v

Quezon City has been the richest city in the Philippines with assets totaling P59.556 billion, but it fails to register within the top 10 cities in the country with the highest income per capita.^{vi vii} In comparison, Makati City (the country's economic capital) ranked first in 2009 with P16,535 average monthly income per capita, while Santa Rosa City (an industrial hub) in the tenth place averaged at P6,618; the national average is P3,951.^{viii ix} Notably, the local government estimated the number of informal settlers in Quezon City at 950,000 – nearly a third of the city's total population.^x Inequality thus prevails despite the relative wealth of the city.

The Quezon City Government aims “to provide quality service which will make Quezon City an ideal community where people live, work, and do business in a hospitable, progressive & peaceful environment.”^{xi} It prides itself in being awarded several times over for local governance, having won the 2018 Most Competitive City in the Philippines and the 2018 Seal of

Good Local Governance (SGLG), among other awards.^{xii} The local government has further launched itself as a “Green City” through a Green Building Ordinance, a Plastic Bag Reduction Ordinance, and a Green Fund sourced from consumer fees collected from plastic bag usage in major commercial establishments.^{xiii}

Reflection

Understanding Melbourne in the context of SDG Target 11.7 necessitated walking around the city to experience its green spaces. As someone who had just moved to Melbourne to study at the time of the ProSPER Leadership Programme, this is one aspect of urban life that I immediately enjoyed. Whenever I need a break from work or have free time on weekends, I can easily walk from my house to any of the three parks near me (Carlton Gardens, Lincoln Square, and Argyle Square), which only takes 15 minutes at the most. Notably, I have been warned to stay away from public parks after midnight as well, given a recent crime in Princess Park. However, being in the park during the earlier hours of the evening has never made me feel alarmed.

In contrast, parks in Quezon City are more difficult to access. The Quezon City Memorial Circle (QCMC) and the Ninoy Aquino Parks and Wildlife are 20 minutes away from my home by car, or 30 minutes by public transport. Moreover, public transport options in Quezon city to visit green spaces are not that convenient either. There is a pedestrian underpass from major public transport stops to QCMC, but it is dingy and does not have adequate lighting. Meanwhile, there is a lift from the ground level to the underpass, but I have never seen it work. Consequently, this could deter pedestrians, including older adults and those with physical disabilities (and especially those with orthopedic visibilities), to visit the park. On the other hand, there is an alternative to get to QCMC without using the underpass. This entails jaywalking across a roundabout that is eight lanes wide, as some pedestrians tend to do. In a country where many motorists feel a great deal of entitlement over pedestrians, this could be a harrowing (not to mention illegal) experience.

While I feel relatively safe traversing this underpass during working hours (when I am likely to be surrounded by other pedestrians), as a woman I would definitely refrain from using it at night and off-peak hours. My work in women’s rights has made me too aware of how public spaces, such as parks, tend to become venues for sexual harassment. Indeed, Quezon City has led other cities in Metro Manila in terms of enforcing policy that protects women in public spaces, specifically through its Anti-Catcalling Ordinance.^{xiv} However, this needs to be complemented with urban design initiatives that improve the safety of public spaces, such as having adequate streetlights and creating venues that encourage social interaction. Consequently, developing safe and accessible public spaces for all includes creating an environment that is safe both physically as well as psychologically.

Meanwhile, our examination of Melbourne’s public spaces has led our ProSPER group to conclude that development of “green” spaces in city can be too anthropocentric. In the Royal Botanical Gardens, we observed there was greater proportion of flat, grassy, and landscaped land compared to forested land. This is great for picnics, but this comes at the price of having less space for flora and fauna to thrive. The same could be said for Quezon City’s sparse green

spaces. First of all, there is no mention of the protection of natural habitats in Quezon City's local government website.^{xv} After all, maya birds and acacia trees don't vote, and the continuing poverty of the city's constituents also means that governance oriented towards multispecies concerns will probably be interpreted as being tone-deaf rather than as a long-term strategy for well-being. Moreover, through the decades I noticed that the development of green spaces in Metro Manila (specifically in QCMC circle) has been characterized by increasingly paving land that was previously grassy or forested. Certainly, this has allowed room for more social sustainability, through the creation of livelihood centers and social activities (such group exercises for senior citizens on weekends). However, I suspect that had the management been able to strategically plan around the original foliage, the park could draw more foot traffic and income by accommodating a wider range of activities, while becoming a more prosperous and healthier place for the city's human and non-human constituents.

