

mASEANa Project 2017

modern living in Southeast Asia

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Philippines

The Role of Sports Facilities in Metro Manila's Urban Living from the 1930s to 1970s

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Publicly accessible sporting facilities started to appear in the Philippines during the early part of the 20th century, under the American rule. These facilities were used as a means of changing the popular public spectacle of congregating at cockfights to participating in sports, to better reflect the American culture (Antolihao, 2012). Such assimilation of sports was promoted to uplift the living standards for Filipinos to become 'bearers of more advanced ways of life'. During this period, the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex, built in 1934, served as a public facility aimed at improving the health conditions of people in Manila. After the Philippine independence from America in 1946, new types of sporting facilities were created to assert national identity and signify Filipino aspirations that are at par with international standards of living. The Araneta Coliseum, built in 1960, was designed to be the biggest covered coliseum in the world.

This paper looks at the socio-political context and cultural significance of the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex (RMSC) and the Araneta Coliseum, built during the 1930s to the 1970s. It also maps out fundamental differences that have shaped their history to the present and it problematizes the changing urban planning paradigm in the country, which affect their current states of upkeep and their future development.

Politics of Urban Development and Sports under the American Rule

The American administration over the archipelago was a turning point for governance and preamble to new concepts of urban living. The administration believed that their primary purpose was to guide Filipinos towards independence and self-governance by modernizing and introducing 'civilization', which encompassed the improvement of living standards in the city (Morley, 2012). While the early years of American administration were known to be concentrated to sanitation, public works and civic design, there were no overarching masterplans at that time that principally guided their undertaking. Eventually, proposals of removing the imprints of Spain were considered and redevelopment plans were done to create a fresh, new city that was of American in character. The masterplan of Manila was done by Daniel Burnham in 1905 and was intended to be an "expression of the Filipino people as well as an enduring witness to the efficient services of America in the Philippine Islands" (Morley, 2012, Torres, 2010).

When the First Far Eastern Championship Games (FECG) opened in Manila on 31 January 1913, the event reinforced the American "civilizing mission" in the Far East. Three main Asian nations participated- the Philippine Islands, Republic of China and the Empire of Japan (**Fig.1**), which spread

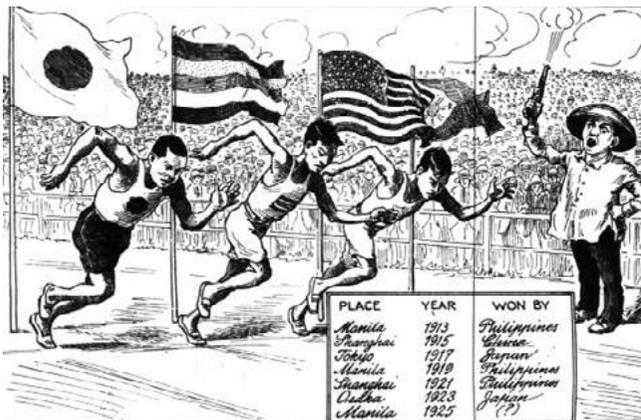


Fig.1: 7th Far Eastern Championship Games (1925)



Fig.2: Rizal Memorial Sports Complex (circa 1960)

the sporting ideology by the United States in the region (Hübner, 2016). Such belief stemmed from the American rhetoric in which Asians would need to be taught to embody the "New Olympian", a man that believed in egalitarianism and peaceful internationalism. The Americans believed that this was an indicator of a tremendous progress, in line with the principles of modern time. The idea of the FECG was brought forward by YMCA physical educator, Elwood Brown who was influenced by American Protestant-Evangelical moral standards and work ethics of providing service to shape healthier and more

productive citizens. These were principles that were spreading in American society during that time (ibid).

The 9.3-hectare site of the RMSC (**Fig.2**), which was previously called Manila Carnival Grounds, held three Far Eastern Championship Games from 1913 to 1925 (Hong, 2005). In 1924, Governor General Leonard Wood confirmed the construction of a center of sports in preparation of future international sporting competition in Manila. The complex was designed by Juan Arellano, the prominent architect of neo-classical and art deco buildings during that time, and site construction began in 1927. After seven years, the sports complex was opened to host the 10th FECG in 1934 (Hübner, 2016). Ever since its opening, the RMSC served as the national sports complex of the Philippines and it has witnessed various national and international sporting events.

