

URBANIZATION AND NATIONAL POLICIES IN THE PHILIPPINES¹

by

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I. THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

The Philippines is situated some 1,000 kilometers southeast of the mainland of Asia. It stretches more than a thousand kilometers north to south between Taiwan and Borneo lying on the western side of the Pacific Ocean. North of the country are the Republic of China (Taiwan), the People's Republic of China and Japan. On the west are the countries of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. On the south and southwest are the states of Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia.

Geographically, the Philippines is composed of a group of 7,107 islands and islets with a total land area of 300,000 square kilometers. The two largest islands are Luzon and Mindanao with a land area of 105,708 square kilometers and 95,587 square kilometers, respectively, which together constitute two-thirds of the total land area of the country. (Please see Map 1, Map of the Philippines.) The country has a varied topography which is endowed with rich natural resources. It is undergoing a transformation from a basically agricultural economy to an agro-industrial pattern of development. As of 1980, it has a total population of 47,914,017 and an arithmetic density of 160 persons per square kilometer.

II. CONCEPT OF URBANIZATION

Urbanization is a complex socio-economic process which is characterized by the movement of people from communities which are concerned mainly with agriculture to communities where the activities are non-agricultural in character. Two forms of urbanization are recognized. One refers to the geographic concentration of population and performing non-agricultural activities, such as manufacturing, trade, management, transportation, governmental and other services. The second aspect is the diffusion of urban values, behavior, organizations, and institutions which are usually referred to as modernization.

The concentration of people in a limited area brings about the formation of towns and cities. This is accompanied by a structural transformation in the economy and changes in the life-style of the population in the new places of settlement. Modern geography concerns itself with the spatial aspects of urbanization, its forms and patterns of growth

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MAP 1. MAP OF THE PHILIPPINES

as well as the features brought about by the different historical, socio-economic and physical factors.

In the development of towns and cities, the areas that have locational or material advantages serve as the centers of population concentration which provides linkage with their surroundings from which spatial processes and relationships in the economic, social, and political activities are generated. Such an evolution of urban areas with their corresponding peripheries within a nation creates spatially defined boundaries which have considerable bearings and implications on the various aspects of the country as a whole.

In defining an urban place, the Philippine Census and Statistics (now National Census and Statistics Office) adopted, since 1970, the following criteria:

- I. In their entirety, all cities and municipalities having a population density of at least 1,000 persons per square kilometer.
- II. Poblaciones or central districts of municipalities and cities which have a population density of at least 500 persons per square kilometer.
- III. Poblaciones or central districts (not included in I and II), regardless of the population size, which have the following:
 - (a) Street pattern, i.e., network of streets in either parallel or right angle orientation;
 - (b) At least six establishments (commercial, manufacturing, recreational and/or personal services); and
 - (c) At least three of the following:
 - (1) A town hall, church or chapel with religious services at least once a month;
 - (2) A public plaza, park or cemetery;
 - (3) A market place or building where trading activities are carried on at least once a week, and
 - (4) A public building like a school, hospital, puericulture and health center or library.
- IV. Barrios (now barangay) having at least 1,000 inhabitants which meet the conditions set forth in III above, and where the occupation of the inhabitants is predominantly non-farming or non-fishing.

The above is a succinct presentation of the official version of an urban place which can be found in several publications of the Census Office (e.g., NCSO, 1973: 2-4). It can be noted that in defining an urban place, the total population, population density, and economic structure of an administrative unit are taken into account. The term *poblacion* as used in the definition is the central business area of the municipality and the *barrio* is now called *barangay* which is the smallest political unit in the country.

TABLE 1. TOTAL, URBAN & RURAL POPULATION IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THEIR PERCENTAGE CHANGES: 1903-1975

Year	Total Population (in thousands)	% Change	Urban Population (in thousands)	% Change	% of Total Pop'n.	Rural Population (in thousands)	% Change	Urban-Rural Growth Differences
1903	7,635		1,000		13.1	6,635		
1939	16,000	2.09	3,451	3.52	21.6	12,550	1.79	1.73
1960	27,088	2.52	8,072	4.10	29.8	19,015	1.99	2.11
1970	36,684	3.01	12,069	4.02	32.9	24,616	2.56	1.46
1975	42,071	2.99	14,857	4.2	35.2	27,660	2.36	2.1

Source: National Census & Statistics Office, Census of Population, Manila.

