

Proceedings of the Public Forum on Baguio City's Urban Carrying Capacity

BAGUIO CITY'S CARRYING CAPACITY

ASSIMILATION CAPACITY
EXCEEDED THE THRESHOLD VALUE

11 September 2024 | 9:00 AM

Audio Visual Room, College of Social Sciences
University of the Philippines Baguio

Prepared by Antoni Karl S. Riva



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
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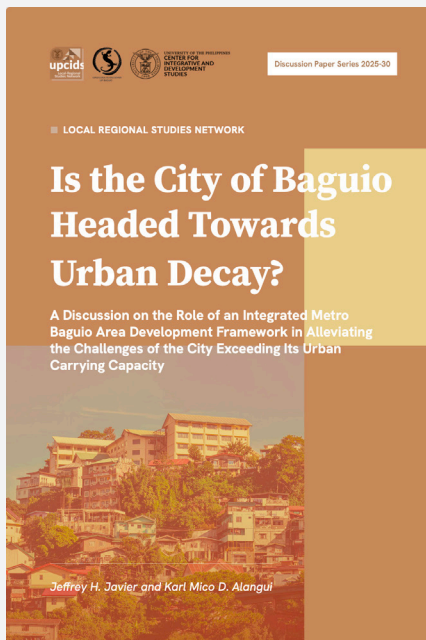
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About the Proceedings

The first Public Forum for the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Project on Baguio City's Urban Carrying Capacity featured a lecture by Arch. Donna R. Tabangin, City Planning and Development Officer of the City Planning, Development and Sustainability Office (CPDSO), and was held on September 11, 2024 at the College of Social Sciences Audio-Visual Room (CSS AVR), University of the Philippines Baguio.

The preliminaries of the forum include the acknowledgement of participants headed by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of UP Baguio, Dr. Alipio Garcia, New Director of the Cordillera Studies Center, Dr. Leah E. Abayao, College of Social Sciences Dean, Dr. Alejandro Ciencia and participants from various national and local agencies and organizations in Baguio City. Mr. Jeffrey Javier then provided the context for the UP CIDS project on Baguio City's carrying capacity. He introduced the initiative as part of the Local Regional Studies Network—a UP CIDS program aimed at fostering research across local and regional areas, involving scholars and research centers from various UP System universities, including the Cordillera Studies Center. Prof. Tala Ramos then introduced the rationale and objectives of the Public Forum on Baguio City's Carrying Capacity project.

Research Results and Status of the City's Urban Carrying Capacity

Arch. Donna R. Tabangin

The research project led by Arch. Tabangin was commissioned by the National Economic Development Authority - Cordillera Administrative Region (NEDA-CAR) and originally focused on the transportation sector, but was eventually expanded by the City Government to encompass all aspects of urban planning in Baguio City. Utilizing the Malthusian Model of population and food growth, the study determined that the city had already exceeded its threshold capacity in terms of resources and support systems. Now at 360,000 residents with a population growth rate of 1.25 percent per annum, the CPDSO projected that the year 2043 would be a critical year for population growth, where the city could reach up to 600,000 people, 20 percent more than the designed capacity. Even at present, the city accommodates about 764,000 individuals daily during peak seasons such as the summer months and the holidays. The research also revealed that the transient or daytime population of the city (including students, tourists, and individuals on business) is four times higher than the long-term resident population.

At the time of reporting, Arch. Tabangin relayed that several critical infrastructure systems had already surpassed sustainable levels. The city's urban road area exceeded its assimilation capacity of 40m² per person as early as 1988, currently leaving minimal room for road expansion in the city. She remarked that this was one reason why traffic congestion has become more palpable in recent years. Land for development has exceeded its carrying threshold since 2010, with the city unable to maintain the standard requirement of 110m² per person. Considering this, Arch. Tabangin cautioned that it is necessary for the city to periodically update its comprehensive

land use and zoning plans. At present, only 14 percent of current land use is available of zoning adjustments (22 percent for built-up areas, mostly in the Central Business District, and 64 percent open and green spaces, of which the largest is the Camp John Hay reservation).

As for water supply, the research team reported that the city had likewise exceeded its threshold value of 0.15m² per person daily in 2002. Accordingly, water supply in the city has to be rationed to ensure that each household is able to get a fair share of water. The city is currently dependent on underground water, of which there is no current data available regarding actual supply. Thus the city is in dire need of an alternative source, or else a decrease in individual allocation for water will be inevitable. All in all, the city is already below the minimum standards required for natural resources and life-support systems comprising of forest, green cover, and open spaces. Given population growth, land conversion, and rapid encroachment into forest lands, the research team projected larger deficits for the city as the demands for natural resources far outrun supply.

Arch. Tabangin also communicated how these create other challenges such as land ownership and tenure, especially because the city has incomplete data on land ownership and forest proclamations. She shared that their current data showed that some 78 hectares of forest proclamations are claimed by informal settlers. Furthermore, as for compliance with national regulations on building construction, only 20 percent of these had the necessary building permits and clearances.

