

Buhay Na Ilog (Living River)

1. Project Statement

As with many other Asian capitals, Metro Manila developed its current form under colonial rule and has historically symbolised the country's interface with the international economy and with 'modernity'. It is the economic and political epicentre of the country and sits at the centre of an industrialising and urbanising region that contains a population of some 17-18 million.

Despite this, the city faces a myriad of social challenges, most visible and pressing being the fact that around 40% of its residents live in informal settlements. These settlements are often in inaccessible areas with a lack of basic infrastructure and few employment opportunities. Despite its sprawling size transport infrastructure in Metro Manila is overrun with problems of maintenance and insufficient provision of routes for its growing population, leading to high levels of traffic congestion and pollution as major concerns. These issues, with the lack of suitable lanes for pedestrians and cyclists, makes travelling through Metro Manila a dangerous and expensive daily routine for some of the city's poorest.

Buhay na ilog aims to improve this aspect of everyday life for residents in Manila by harnessing its intricate river system for use as an alternative travel network. The river system has the capacity to provide the public with new routes for alternative modes of transport that are safe, clean and give greater access to opportunities of employment in the city.

Key Objectives

The key objectives of Buhay na ilog are based on the principles of sustainable development. In doing this, the project is able to address wider issues of ensuring social justice and improving the quality of life. Buhay na ilog seeks to ensure the sustainability of its implementation through:

1. Increasing Connectivity and Access

- Reduction of travel time and cost
- Improved safety
- Improved health and lifestyle
- Access to livelihood and employment

2. Increasing Social Capital

- Blurring the physical boundaries of socio-economic divides
- Public space activation
- Enabling entrepreneurship
- Enabling knowledge sharing across stakeholders

3. Increasing Citizen Participation and Political Representation

- Stakeholder collaboration
- Enabling public-private partnerships
- Reforming policy for longevity
- Strengthening connection between general and local authorities
- Beneficiary managed programmes and outputs

These objectives are aligned with the 10 Point Agenda by the City Planning and Development Office Manila which seeks develop the Pasig River's potential to provide an alternative mode of transportation in Manila, and to regulate the activities of street vendors by designating safe and suitable allocated areas. The agenda also seeks to increase community participation and communication with various sectors in doing this.

2. Context and Relevant Issues

The Philippines is a fast urbanising population and as a result Metro Manila is growing annually, with dense informal settlements and sprawling outskirts.

Amidst this there has been a lack of investment by the government in necessary infrastructure with a trend towards privatisation of transport infrastructure and service providers (World Bank, 2011). Further, when urban developments are privately funded, the streetscape becomes characterised by commercial ventures and void of authentic public space that is open to all.

Due to high levels of industrial activity and cars, Manila suffers from air pollution that affects 98% of the population (Synovate, 2005). Annually, the air pollution causes more than 4,000 deaths according to a study conducted in 2010 (Earth Times, 2002).

Challenges to Buhay na ilog

In many of Manila's Barangays (villages), settlements have extended informally to make use of what was once open land adjacent to rivers. These homes are often built on public walkways and neglected sites, thereby obstructing existing paths and limiting the potential of open sites for public use. In these instances, safe pedestrian and cycle paths would need to be provided on the nearest road or lane until the river network can be rejoined.

The pollution of the river system is extensive and uncontrolled. This makes the rivers both unpleasant to be near and a potential health threat. Although this is a challenge to making enjoyable public spaces, strategies to clean up the river are suggested as being a part of the first phase of Buhay na ilog implementation.

The commercialisation of space and current ideology amongst government to privatise service provision will be a challenge to motivate the

Opportunities for Buhay na ilog

Like many major capital cities in Asia, Metro Manila has the benefit of an intricate river system feeding a central river that channels through the city like an artery. Although the Pasig River and its tributaries are currently more of a dumpsite and are not used for transportation, there is great potential to develop both alternative modes of transport and vibrant public spaces along its banks.

The population of Manila is generally active and a large portion of the population is already engaged in cycling and walking as a means of getting to and from places of work. For some, cycling is a means of income by providing transport or delivery services. These are people who could make use of the proposed safer and cleaner cycle paths.

There are already a number of initiatives aiming to clean up parts of the Pasig river such as KapitBisig Para sallog Pasig (non-governmental upgrade of one tributary), Department of Public Works and Highways (upgrade to three tributaries) and Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission (upgrade to ten tributaries). Further, the Metro Manila Development Authority have already highlighted the Pasig as an area of interest, identifying this arterial river's potential for transportation.

3. Project Description

Buhay na ilog presents a framework for providing and implementing safe alternative routes for cyclists and pedestrians along tributary river banks in Metro Manila.