Furthermore, efforts to create Quezon City's efforts to relaunch itself as a "green city" have been object-oriented, rather than outcome-oriented. The local government quantifies its "green buildings" as evidence of achieving this goal.^{xvi} However, constructing "green buildings" are just means to an end. While creating energy efficient structures lessen the strain of construction and usage on the environment, their potential to contribute to sustainable development remains unoptimized if developers fail to consider broader and more long-term outcomes, such as increased well-being or preserving biodiversity. Sustainable green spaces, after all, is not about creating more things; it is about fostering harmonious and fair relationships so that all manner of life can thrive long into the future.

Additionally, I learned from our ProSPER session with city planning officials that the local government of Melbourne has been imagining and addressing scenarios that assume human population sizes beyond five million, amidst decreasing availability of land. One proposed project involving public space includes the creation of green building corridors punctuated with vertical and rooftop gardens.^{xvii} These could replicate the sociality provided by public parks while performing several ecological functions: providing shade, cooling the city (and thus helping reduce energy consumption during warm weather), cleansing the air, and maintaining biodiversity. This plan could work in Quezon City (assuming the public and private sectors manage to align their intentions), which faces the challenge of a projected population increase of 30% by 2020, and which would amount to four million inhabitants living in a land area that is only 12% the size of Melbourne.

Meanwhile, Melbourne, too, can learn from Quezon City. The universities in Quezon City have become quite active in educating the public about the value of green public spaces. For example, the University of the Philippines opens the roads of its tree-filled campus to the public on weekends. As a frequent visitor of the campus, I observed that it designates its major avenues as vehicle-free zones, which allows joggers, bikers, dog-walkers, and skateboarders to co-exist in this space. It also regularly holds open-air performances and exhibits by artists based in the campus, and these events are well publicized. Furthermore, the University of the Philippines is a popular spot for nature-lovers, especially birdwatchers.^{xix} Its green spaces have long been a center for community life, which consequently extend its educational reach. Notably, the University of Melbourne has numerous green spaces that remain empty on weekends. There is certainly plenty of opportunity for it to become a more integral part of the community by sharing

its built and natural environment. As a nature enthusiast, I have appreciated the ordinary yet diverse range of flora and fauna in the University of Melbourne, which appears to have a number of existing assets for green public space advocacy.

Conclusion

To summarize, my time in Melbourne under the ProSPER Leadership Programme has certainly introduced me to a more and critical and holistic view of the drive for sustainable cities. Specifically, I have become familiar with aspects of sustainable cities that I initially took for granted, such as the tendency of green public space projects to be anthropocentric and object-oriented. I still have three more years to finish my PhD program at RMIT University in Melbourne, which consistently tops the list of the world's most "livable cities". I consider this as an incredible opportunity to gather ideas about green and inclusive public spaces, to spot the challenges and ironies that underpin visions of sustainable development, and to later apply the lessons I am bound to learn when I eventually return home to Quezon City.

Endnotes

- ⁱ World Population Review. "Quezon City Population 2019 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)," November 28, 2018. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/quezon-city-population/>.
- ⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. "Greater Melbourne : Region Data Summary." Government website. Australian Bureau of Statistics, January 30, 2019. http://stat.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary®ion=2GMEL&dataset=ABS_REGIONAL_A_SGS&geoconcept=REGION&datasetASGS=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS&datasetLGA=ABS_NR_P9_LGA®ionLGA=REGION®ionASGS=REGION.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Quezon City Local Government. "QC Household Population by Sex and Age Group 2015-2025." Government website. Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government, 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/qc-profile/280-qc-household-population-by-sex-and-age-group-2015-2025>.
- ^{iv} Ibid
- ^v Quezon City Local Government. "QC-PWD Programs and Thrusts." The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government, 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/qc-profile/278-qc-pwd-programs-and-thrusts>.
- ^{vi} Pinoy Money Talk. "Top 10 Philippine Cities: Per Capita Income, Tax Revenues." Finance blog. PinoyMoneyTalk.com, July 16, 2012. <https://www.pinoymoneytalk.com/philippines-city-per-capita-income/>.
- ^{vii} Marcelo, Elizabeth. "Here Are the Philippines' Richest Cities, Provinces and Towns in 2016." News and opinion. philstar.com, October 16, 2017.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/10/16/1749451/here-are-philippines-richest-cities-provinces-and-towns-2016>.

