

VALUES THAT SHAPE THE SOCIAL MORPHOLOGY OF THE TOWN
CENTER IN BINAN, LAGUNA (PHILIPPINES)

By

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Abstract

This study was conducted to identify how daily use rituals affect function, values, and symbolic meanings residents attach to the town center of Biñan Laguna, Philippines. If values and meanings affect the transformations of the built environment, how are social and cultural values related to the temporal and spatial use of the town center? Furthermore, what are the symbolic meanings that the residents attach to the town center?

This exploratory study attempts to investigate the morphological changes of the physical and social aspects of the town center's built form. The physical aspect focuses on the function or use and morphological changes of the town center. The social aspect focuses on the symbolic value and associational meaning of the town center to town residents.

Other studies on plazas and town centers have only concentrated on site observations, personal interviews, surveys, and urban morphological studies respectively. While these methods show significant results, the focus becomes isolated either only on the users or the built environment or users and the built environment in a confined synchronic analysis. This exploratory study will bridge the gap between the users and the built environment by employing the diachronic analysis using the following methods: personal interviews, site observations, behavioral mapping, and urban morphological analysis. The first three methods deal with the present, and the last method deals with the past, all of which would provide a basis of understanding for future decisions on the built environment.

The results show that a hierarchy of religious, economic, and political values is related to daily use rituals of the town center. Likewise, the spatial use of the town center shows its relevance to these rituals. While the results of values show that religion is on top of the hierarchy, the results of symbolic associations reveal that the town center is synonymous to the public market, hence, placing economic activity on top of the hierarchy.

This research can provide a model for further investigation and stimulate more comprehensive studies of users' values, meanings, and use of other plazas and town centers since data on Philippine plazas and town centers are so limited. This study could also serve as a model for inventory and collection of data resources for similar towns in the Philippines on which information is extremely deficient. Designers and urban planners can utilize this research project as a source of information and understanding for future design and planning initiatives that focus on social morphology of town centers undergoing suburbanization.