III. NATIONAL URBANIZATION TREND

A. LEVEL OF URBANIZATION

At the start of the present century, in 1903, the Philippines had a recorded total population of 7.6 million with only 13.1% or 1 million people, living in the urban areas. A mere seventy-two years later, the total population of the country increased by more than five times, reaching 42.5 million in 1975. During the same period, the urban population of the country increased by almost fifteen times, reaching 14.8 million and representing 35.2% of the country's total population in 1975. Such changes in the total and urban population indicate a significant shift in the urbanization level that the country has attained for the period.

Closer examination of available data reveals however, that such an urban growth for the country was not fostered in a sustained fashion. Table 1 shows that the total population has an accelerated growth from 1903 to 1970, slowing down only a little in the 1970s. Significantly, the rate of urban growth during the 1960s slowed down and picked up once more during the 1970s. The rural population on the other hand, registered considerable growth throughout the period considered. If the growth difference between the urban and rural populations was further considered, it becomes apparent that the rate at which the urban population grew slowed down during the 1960 to 1970 period.

Another interesting aspect of the country's urban growth that can be pointed out is the fact that contrary to common impression, total urban growth in the 1960 to 1970 period was mostly generated by urban natural increase (64%), with only 11% of the total due to net rural-to-urban migration. By contrast, during the 1939 to 1960 period, net rural-to-urban migration contributed almost a quarter (23%) to total urban growth while natural increase accounted for just over one-half of it.³ Lastly, such urban growth for the country was not spread evenly across all cities but was only prevalent in a few of the larger urban centers, notably in Metro Manila. While the national urbanization pattern presented a sluggish growth rate, Metro Manila stood out for its steadily increasing share of the nation's urban population from 26% in 1903 to 35% in 1975. (See Table 2.)

B. REGIONAL PATTERN

In the regional urbanization pattern, Southern and Central Luzon are more urbanized when compared with the other regions of the country. This can be explained from the fact that their closeness to Metro Manila have given them the opportunity to receive the impacts of modernization process. They also serve as the hinterlands of the primate city which gave impetus to their socio-economic development.

³ Pernia, E.M. 1976. "A Method of Decomposing Urban Population Growth and Application to Philippine Data" Papers of the East-West Population Institute, No. 41, Honolulu: East-West Center.

TABLE 2. URBAN POPULATION, LEVEL, PERCENTAGE OF NATIONAL URBAN POPULATION & ANNUAL GROWTH RATE: METRO MANILA, 1903-1975

Year	Urban Population (thousands)	Level of Urbanization %	Percentage of National Urban Population	Annual Rate of Growth
1903	256.7	76.9	25.7	—
1918	371.1	87.1	28.7	2.36
1939	903.3	90.3	26.7	4.55
1948	1,526.1	97.1	29.4	5.51
1960	2,426.2	98.1	30.0	4.17
1970	3,952.6	100.0	32.8	4.90
1975	5,212.0	100.0	35.1	5.68

Source: Bureau of Census & Statistics (various years), Philippines.

Note: Metro Manila, as used in the discussion, refers to the area covered by the four cities of Manila, Caloocan, Pasay and Quezon plus 13 municipalities namely: Makati, Mandaluyong, Navotas, San Juan, Malabon, Marikina, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Pateros, Pasig, Taguig, Muntinlupa and Valenzuela. They cover 636.0 square kilometers.

The other more urbanized regions of the country are Central and Western Visayas. Historically, Cebu which is located in Central Visayas is the first city that was established by the Spaniards when they colonized the Philippines. Because of its central location and rich natural resources, Cebu City became the trading and transportation center of the region.

Among the three major sub-divisions of the country, Mindanao is the least urbanized and industrialized. This may be due to the fact that it is farthest from the seat of the national government where decisions for socio-economic development are being made. It is also the least populated region of the country and much of its natural resources remain untapped.

It is also noted that the national trend changes considerably when Metro Manila is excluded from the urbanization picture of the country. If the Metro Manila region is set aside, the regional patterns over time explain further the faltering rhythm of national urbanization. All regions exhibited decelerating urbanization growth rates in the 1960-1970 period, and this was especially pronounced in the less urbanized and frontier regions of the country which were practically stagnant.