- viii Pinoy Money Talk. “Top 10 Philippine Cities: Per Capita Income, Tax Revenues.”
- ix Araja, Rio. “Quezon City per Capita Income Still Low, Says Belmonte.” News and opinion. Manila Standard, November 12, 2018. <http://manilastandard.net/news/national/280336/quezon-city-per-capita-income-still-low-says-belmonte.html>.
- x Aranja, Rio. “New Census Needed for QC Settlers—Joy.” News and opinion. Manila Standard, March 18, 2018. <http://www.manilastandard.net/lgu/ncr/261267/new-census-needed-for-qc-settlers-joy.html>.
- xi Quezon City Local Government. “Vision/Mission.” Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government, 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/vision-mission>.
- xii Quezon City Local Government. “LGU Awards.” Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government, 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/lgu-awards>.
- xiii Quezon City Local Government. “Mayor.” Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government, 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/mayor>.
- xiv Talabong, Rambo. “Garbage Collector Fired for Catcalling Female Student in QC.” News and opinion. Rappler, December 20, 2017. <http://www.rappler.com/nation/191796-garbage-collector-fired-catcalling-female-student-quezon-city>.
- xv Quezon City Local Government. “Mayor.”
- xvi Quezon City Local Government. “Green Building Ordinance.” Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government, 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/green-building-ordinance>.
- xvii City of Melbourne. “Green Our City Strategic Action Plan 2017-2021.” City of Melbourne, June 2017.
- xviii World Population Review. “Quezon City Population 2019 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs),” November 28, 2018.
- xix Maia, Bird. “BIRDING IN U.P. DILIMAN.” Blog. *EBON* (blog), November 30, 2011. <https://ebonph.wordpress.com/2011/11/30/birding-in-u-p-diliman/>.

Bibliography

- Aranja, Rio. 2018. "New Census Needed for QC Settlers—Joy." News and opinion. Manila Standard. March 18, 2018. <http://www.manilastandard.net/lgu/ncr/261267/new-census-needed-for-qc-settlers-joy.html>.
- Araja, Rio. 2018. "Quezon City per Capita Income Still Low, Says Belmonte." News and opinion. Manila Standard. November 12, 2018. <http://manilastandard.net/news/national/280336/quezon-city-per-capita-income-still-low-says-belmonte.html>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2019. "Greater Melbourne : Region Data Summary." Government website. Australian Bureau of Statistics. January 30, 2019. http://stat.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary®ion=2GMEL&dataset=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS&geoconcept=REGION&datasetASGS=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS&datasetLGA=ABS_NRP9_LGA®ionLGA=REGION®ionASGS=REGION.
- City of Melbourne. 2017. "Green Our City Strategic Action Plan 2017-2021." City of Melbourne.
- Maia, Bird. "BIRDING IN U.P. DILIMAN." Blog. *EBON* (blog), November 30, 2011. <https://ebonph.wordpress.com/2011/11/30/birding-in-u-p-diliman/>.
- Marcelo, Elizabeth. 2017. "Here Are the Philippines' Richest Cities, Provinces and Towns in 2016." News and opinion. Philstar.Com. October 16, 2017. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/10/16/1749451/here-are-philippines-richest-cities-provinces-and-towns-2016>.
- Pinoy Money Talk. 2012. "Top 10 Philippine Cities: Per Capita Income, Tax Revenues." Finance blog. PinoyMoneyTalk.Com. July 16, 2012. <https://www.pinoymoneytalk.com/philippines-city-per-capita-income/>.
- Quezon City Local Government. "Green Building Ordinance." Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government, 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/green-building-ordinance>.
- Quezon City Local Government. 2018. "LGU Awards." Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government. 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/lgu-awards>.
- Quezon City Local Government. 2018. "Mayor." Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government. 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/mayor>.
- Quezon City Local Government. 2018. "QC Household Population by Sex and Age Group 2015-2025." Government website. Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government. 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/qc-profile/280-qc-household-population-by-sex-and-age-group-2015-2025>.
- Quezon City Local Government. 2018. "QC-PWD Programs and Thrusts." The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government. 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/qc-profile/278-qc-pwd-programs-and-thrusts>.
- Quezon City Local Government. 2018. "Vision/Mission." Government website. The Official Website of the Quezon City Local Government. 2018. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/vision-mission>.
- World Population Review. 2018. "Quezon City Population 2019 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)." November 28, 2018. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/quezon-city-population/>.
- Talabong, Rambo. 2017. "Garbage Collector Fired for Catcalling Female Student in QC." News and opinion. Rappler. December 20, 2017. <http://www.rappler.com/nation/191796-garbage-collector-fired-catcalling-female-student-quezon-city>.