Juan Arellano designed several structures in the complex, namely the Rizal Memorial Baseball Stadium to support baseball as the popular sport during the American period; the Rizal Memorial Tennis Stadium which was renamed as Rizal Memorial Coliseum in the 1940s; and the Rizal Memorial Track and Football Stadium for athletics, football and large outdoor events. It also had an olympic-sized swimming pool. Currently, RMSC also has other facilities such as bowling center, badminton hall, gymnastics center, billiards hall, judo, boxing, and pencak silat gym. Aside from the various sporting activities that the complex hosts, RMSC is also used as a venue for concerts, athletic training, religious events and other organized public activities.

The site received heavy damage during the Second World War when Japanese troops used the sports complex and the adjacent De La Salle University as a key defensive area to prevent American soldiers from entering the city limits of Manila (Huber, 2001). Tank traps, road blocks, barbed wire entanglements and different types of mines were placed within the site's vicinity. Heavy military activity on site ended on 15 February 1945 with American soldiers taking over the complex.

Cultural Significance of RMSC

The RMSC has a deep cultural significance particularly as a venue of mass social memory both locally and internationally. Because of its extensive capacity and multiple buildings, the complex has also been part of various types of events that have affected Philippine history and culture which is described below.

a. Philippine and Asian Sports: The RMSC has been a testament to more than a hundred years of Asian multi-sports competition, celebrating the value

of sports, egalitarianism and peaceful internationalism among different nations. Aside from the four FECG that took place in its vicinity (three games in the Manila Carnival Grounds and one game at RMSC), the complex served as a venue for several international sporting competitions such as the 1954 Asian Games, the 1981, 1991 and 2005 Southeast Asian Games, the 2005 ASEAN Para Games and the 2006 Asian Women's Club Volleyball Championship. As the national sports complex of the Philippines, many of the top Olympic athletes of the country such as Teofilio Yldefonso, David Nepomuceno, Miguel White, and Lydia de Vega used the site as a training ground for their various sporting activities. Famous international athletes have also made history in RMSC such as Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth who hit the first two home runs of the baseball field during their exhibition games in the Philippines in 1934 (Antolihao, 2012).

b. Political Significance: From its completion towards the onset of the Second World War, the site hosted several political events during the leadership of President Manuel Quezon. Some events held in the Rizal Memorial Stadium include the unification of the Nationalist Party in 1934; the acceptance of Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña in 1935 as the president and vice president party candidate; and the "Quezon Social Movement" of 1938, which was aimed at empowering the Filipino youth to strengthen their character through the cultivation of courage, hard work, gallantry and social efficiency. Such political events in RMSC have not been deeply documented and further studies need to be done to enrich the political history of the site. Political history research surrounding the 10th FECG and the tensions between China and Japan with the conflict of Manchuria is another avenue of possible research in the future.

c. Military History: During the Battle of Manila in WWII, RMSC served as a major battleground between Japanese and American troops in February 1945 (**Fig.3**). Parts of the complex were destroyed. There were several civilian casualties during the armed conflict and war atrocities were recorded in the vicinity of the sports complex (Huber, 2001).

d. World Music: The RMSC hosted the Beatles tour of Manila in 1966. This concert had a combined audience of 80,000 people for their two performances, one of the biggest turn out of fans in Beatles history (Beatles, 1995). The concert in Manila was however considered by the Beatles as one of their worst tour experiences because of maltreatment from the organizers and miscommunication with the Marcos regime. They have publicly shared their thoughts of never to returning to Manila after the event.