The projects seeks to improve the quality of pedestrian and cycle pathways. In conjunction with this the project will partner with existing NGOs to clean up the river and it's banks, protecting the environment and residents.

Secondly the project seeks to provide basic infrastructure to promote the use of public space and encourage entrepreneurship. Illustrated are a number of examples, however, these potential activities should be defined in consultation with local stakeholders and implemented in a way that ensures long term management takes into account public interests.

In doing this, the project can be expanded over time to address:

Safety – to provide safer public spaces in Barangays

Health and Lifestyle – to improve the quality of life and reduce the time and cost of commuting

Transport – to provide safer alternative transport such as bicycle paths

Livelihood – to redesign a safer market place along the riverbanks

Location

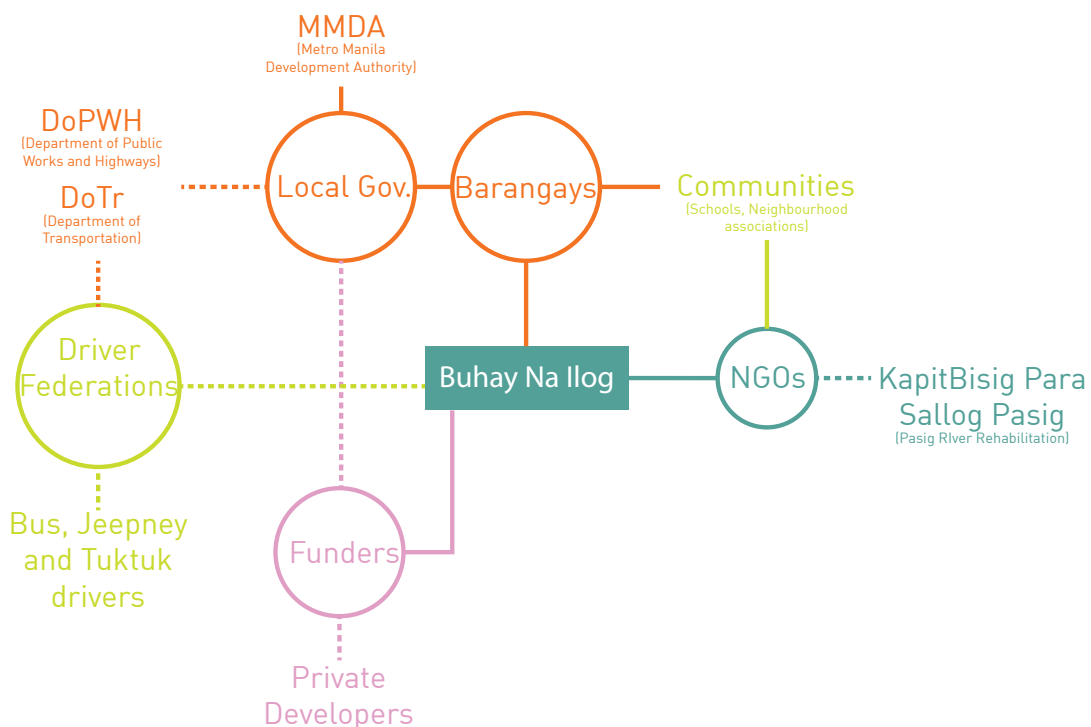
The principles of Buhay na ilog can be applied to any river where there is sufficient space adjacent and a useful route can be created.

There are six common site types that can be identified throughout Manila's river system, each presenting a unique set of restraints and possibilities. These are: planned residential, unplanned residential, industrial, public, brownfield and waterfront sites. To demonstrate the possibilities of this project, we have located an example of each of these sites along the banks of Estero Dela Reina and illustrated how an intervention can be designed to serve the local context.

4. Methodology

Partnership

Partnerships are fundamental in achieving sustainability of the key objectives for Buhay na ilog. The project will be implemented using tools of participatory practice that focus on community engagement. Key to the success of the project will also be partnerships with local authorities and private entities such as industrial landowners and potential residential developers.



Phasing

The Project is set out to be implemented in three phases over a period of 3 - 5 years, that enables the appropriate consultation and funding to be put in place.

Phase 1: Walkways, cycleways and lighting

Phase 2: Linear parks, planting, seating and public art

Phase 3: Connection to broader road networks and infrastructure for community activities

5. Summary

Buhay na ilog is a framework for improving the lives of the urban population in Metro Manila by reducing the time and cost spent on travelling. This can be achieved by utilising the river system to provide safe and clean alternative routes for pedestrians and cyclists. The project has the potential to activate a network of vibrant public spaces with the capacity to host activities that will benefit local stakeholders and enable further development to take place.

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