

From Metro to Mega Manila Issues in Definition and State Response

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Abstract

This paper serves two purposes:

1. To provide data supporting the hypothesis that Metro Manila became a megapolis earlier than believed.
2. To highlight the weak responses of the State to megapolitan issues and problems.

The National Capital urban region which has been called Metro Manila officially reached and exceeded the 8 million population, by the reckoning of the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 1995; and so attained a megacity status by the United Nations definition. But the method of enumeration based on residence used by the NSO seriously underestimates the working population of the metropolis, because it does not include the commuting workers of the metropolis, because they are not residents of the National Capital Region (NCR). In this and earlier paper of the author, this quantity has been named as the circulating population of Metro Manila. This circulating population plus the residential population should be considered the effective population of the metropolis, which consumes goods and services and uses the environmental resources of the metropolis. Using this actual population, the NCR attained the 8 million population, and thus megacity status some 5 years earlier (in 1990). This paper describes the methodology to include this additional population, and provides these figures to be added to the residential population of the megapolis.

Given this earlier megapolitanization of Manila, it is a great disappointment to note that State structures that should be in place for the effective governance of this megapolitan region are absent. Instead, it can be shown that the responses of the State has been weak and inconsistent. This paper therefore traces the historical trend in metropolitan governance about the time the NCR was attaining megacity status, and shows the continuing weakness and inconsistency in policies and measures intended to manage the mega region's urban problems.

On the basis of National Statistics Office (NSO) data, it is generally accepted that the National Capital Region (NCR), also known as Metro Manila, had attained megacity status after 1990, having exceeded the 8 million population benchmark as established by the United Nations¹. As shown in Table 1, Metro Manila was already at the threshold of megacity status in 1990, with a population almost 8 million.

Table 1. Metro Manila Population

Year	Population
1980	5,925,884
1990	7,948,392
1995	9,454,040

¹ The UN did so in 1980. However, the Asian Development Bank quote 10 millions as the defining size of the megacity (Clarke, 1996)

Megacities are seen as extraordinary urban agglomerations, requiring correspondingly extraordinary considerations, whether economic, social or political. These considerations result from their huge populations, which require special organizational systems and procedures in order to be managed successfully. In 1996, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations held a conference for "Megacity Management in the Asian and Pacific Region", where it was acknowledged that the megacity faces unique and heretofore unforeseen problems.

Whether 8 millions or 10 millions is chosen as the definition of the megacity is less important than the response of the State to the emergent problems of megapolitan urbanization. This paper makes two assertions: one, that both analysis and foresight in the monitoring of the transformation of Metropolitan Manila into Mega Manila has failed; and two, the response of the State to megapolitan problems has been weakening through the years. Both insufficiencies in these two aspects of planning and governance has resulted in the worsening of urban problems, and has compromised national development.

Issues of Definition

A metropolis can outgrow itself in two fundamental ways. The first is by demographic growth. By continuously increasing until it attains a benchmark population size, say 8 million population, it achieves a megapolitan status. This is in fact the definition of the United Nations, which sets the megacity benchmark at 8 millions. The second way is by expanding spatially, so that its urban character transforms what were formerly peripheral rural areas into extensions of the urban core. This paper will show that in both ways, the greater Manila conurbation has overgrown its original metropolitan definition, and this much earlier than officially recognized.

The Greater Manila Area became officially a metropolis, with its own special government since 1975 as a recognition of the need for metropolitan management. In principle, the urbanization of contiguous 17 cities and municipalities was recognized as a unified process which gave rise to metro wide problems, such as garbage collection, traffic management, and the provision of metropolitan utilities and services.

Since then, however, metropolitan problems have grown rather than lessened. Why?

In trying to answer this, I hope to show that the analysis of the urban process has been inadequate and that the responses of the State to problems that have arisen from urbanization have been weak.

At the center of analysis that is characterized as inadequate is the issue of definitions: when does a city become a metropolis? A megapolis? Derivatively, the issue of planning and management follow: how does the State manage metropolitan, or megapolitan organization? What policies and measures are appropriate at each level?

