

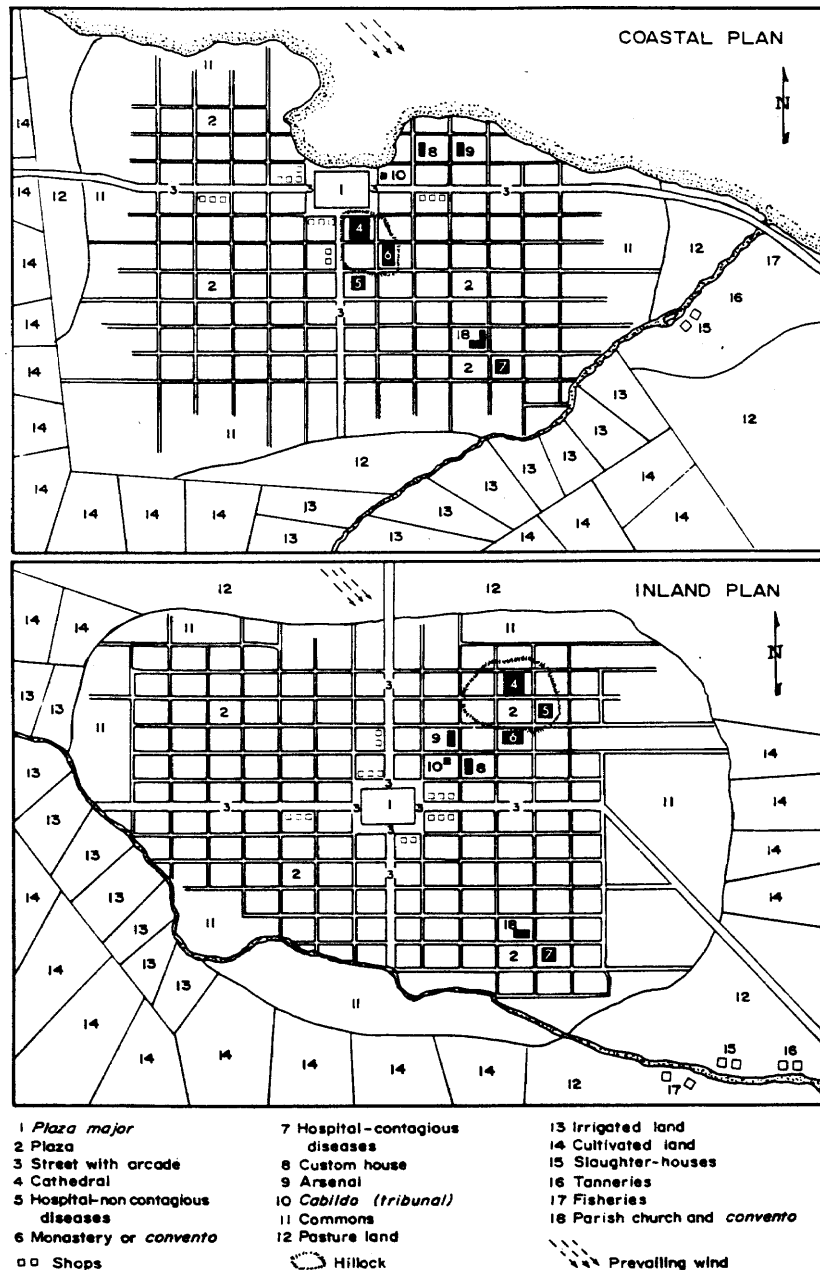
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The cultural landscapes of Philippine town centers offer an excellent prospective for exploring the relationship between community values and its functions. The town center in Biñan, Laguna, for instance, is “still traditionally the market center where farmers and traders from adjacent towns and provinces come to market their products” (NRV IV Southern Tagalog City Region Planning Services 1983, 6). Also, it is the only town center in the Province of Laguna that has a continuous 24-hour cycle of commercial and trading activities. In this case, the diversity of people and functions of the place at different times of the day warrants an investigation to understand the town center’s value in relation to the community’s daily life.