e. Architecture: As an architectural expression, RMSC is an exemplary contribution to the Philippine Art Deco movement wherein major building components have streamline modern design with rounded edge corners, double banded moldings, sleek horizontal canopies and subdued earth tones color scheme. Several signages of the original buildings were written in a Broadway typeface, characteristic of Art Deco movement. Amidst the threat of redevelopment in 2016, two cultural agencies in the Philippines declared the RMSC as an important site for Filipinos. The National Museum of the Philippines designated RMSC as an important cultural property on December 2016 while the National Historical Commission of the Philippines indicated it as national historical landmark on March 2017. These designations highlight the State's recognition of the site's significance and valorizes the principles of the American government in the 1930's to develop beautiful, modern public facilities that can be accessible for the people of Manila. The RMSC can further be argued as the oldest existing Art Deco multi-sport facility in Asia, but this will need to be verified with other sports complexes built during that time particularly in Japan and China, as a part of the development of modern sporting culture that began with the FECCG.

Post-Colonial Sports and Architectural Aesthetics

The post-colonial period brought about changes in urban architecture and the use of sporting facilities. Baseball, popularized during the American period started to lose its audience as good coaches in the American army went back to the USA and Filipinos baseball teams did not produce notable international pride (Antolihao, 2012). Because of urban development, there was also a growing need to convert ballparks and patches of open fields to housing. Designated baseball stadiums such as what was in RMSC became less popular and many Filipinos eventually gravitated to basketball as a 'modern game' and public spectacle, which needed less space (ibid). Schools also adapted indoor sports such as basketball and volleyball to be part of the physical education courses in primary and secondary schools.

At a similar time during the 1950s and the 1960s, intensive population growth happened in Manila, with the migration of rural dwellers to the capital. As many areas in the city were destroyed during WWII, development projects were scattered at the surrounding districts that formed part of the bigger metropolitan region surrounding the old capital. Several piecemeal and uncoordinated solutions happened, while the government also felt the need

to showcase the modernization of Metro Manila as a new independent nation (Manasan & Mercado, 1999). Post-war austerity measures meant that simple straight lines with no-nonsense architectural aesthetics were preferred (Lico, 2017). This architectural style followed the International Modern Movement as the main architectural expression. Architects also wanted to break away from traditional colonial forms while searching for all things "Filipino", in line with optimistic nationalist agenda. (Cabalfin, 2006)

Araneta Coliseum History and Cultural Significance

It was during this modernist period that the Araneta Coliseum was conceptualized. The structure was built in 1960 inside the 35-hectare private land owned by J. Amado Araneta, and located in between the major roads of EDSA and Aurora Boulevard. It was strategically located at the landing terminal of provincial buses coming to Quezon City, the new capital city, as defined by the Capital City Planning Commission of 1948 (Lico, 2017). The building was designed by the little-known architect, Dominador Lacson Lugtu, and it had a large span dome having a diameter of one hundred and eight (108) meters. During the first few years of its opening until 1963, the Araneta Coliseum was the biggest covered coliseum in the world (ibid). It occupied a land area of four hectares with 2,300 square meters of floor area and the structure was constructed of a reinforced concrete cylinder with 48 main rib steel structure. The dome structure was suspended 10 stories above the arena floor. Such expression of size and grandiose is characteristic of post-colonial architecture seen in the region, wherein built forms were used to project the image of progress and global competitiveness (Shatkin, 2006).

a. Indoor Sports: The coliseum opened on 16 March 1960, with the wrestling match between Gabriel 'Flash' Elorde versus the American World Junior Lightweight holder, Harold Gomes. The coliseum also hosted the historic boxing event on 1 October 1975, entitled "Thrilla in Manila", which showcased the fight between rivals Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier (Fig.4). McKirdy (2016) opined that Ferdinand Marcos used the Thrilla in Manila to momentarily unite the country while rehabilitating his political image in the global stage. The fight was intended to portray the Philippines as a safe place to have international events during that period of Martial Law. The coliseum serves as the venue of the Philippine Basketball Association, which is the professional basketball league of the country since 1975. Aside from boxing and basketball, the coliseum is also a preferred venue for championship games



Fig.3: Destruction of RMSC during WWII (February 1946)



Fig.4: Araneta Coliseum aerial view (1960) The Araneta Coliseum is culturally significant because of several reasons, which will be described below