At this point, I assert that the population of Metro Manila has been consistently underestimated. Since population concentration has been used as the indicator of urbanization at every level, the estimation of urban population becomes central to the definition of metropolitan or megapolitan urbanization.

Including only the resident population of the metropolis as basis for urban definition will underestimate its ecologically true population. This "ecologically true" population is the effective population that performs economic production, and demands socio-cultural services in the metropolis. This is also the population that "consumes" the environment, and on a daily basis, puts the sustainability of the metropolitan ecology at risk.

This ecologically true population is therefore greater than the resident population by the incoming daily commuters, the temporary residents who stay in a weekly or seasonal basis from other regions of the country. In the Census questionnaire, they are classified as residents of other regions of the country, even if they are present in the metropolis on working hours and working days, but not on weekends. They have been called circular migrants (Padilla, 1993).

Table 2 shows the total population of the metropolis in 1980 and 1990 if the circular migrants are added to its resident population. These numbers exceed those published by the NSO, and those of the National Statistical Coordinating Board (NSCB). Originally, I had intended to compute the numbers for 2000, but negotiations to avail of NSO data are still ongoing.

Table 2. Resident, Circular and Total Population, MM

Year	Resident	Circular	TotalPopn
1980	5,925,884	887,508	6,813,392
1990	7,948,392	2,078,259	10,026,651

Source: for Resident, Table 1; for Circular and Total, calculated for this study

Now, the contiguous provinces of Bulacan, Rizal, Cavite and Laguna contribute the most number of circular migrants to the metropolis. The first is a province of Region 3, while the remaining three are provinces of Region 4. If population working in Metro Manila is the criterion for integrating into the metropolitan economy, Region 4 is more integrated. See map 1.



If we go by the Census counts, the entirely urban Metro Manila has been a megacity sometime after 1990. However, with the addition of non-permanent residents, it can be shown to have been a megacity much earlier than that. That is to say, the effective population of the metropolis has reached (or even exceeded) 8 million even before 1990. In fact, the total effective population of Mega Manila as computed even exceeds the population of Metro Manila for the year 2000 as reported by the NSO.

More importantly, the circulating population as proportion of the resident population has increased significantly: from 15 percent to 26 percent, or 11 percent points from 1980 to 1990. This increase supports Zelinsky's hypothesis of the mobility transition, which if extrapolated to the future predicts even higher rates of circular mobility, and consequently, greater non-residential population for Mega Manila. This can mean that in the year 2000, the effective population of Mega Manila should exceed 14million²!

Table 3 shows the annual population of the metropolis through the years. These numbers are derived through interpolation using the geometric growth rate.

Table 3. Annual Population of Metro Manila, 1980-1990

Year	Population
1980	6,813,392
1981	7,081,840
1982	7,360,864
1983	7,650,882
1984	7,952,327
1985	8,265,649
1986	8,591,315
1987	8,929,813
1988	9,281,648
1989	9,647,345
1990	10,027,450

Source: Calculated for this study

From this table it can be seen that shortly after 1984, Metro Manila has already become Mega Manila. This is some 5 years earlier than what is officially recognized. In terms of planning cycles, 5 years already go beyond recognized short-term planning boundaries. Short term plans are the "response to crises" measures, so it is apparent that longer term plans will have to have greater foresight than is currently shown.

No city on any time heretofore, has experienced mega status in this country yet. Perhaps this is the reason why the first Philippine megacity is plagued by so many difficult problems; because there has been no local precedent, no historically relevant case from which we can derive solutions to so contemporary domestic megapolitan issues.

