

Complexity and Contradiction in Cities: Some Insights and Impressions on Barangay Poblacion in Makati

Poblacion in Makati is the new place to be in Metro Manila—receiving more than the regular share of buzz and social media posts than most other places in the Metropolis. Cool, hip, hot and youthful, it naturally exhibits characteristics that many developments and commercial districts either aspire for or avoid—one that became popular by word of mouth, one that has an identifiable sense of place, one that defines and is defined by a unique micro-culture, vibe, crowd and attitude: if you don't like it, then this is not for you.

The phenomenon that is Barangay Poblacion in Makati is best viewed as a study in contrast and context, seen against the sheen and formality of Makati's Central Business District. The Poblacion area has been the latest scene for youthful revelry—gritty, raucous, crowded and fun, joining the likes of Hong Kong's Lan Kwai Fong or Kuala Lumpur's Changkat Bhukit Bintang.

Big and Small, Old and New

Barangay Poblacion, despite being the newest happening place in the metropolis, is actually is the oldest settlement of the City of Makati, predating the Central Business district by a couple of generations and is also known as Makati's Heritage District. Poblacion has been the seat of government of Makati since its founding. A community that has seen the growth of the city since Spanish colonial times, it is a mix of old neighborhoods, exclusive residential villages and upscale mixed-use developments such as Rockwell Center and A. Venue Event Mall. More recently, the barangay has become a popular nighttime destination, offering dining and entertainment venues that have organically grown along its narrow streets. Small residential buildings have converted into pubs, restaurants, B&Bs and hostels and have nurtured a counterculture among young office workers and tourists that contrast sharply with the colder business environment of the Makati Central Business District, located just a few blocks away. On one hand, one sees the randomness of the Poblacion where the daytime image of sleepy mom and pop stores and boutiques by day transform into a mix of pubs and clubs by night; on the other hand, the hard-nosed, snooty area of Central Business District with its multinational headquarters, glass facades, orderly row of towering buildings and people in ties and suits.

Night and Day

Makati is still essentially a day city, with the rest of Mega Manila (with the exception of a few business districts) essentially its bedroom community. This is evidenced by the large difference between its daytime and nighttime population: The city has registered resident population of over 582,000 in 2015 while its daytime population ratio has been estimated at a minimum of 3.2 Million to 4.2 Million in 2010, which is 6 to 8 times of its night-time population during weekdays. (*Source: Makati City Transportation Study, 2012*). A significant proportion of this daytime population are workers in Central Business District, who comprise the tidal exodus of people that commute daily to and from their place of work.

Makati's previous exclusionary zoning disallowed retail, dining and entertainment in the CBD except in Ayala Center. This has triggered the organic growth of restaurants, bars and nightlife at the fringes of the business district: Pasong Tamo, Jupiter Street, Pasay Road, Makati Avenue and Barangay Poblacion. These micro-districts have become the de facto after-hours destinations in the City and have continued

to be such even after the CBD restrictions and zoning ordinances have been relaxed in the mid-90's to accommodate a richer variety of uses. The Poblacion area's recent metamorphosis as the new place for city nightlife point to the importance and benefit of urban nightlife in cities. Across the globe, cities have adopted strategies for expanding and promoting nightlife entertainment districts to stimulate tourism, social interaction, entrepreneurship, culture and economic activity. The function of urban nightlife districts to build a city's social and fiscal capital has been around for some time (with the possible exception of a brief downturn at the advent of the television and suburban living in the mid-2000s). They have contributed to the economic growth of cities, attracting tourists, businesses and even the affluent residents that seek the vibrancy of urban life.

