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## **Metro Manila**

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### **GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION**

A coastal megacity, Metro Manila has a land area of 686 square kilometers (PSA 2012) located in the southwestern portion of Luzon, the biggest island group in the Philippines. It is bounded by the provinces of Bulacan on the north, Rizal on the east, and Cavite and Laguna on the south. It is also sandwiched by three bodies of water: Manila Bay on the west, Laguna de Bay on the southeast, and the Pasig River, which cuts through the region. Its strategic location along Manila Bay and the Pasig River contributed to its growth and primacy in the past three decades, with the bay providing an ideal port location for local and international sea vessels facilitating export–import trading activities, and the river serving as an active transport gateway to the central district of Manila until heavy siltation and land-based transport rendered this system ineffective and saw the shift to road-based transport (See and Porio 2015; Porio 2011).

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

As the national capital region (NCR), Metro Manila (MM) is different from the other 17 regions of the Philippines. While they are made up of provinces, the NCR or MM is composed of 16 cities: Caloocan, Las Piñas,

Makati, Malabon, Mandaluyong, Manila, Marikina, Muntinlupa, Navotas, Parañaque, Pasay, Pasig, Quezon, San Juan, Taguig, and Valenzuela, and the lone municipality of Pateros. Its history can be traced back to the creation and reconfiguration of Manila City as the colonial capital during the Spanish and American colonial periods, through the early years of the republic (1946–1965), to its becoming the nucleus of an amalgam of local government units (LGUs) from being the Greater Manila during the time of President Quezon to becoming the Metro Manila during the authoritarian Marcos regime until the current administration.

In 1570 the Spaniards, who were already in Cebu in the 1520s and were on the lookout for fertile land, found Manila lying on a delta formed by the Pasig River, the only outlet of the inland lake, Laguna de Bay. A then thriving Muslim settlement at the mouth of the Pasig River, the settlement was established by Miguel Lopez de Legaspi in 1571 as the capital of the Spanish colonial effort in Asia for the next 300 years (1565–1898). On June 3, 1571, López de Legazpi gave the title of “city” to the colony of Manila, and in 1595 Manila was formally declared as the capital of the archipelago. In addition to being a city and the capital of the Philippines, Manila also became a province and later a provincial capital for nearly all of Luzon. As the territorial area of the province of Manila changed over time, it also lost its name to Tondo and was regained only around 1859.

With the establishment of a civil government under the American regime (1898–1946), the province of Manila was dissolved and a new charter was executed for the city of Manila. The charter defined its boundaries and divided it into districts that

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have remained unchanged. In 1942 during World War II the president Manuel Quezon simplified the metropolitan area by merging Quezon City, Caloocan, San Juan del Monte, Mandaluyong, Makati, Pasay, and Paranaque with Manila City to form Greater Manila. This was dissolved after liberation from the Japanese in 1945, and the towns and cities returned to their prewar status.

In 1948 Quezon City became the new capital of the new Republic of the Philippines. This decision was initially made by the government in 1933 to decongest Manila using Quezon City's large and less populated areas (Porio 2016). But on May 29, 1976, President Ferdinand Marcos gave the seat back to Manila by presidential decree, after he had created Metropolitan (Metro) Manila, which united the cities of Manila, Quezon, Pasay, and Caloocan and the municipalities of Makati, Mandaluyong, San Juan, Las Piñas, Malabon, Navotas, Pasig, Pateros, Parañaque, Marikina, Muntinlupa, Taguig, and Valenzuela, to address the call for unified and integrated development in the metropolitan region. The same decree created the Metropolitan Manila Commission (MMC), the administrative body to govern the emerging metropolis, and Imelda Marcos, the president's wife, was appointed its first governor. Metro Manila was later decreed as the seat of government. On June 2, 1978, it was also declared the National Capital Region (NCR).

In 1990 President Cory Aquino issued an executive order renaming the MMC to Metro Manila Authority (MMA), and allowing mayors of its member cities and municipalities to choose from among themselves the chair of the agency. Five years later, the MMA was replaced by Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) by President Fidel Ramos. The MMDA's governing and policy-making body was the Metro Manila Council, which again has a presidential appointee as its chair. Since the 1990s, the

MMDA has become increasingly prominent in traffic and waste management, and disaster control functions.