The second way that a metropolis can overgrow is by pushing its spatial boundaries outwards. Urbanologists (such as Duncan, Keyfitz, and Dobriner) among others have long ago also established that the metropolitan region is fundamentally defined by the socioeconomic interrelationships between what is called the core city and its peripheries (the suburban and rural fringes). In the context of this interrelationship, an overgrowing metropolis expands its core city to its peripheries, initially through its

² 14,772,860 by geometric rate

suburbs which provide bedroom communities for core city workers. Later, such bedroom communities become themselves commercialized and industrialized, and thereby push the suburbs farther outwards. This process repeats itself unabatingly, so that like the sea moving to the shore, succeeding waves of land use changes absorb ever wider suburban areas into the expanding urban core.

It is apparent that this spatial growth is powered by demographic growth, especially through circular mobility. The circulating population which works in the metropolis and sleeps in the peripheries minimize the cost and distance between places of work and residence. In reaching for this goal, the spatial relationship between the core and the peripheries are continually reduced.

This process happens within a greater and wider spatial and economic process which is regional in scope: the economic trade between the industrial urban area and the agricultural rural areas. As the metropolis grows ever bigger, its demand for agricultural goods correspondingly increases. To pay for this consumption, it exchanges its industrial goods and services. But as urbanization transforms once prime agricultural lands into urban areas, it has to seek out markets beyond transformed lands.

State Response and Intervention

These two correlated processes drive metropolitan growth relentlessly. But metropolitan growth is attended by rapid social change, and attendant social ills. The only hope for managing such rapid hypertrophy is State intervention.

Although there are multiple ways in which the State can intervene in the urbanization process, I only have time to focus on two: on a particular aspect of planning, which is analysis and monitoring; and on a general prescription of strength and political will.

The first pertains to the projection and monitoring of population growth of the megapolis, which has been discussed in the first part of this paper. A more realistic assessment of the metropolitan/megapolitan situation must include the contribution of the peripheral regions, both in terms of population and other resource flows

The second, which I shall discuss now is an advocacy for a strong local state.

To start, State responses to the unprecedented megapolitanization of the central urban region have been weak for a number of reasons.

First, it has failed to competently analyze the issues of population increase in the metropolis; specifically, it has not acknowledged, and therefore has not coped with the role of circular mobility in the increase of effective population. The underestimation of metropolitan population has distorted all policies and programs for planned mitigation in issues of traffic, social services, security, economic development, and environmental viability of Megamanila. The MMDA Physical Framework Plan for Metro Manila, ***Towards a Humane World-Class Metropolis***, although it refers to the growth of the metropolis through the moving labor force (p 32), is not exempt from this weakness.

More importantly, it has failed to address the crucial issue of megacity governance.

In 1975, the Greater Manila conurbation was officially recognized as a province and a region. The designation of Metro Manila as both a province³ with a governor was instrumental to some degree in its urban management. This designation did not come a moment too soon, because at 5 million inhabitants and as nucleus of the country, governance of this metropolis should have begun much earlier.

Around the time that Metro Manila reached mega city status, the Metro Manila Commission was replaced by a toothless Metro Manila Authority (MMA), and there was a resurgence of strong, perhaps ungovernable local city and municipal autonomy. The untenability of such a structure for urban management soon became evident and a compromise in the form of the present day Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) replaced it in 1995 (R.A. 7924).

In its initial institutionalization, the metropolitan government in the form of MMC has been barely adequate. But its degeneration into an authority (MMDA), which is undermined by strong local autonomy has resulted in compromises in governance, which when viewed in the contextual reality of a megaurban region, is a symptom of a weak and non-developmental State.

³ Actually a province and a region (the National Capital Region, or NCR), ruled by a Commission

A region is one that is self contained, vis-a-vis the rest of the landscape. This self-containment may be due to natural forces, as in an island. Again, such self-containment may be socio-cultural, as when the level of urbanization distinguishes it from the less urban or rural hinterlands. Within this highly urbanized region, subdivisions based on political territoriality becomes artificial. In Metro Manila, for example, the unified flow of traffic known as EDSA traverses at least 4 cities, some of which differ in traffic regulations from each other. But the EDSA has become a "natural" (although manmade) region: its unity is like that of a river which does not respect municipal (or even provincial) boundaries. To subdivide it according to differing traffic regulations as happens now is to disregard its regional unity. What then does this example imply for competent analysis and effective management?