Since the late 20th century, cities have increasingly promoted nightlife; the main goals have been to strengthen commercial districts and to encourage a sense of urban excitement that might persuade affluent people to live and do business in the commercial core. Though mainstream commercial amusements scattered to the suburbs in most metropolitan areas after 1960, highbrow entertainments, such as opera companies, dance troupes, and symphony orchestras, continued to be held downtown. Municipal governments and private foundations after 1970 developed performing arts centers in Detroit, San Francisco, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Portland. Old movie palaces were converted to concert halls in New Orleans, St. Louis, and other cities. Some struggling smaller cities, such as Hartford, promote their surviving cultural institutions, nightclubs, and downtown restaurants as "arts and entertainment districts." Since the 1990s, formerly decrepit neighborhoods of obsolete, multistory warehouses and factories have been redeveloped into clusters of restaurants, nightclubs, and art galleries.

--Peter Baldwin, Nightlife in the City, 2015

New York City even went as far as establishing an Office of Nightlife led by a director (referred to colloquially as the Nightlife Mayor), joining over 30 cities around the globe that have adopted official policies to manage and promote urban nightlife. The benefits have been economic as well as social and cultural in nature.

The last economic study of New York City's nightlife industry identified an annual impact of \$10 billion and found that annual admissions to nightlife venues totaled three times more than the attendance for all New York City sports teams combined. The vibrancy of a city's nightlife is an indicator of its overall fiscal and social health. That's why it's smart public policy to plan for, manage and promote a city's nightlife. The most authentic scenes evolve organically from the unique features of their time and place.

--Andrew Rigie, Forbes Magazine, March 2018

While the expansion of nightlife entertainment is a common strategy for stimulating the local economy by promoting cities as global destinations for tourism and investment that can promote cities as a cosmopolitan metropolis, the Poblacion district grew organically and authentically, without much government nor formal incentive. The pub scene possibly grew as spillover from the racier nightlife in Jupiter Street and the more organized dining entertainment found in Rockwell and A Venue, both also found in barangay Poblacion.

Rigidity and Flexibility

From an urban economic standpoint, both the CBD and Barangay Poblacion form a duality of function that enables the collective city to grow. One district nurturing small enterprises and local and informal industries, the other addressing more regional and global requirements of services. Collectively, they span demographics and social strata as well as time of day, enabling the city to be active round the clock and responsive to the needs of both business and leisure.

While the Poblacion may draw criticism for its rowdy character, the occasional bar fights or its sometimes less than desirable characters (or activities), and the CBD criticized for its stiffness, formality and sterility, both are two sides of the same urban coin and are inextricably linked. The structured business formality, global reach, fast-paced lifestyle and rigidity of uses in the central business district spawned the urban nightlife district that is the Poblacion. Poblacion, on the other hand, will not exist in its present form without the Central Business District. They represent just two of the multiple facets of urban living, where the top-down, large-scale, regulated rigidity of the CBD meets the bottom-up, small-scale flexibility of the Poblacion enterprises. Each capture activities that are collectively needed for cities to thrive and that makes urban living interesting: vibrancy, commerce, socialization, enterprise, bonding, festivity, culture. All messily packaged in chaos amid order, the strange among the familiar, the sober and the inebriated juxtaposed states of city life that contrast as sharply and yet blend as beautifully as black and white and night and day.

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Joel is a registered Architect, Environmental Planner and a Certified Berde Professional. He has over 30 years of design experience covering the fields of architecture, planning, urban design and design management. His expertise is in the field of mixed use development planning and township development planning He had over 26 years of experience with Ayala Land Inc. As ALI's Chief Architect and Head of Innovation and Design, Joel led the designs for all of the company's products across all of the company's business units and has driven the planning strategy and design effort of significant urban development such as Bonifacio Global City, Bonifacio High Street, the Ayala Center Redevelopment, Nuvali, City Gate, the Ayala Triangle, Arca South, the redevelopment of Greenhills Shopping Center, El Nido Tourism Estate and many others. In the growth period of Ayala Land from 2009 to 2014 alone, Joel supervised the designs of over 300 projects that were launched by real estate company.

In 2017, Joel founded his own masterplanning and design consultancy practice that focuses on providing development and strategic planning advice to various companies and in planning townships, mixed use developments and tourism estates.

Joel is an urbanist and loves to imagine the future of cities.