In the Philippines, the traditional layout of towns and cities is a manifestation of Hispano-Filipino urbanism stemming from the Spanish colonial settlement that began in 1571. Notable uniformity in the original layout of cities and town settlements is still evident throughout the country. The Spanish authorities envisioned colonial towns and cities as critical instruments of territorial occupancy for the purpose of economic exploitation, regional administration, and religious conversion. During the Spanish regime, the urban morphology of these settlements was exemplified by a *plaza mayor*, the grid street pattern, the presence of a Catholic Church, a *convento*, and larger houses of the *principalia* located on the perimeter of the central square. The familiar siting of the marketplace and school within the central area and the rural ambiance of residential *nipa* houses and adjacent gardens are all evident (Reed 1990).

Consequently, the brief interlude of American occupation (1896-1942) focused on health, educational services, and economic growth leaving the established built form of many towns intact (Dungo 1998; Fisher 1964, 703). Presently, the plaza is also referred to as ‘*bayan*’ in Tagalog, literally referring to the word “town.” These plazas are the nuclei of economic, religious, and social activities, as well as political and military parades.

While there are studies of colonial towns and plazas in Latin America and Southeast Asia that demonstrate similar functions and activities for plazas (Elbow 1983; Hart 1955; Low 1993),



Source: Reed, Robert. Colonial Manila. Geography v22. 1978. P42.

Figure 1. Hispanic Urban Plans Based on the 1576 Ordinance

it is not an assurance that functions and activities for the town centers in the Philippines are completely the same. Factors such as urbanization, modernization and economic globalization, are slowly transforming traditional colonial town centers in the Philippines into contemporary commercial and business districts. Such districts are commonly dominated by commercial structures caused by changing land uses that convert residential land uses to commercial zoning,

giving rise to physical changes as well as changes in the use, activities, and social interaction occurring in the built form. The result is a congruent change of the traditional town identity, character, and values manifested that are particular of Filipino town settlements.

In the Philippines, the traditional form and identity of the town center as influenced by the Spanish tradition, is reflected in the central plaza. The central plaza, in the Spanish period, functioned as the physical and functional nucleus of the community, an arena for public function, and the center for exposure of monumental edifices. This Hispanic traditional structure was specifically designed to assimilate the indigenous people to regard it as the seat of colonial power. The idea was a colonized urban environment expressive of the values of monumentality, power, hierarchy, and beauty (Mojares 1998). With the rise of suburbanization, liberation from colonization, introduction to capitalism and commercialization in the 20th century, the traditional form of the town center has also changed accordingly. This parallel movement shows the retention of the hierarchical position of religion in relation to government, as it paved way to important economic activities (Mojares 1998).

At issue are the morphological transformations of the town center and community values. Rokeach defines value as a culture's criteria for desirability and selection in action. "When explicitly conceptualized, they also become criteria for judgement, preference and choice" (Rokeach 1979, 16). It is an abstract concept that governs our tangible (e.g. goods, built form, and other physical forms) and intangible (e.g. beliefs, social justice, character, and other abstract ideas) world." In tandem with physical changes is the inevitable reshaping of the social morphology of the town center due to changing values brought by external factors.

Also, social morphology examines the relationship between the social form and structure of a community and use of the built environment. Social morphology is envisioned in the community's open public spaces, streets and lanes, buildings, and other areas of social interaction. For example, the function of the market provides a type of social interaction that weaves together the social fabric of community life. Aside from the necessity to purchase goods, the market becomes a place for an adult social group to gather and communicate neighborhood news, gossip, and ideas. Similarly, streets become playgrounds for children and congregation

areas for adults. In Havana Vieja, Cuba, the vitality of certain streets is defined by recreational activities like baseball games or *pelota* participated in by young children and adolescents during the afternoons. Adults, on the other hand, pass the time in conversation, observing other people walk by, or watching the game. Although the street is not specifically designed for such activity, the built form still facilitates the structuring of social groupings. This proves that the function of the built form can be modified to address a more pressing need to achieve social relationships.