The garbage disposal problem is another illustration of the destructive "atomization" of management in the megapolis. A city can claim that garbage outside its boundaries is no longer its problem, and so encourage "over the bakod" disposal techniques. Only a strong, unified superlocal state can enforce severe sanctions on such environmental hooliganism.

An urban region is an entity, regardless of how many political subdivisions it encroaches. Logically therefore, it should have a unified state of governance, which among other functions can enforce consistent traffic management and standard socio-cultural services throughout the entire urban region.

This failure of governance is also evident in broad policy statements and programmatic initiatives of the national state. To illustrate this empirically, I will compare the national official statements of policy and programmatic plans of the national state with regard to urbanization. The supreme agency involved in this is the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC).

The National Urban Development and Housing Framework (1999-2004) has become a collection of "motherhood statements" and policy directions with no clear programs to implement. With regard to Manila (Theme A: Urban Growth, Integration and Metropolitanization), the HUDCC up to this point has not even recognized that Metro Manila has become a mega region. It even expresses hesitancy as to the feasibility of an metropolitan approach to planning and coordination, and limits the range of such an approach to provision of services.

"When urbanization spills over municipal boundaries, cities must resort to inter-local governmental cooperation and, if appropriate given population levels, even a metropolitan approach to planning and coordination. Initially, such an approach should be confined to the coordination of infrastructure such as roads, water, sanitation, and solid waste collection..." (p. 12)

Consequently, its recommendation for more effective metropolitan organization has not moved from encouragement of "inter-local cooperation" among the LGUs to something more coercive and whose decisions will be binding on recalcitrant units. Throughout the document, there is an uncritical acceptance of the "decentralization" and recommends "dialogue" and "consensus building" as the mechanisms of governance and management (p. 55).

"An important element of the metropolitan approach is that the existence of such an authority does not affect LGU authority" (p. 17)

Perhaps it would not be fair to look for detailed plans in the national document, but the MMDA physical plan, as we have seen, is also defective in much the same way. Mainly due to strong local autonomy, no area wide policy can be unchallenged, and no decision affecting the mega region can be enforced rapidly. As shown by Santiago, land use planning and control problems illustrate this "state weakness" at the metropolitan level (1995).

In attempting to resolve this issue, the critical terms are those loaded with the meaning of power. When it comes to population mobility, urban economic development and environmental sustainability in the Mega Manila region, there is a universe of difference between "governor" and "chairman", between "control" and "coordination". On these distinctions too, perhaps lie the difference between a barely habitable and a good megacity or metropolis.

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A note on the limitations of the Study

On March 2005, the Public Utility File of the NSO, a 10 percent sample of the 2000 census data was processed to obtain the 2000 circulating population to Metro Manila. From an approximately 2 million figure in 1990, the total circulating population to the NCR in 2000 declined precipitously to little less than a million. This result leads me to hypothesize two things: one, a qualitative shift in spatial mobility within the mega urban region has been reached; or, two, the public utility file data set has a large sampling error.

Regarding the second hypothesis, a reduction in interregional circulation is entirely possible, but the resultant magnitude of the reduction seems to me implausible. However, as a scientist I have to report the result of the calculation. The calculation was performed with the assistance of a programmer from the NSO, using the IMPS program (the figures in the previous decades were calculated using SPSS), which is a software used by the US Bureau of Census. I suggest that my readers and colleagues consider the result for 2000 as preliminary because of the differences in software (and the implied difference in algorithms between SPSS and IMPS?).

Happily, the first hypothesis offers a way out, and includes directions for further research. I can only briefly outline such directions: to wit, the continued expansion of the built-up area outside the NCR , leading to the rapid urbanization of Region 3 and Region 4 has absorbed the circular mobility of the other regions, which otherwise would have gone to the NCR.