Table 3 below shows a more detailed picture of the urban population trends for some selected cities of the Philippines for the period of 1960 to 1970. Outside of Metro Manila the cities of Cebu and Davao rank next in the degree of urbanization.

Summarily, national urbanization, along with structural transformation of the economy, proceeded slowly. Metro Manila, however, experienced unremitting population growth and concentration (due mainly to immigration) because of its almost solitary growth. The other regions of

TABLE 3. POPULATION, PERCENT OF URBAN POPULATION & ANNUAL GROWTH RATES FOR SOME SELECTED PHILIPPINE CITIES: 1960-1970

Area	Population (thousands)		Percent of Urban Population		Average Annual Growth Rate
	1960	1970	1960	1970	1960-1970
Metro Manila					
Manila	1,139	1,331	13.9	11.0	1.6
Quezon City	398	754	4.9	6.2	6.6
Caloocan	146	274	1.8	2.3	6.5
Pasay	133	206	1.6	1.7	4.5
Others (municipalities)	906	1,839	11.1	15.2	7.3
Total MMA	2,722	4,404	33.3	36.5	5.0
Major Chartered Cities					
Davao	226	392	2.8	3.2	5.6
Cebu	251	347	3.1	2.9	3.3
Iloilo	151	200	1.8	1.7	3.4
Zamboanga	131	200	1.6	1.7	4.3
Bacolod	119	187	1.5	1.5	4.6
Basilan	156	144	1.9	1.2	0.8
Angeles	76	135	1.0	1.1	5.9
Butuan	80	131	1.0	1.0	3.3
Cagayan de Oro	69	124	1.0	1.1	6.0
Cadize	89	124	1.1	1.0	3.4
Batangas	83	109	1.0	1.0	2.8
Olongapo	45	108	1.0	1.0	9.2
San Pablo	71	106	1.0	1.0	6.0
Other urban areas	3,841	5,246	47.0	43.5	3.2
Total Urban	8,168	12,071	100.0	100.0	4.0
Total Philippines	27,088	36,684	—	—	3.0

Source: Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1960 & 1970, Philippines.

the country, on the other hand, remained depressed particularly the less urbanized and frontier regions. Thus, the overall picture that emerged is one of markedly unbalanced urbanization which led to a primate structure in the country's hierarchy of urban centers.

IV. PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

As pointed out earlier, Metro Manila dominates the urban sector of the country, accounting for 35.1% of the national urban population as of 1975. It contains about 5.2 million inhabitants in 1975 and has been growing at a rate of 5.6% per year. Such dominance is illustrated by the fact that close to two-thirds of the country's manufacturing activity, not to mention government offices, major educational institutions and other major activities, are concentrated in this area. Not surprisingly, therefore, it has continuously drawn population from other regions of the country, including the more urbanized ones. This has subsequently led to the evolution of a primate structure in the Philippine urban scene, whereby a stratum of small towns and cities is dominated by Metro Manila, with only a few intermediate-sized cities present in between. Metro Manila's population is almost four times bigger than the combined total of the next four largest cities of the country, namely, Davao, Cebu,

Zamboanga and Iloilo. Moreover, it must also be noted that Metro Manila has traditionally been dominant not only as a population center of the country but also as a source of growth within the national economy, as evidenced by its considerable share in secondary and tertiary production outputs. Such a predominance of Metro Manila over the other areas of the country have generated considerable pressures on the resources of the region to absorb its growing population, so much so that there has now been a growing concern for such urban problems such as congestion, inadequate living conditions, and services, as well as unemployment. In the wake of such problems, there arose a growing need to try slowing down population growth in Metro Manila and create a more balanced national urban structure by focusing attention on the development of other urban centers of the country.

One regional center where significant growth can be expected is Cebu City in the Visayas, which is one of the larger cities of the country. Cebu, with the contiguous cities of Mandaue, Lapulapu, Talisay and Cordova, is now becoming rapidly urbanized due to government and private efforts to tap and develop its mining and industrial potentials. It has the second most varied manufacturing base in the country, and its strategic location and accessibility make it the trading center for the central part of the archipelago. The Visayas have contributed heavily to migration to both the Metro Manila and Mindanao regions and it is expected the on-going development of infrastructure and services in Cebu will promote the growth of the region and alter such pattern of migration.