Although research has been done on plazas in North America, Europe, and Latin America, very few studies on plazas in the Philippine context exist. At the same time, while geographers and sociologists have studied cities in the Philippines and Southeast Asia (Reed 1990), few studies have focused on Philippine plazas and small town settlements (Hart 1955). Some studies have focused on the functional aspects of plazas, but very little research regarding values and meaning of the urban form has been done. The present body of knowledge shows the relationship of values and the built environment.¹ In Europe for example, reverence towards cathedrals not only represents religious values, but also social and personal values. The various celebrations of life events held in this place such as birth, marriage, death, and the expression of arts are all evidence of these human values attributed to a place (Bonkovsky 1986).

Because values are deeply rooted in culture, they are the basis for the decisions concerning our behavior in the built environment. The desire to cluster into a homogeneous group in very defined areas in neighborhoods, towns and cities (e.g. suburbs) is a result of values working their way in the formation of the built environment. Suburban housing development is an example of a homogeneous clustering of people that may indicate a group sharing common neighborhood preference, value for open space, safety for child rearing, environment quality, and so forth. Thus, the concepts of values, images, and meaning become a vehicle for the user to communicate and shape the built environment through attitudes, lifestyles, social grouping, activities system, and perception of meanings (Rapoport 1977).

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 of Binan,*

Laguna Philippines? Furthermore, what are the symbolic meanings that the residents attach to the town center?

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the values and their symbolic or associational meanings. In addition, the change of use of the town center will be examined by looking at urban morphology.

Moreover, The objective of this study attempts to identify and determine the values the residents assign to the daily use of the town center, the symbolic meaning of the town center's built environment, and the morphological changes in the urban fabric of the town center.

Furthermore, this research uses two approaches: the qualitative method and urban morphology. First, the qualitative method investigates the physical use, values, associational meanings, and behavior of the respondents through personal interviews, site observations, and behavior mapping. Secondly, urban morphology analyzes how towns and cities evolve over time. Urban morphology analyzes site plans, lot subdivisions, land use, and building configuration from 1911 to the present.

The random sampling of household selection is within a 2-km. radius from the town center that encompasses *barangays* or barrios. The 8 selected *barangays* were chosen to represent the denser population, mixture of social class, educational attainment, income level, and length of residency as a result of the diverse local economic base of the town.

The use of content analysis determines the results of the responses from the interview. Also, this research examines and compares the data from key informants to community development studies done for the town by the national agency. This comparison extends from the key informants' goals and objectives to the community's desires and preferences. Content analysis identifies the themes for the categories that will be ascribed to value, associational meaning, and function (Babbie 1998; Sommer & Sommer 1991).

Also, composite maps of the site observation and behavioral maps are compared and

¹ Built environment refers to the changes people made in the physical environment such as building, infrastructures and so forth

layered with the results of the survey questionnaire to find commonalities or differences between the participants' values and symbolic associations/meanings. This method likewise indicates places that are physically and/or visually used.

The urban morphological analysis of the built context including building density patterns, lot subdivisions, open spaces, streets, and alleys indicates changes in the function of the place, ownership, and land-use which may have occurred over time. Physical modifications can reflect changing functions and community values towards 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 will focus on the function or use and morphological changes of the town center. The social aspect examines the symbolic value and associational meaning of the town center to town residents.

Moreover, studies (Hart 1955; Elbow 1983; Watts & Watts 1986; Low 1998) on plazas and town centers have only concentrated on site observations, personal interviews, surveys, and urban morphological studies. While these methods show significant results, the focus becomes isolated either 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 and the diachronic analysis of time through combining qualitative method and urban morphological analysis.

Furthermore, this research can provide a model for further investigation and can stimulate more comprehensive studies of users' values, meanings, and use of other plazas and town centers since data on Philippine plazas and town centers is limited. This study could also serve as a model to inventory and collect data 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.

(Lang 1994).