The historic specificity of Metro Manila as a capital city lies in its democratic heritage, as it was the site of the first modern war of liberation in Asia (the 1898 Philippine Revolution), which installed the first parliamentary democracy as a system of governance, and of the 1986 People Power Revolution which installed a democratic, decentralized regime of governance after two decades under the authoritarian rule of Marcos. Since the late 1990s, Metro Manila has increasingly been reconfigured by its particular insertion into the global economy through labor migration and services to transnational capital in the NCR. All these forces are reflected in the significance of new public spaces, buildings, and monuments in what used to be the suburbs of Manila, but which now occupy center stage in national politics, commerce, industry, and culture (Porio 2009).

#### SOCIOECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Metro Manila is viewed as synonymous with the Philippines and the Filipino people. It is the seat of the country's political-economic and sociocultural power. Shatkin (2006, 577–578) describes the metropolis as “the economic and political epicentre of the country.” As the major transport, finance, political, and sociocultural hub of the nation, it connects the country to the world. Those living in the provinces call it Imperial Manila, because state bureaucrats, businessmen, and residents treat the rest of the country like their vassals. Given that it accounts for over one-third (36.3 percent) of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014 (Porio 2009) and is the seat of political power, this label is not entirely misplaced.

As the center of economic activity in the country, Metro Manila remains the largest economy among the 17 regions. Its annual gross regional domestic product (GRDP) was actually growing faster than the nation's GDP from 2011 to 2013. And, while GRDP growth in 2014 declined just like the nation's GDP, it still contributed 2.1 percentage points (34.4 percent) to the national GDP growth rate of 6.1 percent, while the other regions contributed less than 1 percentage point each (PSA 2015b). Services continue to be the top contributor to its economy. At 52 percent, it also accounted for the biggest share of the national output of services. Its real per capita income of 203,132 peso in 2014 was also the highest in the country and was nearly three times the national per capita GDP (PSA 2015b).

However, as indicated in its Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.777, Metro Manila is quite low compared to other cities in advanced economies (e.g., Hong Kong 0.916; Singapore 0.907), but it scored favorably compared to other Philippine cities (Cebu 0.728; Davao 0.702). One of the reasons for its low HDI score is its population. The problem of overpopulation was first felt in Manila as early as 1933, and since then it has attracted migrants from all over the country as it continues to dominate the nation's economic opportunities. With Manila starting to be congested, the elite retreated to the suburbs, resulting in the development of New Manila in Quezon City as an exclusive residential community in the 1930s. In addition, the postwar years witnessed not only the reconstruction of Manila but also the burgeoning of new areas like Makati (the financial district, which has now replaced Binondo in Manila Chinatown) in the 1950s; Quezon City, Pasay, Pasig, and Paranaque, where residential subdivisions and exclusive residential villages flourished; Caloocan, Malabon, and Valenzuela, which were the

industrial and manufacturing centers; and the rest of the cities, which became the new suburban areas. These developments had led to population expansion and the densification of Metro Manila (Porio 2018).

Having grown from a population of only 3.5 million in 1970, Metro Manila or the NCR now has a 12.9 million population (PSA 2015a), the second largest among the 17 regions in the Philippines. But the metropolis has a daytime population of 16–18 million (Porio 2018), making it one of the most traffic-congested cities in Southeast Asia. Though its total land area is the smallest among the regions, it remains the most densely populated region, with 21,000 persons per square kilometer (PSA 2015a). Unfortunately, economic growth and investments in basic services and infrastructure have not kept abreast of the expanding needs of the population. While Metro Manila's poverty incidence is lower (11 percent) compared to the national figure (33 percent), one in every 10 residents lives in informal settlements (Ballesteros 2010). Urban governance and management are therefore a critical factor in how cities provide basic services, stimulate the economy, and generate employment for its constituencies (Porio 2014).

Composed of 17 administrative cities, Metro Manila is a body of relatively autonomous LGUs, which are loosely connected through the MMDA. Because of the Philippines' highly decentralized governance structure, local chief executives, such as mayors and governors, have executive, legislative, and judicial control over local officials, government employees, and their political constituencies. State power was shifted from national to local governments to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of local governments in response to the needs of their constituents. It also received a boost in the 1986 People Power Revolution (Porio 2004). This dismantled the 20-year Marcos dictatorship,

which had been installed by the declaration of martial law in 1972. The push for decentralization and democratization in urban development was further institutionalized by the Social Reform Agenda during the Ramos administration (1992–1998). It became the centerpiece for institutionalizing democratic practices, for example, consultation with and the participation of marginalized groups and other sectors, in metropolitan governance. To an extent, this setup also allows local elite families to continue to dominate the political leadership in these cities.