On the island of Mindanao, the growth of two regional centers have been given priority attention. These centers are Davao City in the South and the Iligan Bay area in the North. Davao, the largest city in Mindanao, and one of the largest in the country, is basically oriented toward agriculture. Its potential for urban growth rests on its becoming a commercial and trading center given its rich hinterland where investments in cash-crop plantations are being developed. The Iligan Bay area, on the other hand, includes two closely linked cities, Iligan and Cagayan de Oro. This region has significant industrial growth potentials, as evidenced by the establishment of a number of major industries within the area. Cagayan de Oro City presently has Xavier University and several good secondary schools which offer an education base to build on. Iligan City for its part, with its adequate source of hydroelectric power and growing industrial base, could develop specialized facilities for technical and machine-trade skills. The Iligan Technical Institute was established to provide skills and technological services. Also, the Mindanao State University in Lanao can provide the trained manpower needed for industrial development of the region.

It is expected that by pursuing a more active policy of decentralization, the primate urban structure of the country can eventually be altered to bring about a more balanced hierarchy of urban centers throughout the national territory.

V. URBANIZATION AND NATIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Cities or urban areas are essentially noted for the concentration of industries and leading economic activities, aside from population, by virtue of the locational, material and demographic advantages that they have to offer. The processes of urbanization and industrialization are therefore expected to trigger development in the city's hinterland through the linkages that can be generated between the leading industries located in cities and the economic activities within the peripheral areas. Thus, the growth that is fostered in the cities of a nation is expected to exert an impact on the surrounding areas, leading to an increase in productivity in the agricultural sector of the country. It has therefore been commonly accepted that urbanization has a direct bearing on the planning and development efforts of a nation's economy. Basic to such a relationship is the presence of a functional linkage and complementarity in terms of economic activities between the city and its hinterland. Moreover, there ought to be an effective distribution and spatial integration of urban centers within the national territory in order to make more efficient the diffusion of benefits accruing from the growth and development of cities.

The primate structure resulting from the urbanization process in the Philippines has seriously affected the rate of growth and development of the country. Whatever benefits have been derived from the urbanization of the country have been confined to a very limited area, focused primarily in Metro Manila. If a more balanced growth throughout the country is to be fostered, and bring a more equitable distribution of wealth over the different areas, the unbalanced urban structure of the country should be effectively altered by enhancing the urban growth of other areas.

VI. URBANIZATION AND NATIONAL POLICIES

In line with the objective of 'decongesting' Metro Manila and to distribute the population more evenly, so as to attain a better quality of life, the government has adopted the following policies:

1. Dispersal of industries. Under the program, the establishment of industrial estates and export processing zones are being made in the different regions of the country. Prohibition of the construction of highly polluting industries within a radius of 50 kilometers from the City Hall of Manila is being enforced.

2. Dispersal of educational institutions. Universities and colleges are encouraged to establish branches in other parts of the country so that students from the provinces need not go to Metro Manila to acquire tertiary education. Toward this end, the enrollment in colleges and universities in the metropolis has been limited.

3. Countryside development is given more emphasis so as to improve the lot of the rural population and provide them opportunities for employment which will in turn discourage them from migrating to the city.

4. Other growth centers are being developed through a process of government decentralization and regionalization. The decision making process is advanced which will contribute in hastening the socio-economic development of the country.

5. Mindanao, which is the least urbanized among the three principal sub-divisions of the country, is now given priority attention in infrastructure and agro-industrial development.

6. Recently, the planting of at least 64,000 trees within Metro Manila as a joint project of the Ministry of Human Settlements and the Ministry of Education and Culture was launched. This will restore the ecological balance and provide a more healthy environment to the inhabitants of the primate city, and

7. The construction of low-cost housing under the National Housing Authority and the PAG-IBIG Housing Project of the Ministry of Human Settlements will go a long way in solving the critical housing problems in the urban centers of the country.

With the various programs being initiated by the Republic of the Philippines, it is expected that by the year 2000 the benefits of growth and national development will be more evenly distributed in the different parts of the country.

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