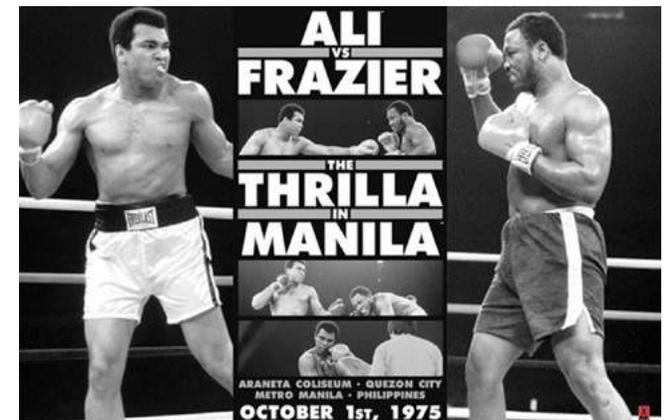


Fig.5: Thrilla in Manila at the Araneta Coliseum (1975)

for collegiate sports by the University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP). Students coming into the coliseum to witness the sporting rivalry between various universities has become part of university life and spectator sporting tradition particularly for Basketball, Volleyball and Cheerdance Competition.

b. Beauty Pageants: The Araneta Coliseum serves as the singular venue for the Binibining Pilipinas (Miss Philippines) pageant, which is a national beauty competition that started in 1962. The yearly event selects the candidates that will compete for various international beauty competitions like the Miss Universe Pageant. It was initiated by Stella Marguez Zawadski-Araneta, a Colombian national who married Jorge Araneta, who serves as the head of the Araneta Group of Companies. Such events further strengthen the popularity of the Araneta Coliseum as a desirable event for entertainment and showbusiness.

c. Commercial Development: Araneta Coliseum forms part of the Araneta Center, a big complex of retail and commercial spaces that was meant to rival the bustling districts of Quiapo and Escolta but situated in Quezon City. Shopping and entertainment spaces such as Ali Mall, Farmers Market, New Frontier Theatre, Fiesta Carnival, Gateway Mall, and Novotel Manila slowly surrounded Araneta Coliseum and they form part of the bustling scene of business and entertainment that Araneta Center has today.

Sports Facilities, Past and Present Urban Living

Sports facilities have made an impact to the urban fabric of Metro Manila starting from the American period, the post-colonial period up to the present day. They have provided facilities for public spectacles, changing the predominant pastime of cockfighting to baseball and other outdoor sports during the 1930s. This trend then shifted to indoor sports and entertainment during the 1970s. These places are interlaced with underlying political meanings, authorized by the State based on their agenda of the time. On the one hand, the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex and the Far Eastern Championship Games were used to propagate the American definitions of civilized ways of life and the principles egalitarianism and peaceful internationalism. Araneta Coliseum, on the other hand was used to showcase size and grandiose to represent the rhetoric of a newly independent nation, optimistic of its future rising from the destruction of WWII (**Fig.5**).

Sport facilities are massive landmarks in the city, which serve as repositories of social memories for many spectators, trainers, and athletes

who witness the triumphs and defeats of the human spirit. Not only are these places venues for sports, they also hold other events such as music concerts, political rallies and beauty pageants, highlighting their potent cultural significance that need to be further mapped and studied by various researchers.

The urbanization of Metro Manila and the increasing power of commercial entities observed in the later part of the 20th century have changed the character of sports facilities in the country. Public venues such as the RMSC are now decline because of limited funding from the government. There are also increasing pressures of redevelopment from private developers who wish to convert large pieces of land, such as RMSC to become mixed-use developments, like the Araneta Center. The value of 20th century architecture and the constant need for urban development is a divisive topic in the Philippines. This paper would suggest that such discourse needs to be guided by the understanding of cultural significance so that there are informed decisions to aid stakeholders. The intangible associations of places need to be integrated as part of the urban development phenomena.

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Footnotes

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- Fig.1: The Philippine Free Press.
 Fig.2: John Camarines.Rizal Memorial Sports Complex History
 Fig.3: Wikimedia Commons.
 Fig.4: Philippine Daily Inquirer.
 Fig.5: The American Conservative.