Metro Manila is also an educational and cultural center, as the home of half the universities and educational institutions in the country and with a monopoly of communications institutions. Its demographic, economic, and sociocultural primacy is undisputed. The downside is its dwindling quality of life and questionable environmental sustainability. Traffic jams, floods, mass protests, gated communities, exclusive commercial and consumption spaces, empowered urban poor groups in huge informal settlements, among others, make Metro Manila a difficult city to navigate.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world (Arcibal 2014; Lozada 2014; Porio 2014; Yulo-Loyzaga et al. 2016). The country sees an average of 20 typhoons a year, even outside the regular typhoon season of June to November (Porio 2014). Metro Manila is extremely exposed to climate-related hazards, including heavy to extreme precipitation, sea-level rise, cyclones, storms, and flooding because it lies on a semi-alluvial plain formed by sediment flows from the Meycauyan and Malabon–Tullahan river basins to the north, the Pasig–Marikina river basin to the east (Bankoff 2003) and

the Mangahan river basin to the west (Porio 2011). Its location in the paths of typhoons and the intensification of the southwest monsoon rains (locally known as *habagat*) and the high subsidence level of some of the cities in the metropolis have also rendered Metro Manila prone to flooding (Porio 2011). Thus, Metro Manila can become a large drainage basin with frequent inundations from overflowing rivers and storm waters, rendering the existing drainage channels (with some of them still dating back to the Spanish and American colonial periods) highly inadequate.

While Metro Manila's poverty incidence is lower (11 percent) than the national figure (33 percent), one in every 10 residents live in slum and squatter settlements (Ballesteros 2010). Eighteen percent of Metro Manila's population live in a low coastal elevation zone. As services and infrastructure support lag behind Metro Manila's population growth, formal and informal settlements in these areas have arisen with minimal regulation (See and Porio 2015). Buildings and other infrastructural developments are built on flood and danger zones, further compromising the quality of life in the metropolis (See and Porio 2015), where 41.7 percent of its population live on less than \$2 a day (World Bank 2018). Alongside poverty (low income, absence of land security and tenure, and dependence on social services), the social indicators that affect the social vulnerability of the metropolis are gender (the women), age (both young and elderly), and education (no or minimal schooling).

Earthquakes are also one of the ecological threats to Metro Manila since active faults surround the area. The most prominent of these is the Marikina Valley Fault System. It contains two major segments: the West Valley and the East Valley faults. The West Valley Fault (WVF) poses great risk to Metro Manila for it traverses the cities of Marikina, Pasig,

Quezon, Makati, Taguig, and Muntinlupa, and neighboring provinces. It is reportedly capable of producing large-scale earthquakes with a magnitude of 7 or higher (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2002). The Philippines is likely to experience a powerful earthquake soon, dubbed the “Big One,” and it may strike when the West Valley Fault moves (Porio 2018). If this happens, the whole of Metro Manila will be affected, with a projected death toll as high as 35,000, with some 120,000 or more injured, and over 3 million who will have to be evacuated (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2002).

Swiss Re, a Swiss-based reinsurance company, found Metro Manila the second riskiest city in the world among the 616 largest urban areas assessed (Porio 2018). It is the urban poor households, especially those living on the fault line and in low-lying flood-prone areas, who are most vulnerable. They are expected to incur losses not only of property but also of income and earning opportunities, and to experience intense inconvenience (e.g., water sources buried by floods, toilets blocked and overflowing with waste) compared to their relatively affluent neighbors (Porio 2011, 2014).

Exposure to these conditions has pushed the local people and local government units to formulate adaptation strategies. There are support networks for calamities, but people insist that they rely more on themselves for survival than on others. The ecological vulnerability of Metro Manila and the socioeconomic vulnerability of its urban poor population magnify the effects of the environmental challenges and climate change (Porio 2011) that the world is experiencing today. However, the poor residents of Metro Manila have become used to the frequency of calamities and have adapted to them. Thus, the physical, social, and psychological adjustments they have

made to climate-related challenges in their daily lives have strengthened their resilience (Porio 2016).

## WAYS FORWARD

Research that highlights the interaction of biophysical and environmental factors with the economic, sociocultural, and political dimensions of urban planning and development trajectories of the metropolis is critically needed. In a globally warming world where economic and demographic expansion are highly concentrated in coastal cities, this type of research is important in understanding the risk and resilience of urban systems. More importantly, the risk governance of metropolitan cities that straddle bodies of water (seas, oceans, river and lake systems) and varying social-political and economic geographies needs to be interrogated with a new conceptual and methodological urban lens.

SEE ALSO: *Barangay*; Capital Cities, Ex-Novo; Density; Informal Settlements; Megacity; Metropolitan Resilience; Migration and Urban Flows; Participatory Planning; Primacy; Public/Private Space

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