In terms of social vulnerability and livability, they reported that about 28 barangays in Baguio City have a very high score on the social vulnerability index based on indicators such as economy, population, housing, etc. Only one barangay (South Drive) has been identified as livable based on the availability or existence of an improved built environment, improved governance, and environment quality, as well as the promotion of the social environment. In contrast, 41 barangays have been classed as moderately livable and two were tagged as having declining livability. The criterion for determining livability follows the criteria for the Seal for Good Local Governance for Barangays, which includes performance assessments on the following: financial administration, disaster preparedness, safety, peace and order, social protection and sensitivity, business friendliness, and environmental management.

Baguio City's Strategic Response and Implementation Measures

In response to the data and challenges reported, the City Government has implemented the “Baguio 2043: A Livable, Inclusive and Creative City Vision and Framework,” which outlines a long-term development plan for Baguio City, emphasizing sustainability, livability, and inclusivity. The framework focuses on a vision for a smart, green, creative, and resilient city as it addresses the challenges of urbanization by preserving the natural environment and improving the quality of life for its residents. This is indexed by three components of Baguio as a Livable, Inclusive, and Sustainable Community, and were summarized as follows:

1. Livable Community

- a. Sustainable Urban Development – Prioritizing eco-friendly infrastructure and reducing environmental impact.

2. Inclusive Community

- a. Economic Diversification – Supporting local businesses and industries that align with the city's sustainable goals to overcome poverty in terms of health and environment, education, empowerment, and income opportunities.
- b. Cultural Preservation – Culture is the foundation of the city and protecting Baguio's rich cultural heritage is a must along with integrating it into modern urban life.

3. Sustainable Community

- a. Urban Resilience – Strengthening Baguio's capacity to withstand natural and man-made hazards through improved disaster risk management.
- b. Smart City Innovations – Maximizing the use of technology to improve urban management and services and enhancing both public and private sector efficiency.

Responses from Government Agencies and the Open Forum

For their part, NEDA-CAR shared that work was already ongoing for the development of a Masterplan for Sustainable Urban Infrastructure Development in the Baguio, La Trinidad, Itogon, Tublay, Tuba (BLISTT) area. This Masterplan covers action plans for the development of clusters and growth sub-centers around the BLISTT area toward the end goal of decongesting the city of Baguio. Through the dispersion of economic, educational, and institutional opportunities across the BLISTT, the agency hopes to stimulate growth in the surrounding sub-centers by reducing the need to travel to the city center. Policies and action programs to address transportation and connectivity challenges across the BLISTT government units are also covered by the Masterplan.

One of the most urgent matters raised in the open forum was on the worsening traffic congestion in the city, particularly in the Central Business District. Arch. Tabangin replied that at present, the city's roads are already accommodating three times its intended capacity (i.e., 45,000 vehicles from the ideal 15,000 vehicles). To reduce traffic congestion in the absence of road widening capacity, the city promotes smart mobility options such as the establishment of bike lanes and improvement of pedestrian walkways to maximize the walkability, and encouraging tourists to utilize public transportation. In addition to these smart mobility initiatives, the city also plans to implement congestion fees to change the behavioral patterns of transportation in the city, though this has not yet been enacted.

Another concern was the inevitable increase in the volume of garbage collected during peak tourist seasons such as Panagbenga in February and the holidays in December. Arch. Tabangin responded that there was a need to improve the waste collection system at source, where proper segregation must strictly be observed. Considering the absence of a local waste management

facility, the city currently has no other option but to bring the waste to Tarlac with corresponding payments. She noted, however, that the city is still at work looking for closer alternatives in neighboring municipalities.

Arch. Tabangin concluded by stressing the importance of mobilizing the inter local government unit council or the BLISTT development council to implement integrated action plans quickly, as Baguio's urbanization challenges will inevitably affect neighboring municipalities as development continues.

Representatives from Baguio-based civil society groups, non-government organizations (NGOs), and other national government agencies also shared their on-going programs and commitments to help the city resolve the challenges of the dwindling urban carrying capacity. Among the initiatives undertaken include the regreening movement, adopt-a-park and ridge to reef projects. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) also welcomed the opportunity to be included in the discussions as it is equally important to consider the welfare of the Indigenous Communities in the continuous urbanization of the city. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), for their part, informed that they are still in the process of completing the documentation of the metes and bounds of the proclaimed forest reservations and natural parks in the City of Baguio. They hope that completion of the documentation process will help the city reclaim forest lands habited by informal settler communities.

CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Established in 1985 by University of the Philippines (UP) President Edgardo J. Angara, the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) is the policy research unit of the University that connects disciplines and scholars across the several units of the UP System. It is mandated to encourage collaborative and rigorous research addressing issues of national significance by supporting scholars and securing funding, enabling them to produce outputs and recommendations for public policy.

The UP CIDS currently has twelve research programs that are clustered under the areas of education and capacity building, development, and social, political, and cultural studies. It publishes policy briefs, monographs, webinar/conference/forum proceedings, and the Philippine Journal for Public Policy, all of which can be downloaded free from the UP CIDS website.

THE PROGRAM

The **Local Regional Studies Network (LRSN)** aims to create a network of research programs engaging in local and regional areas of study, involving scholars and research centers based in the different UP System constituent universities.

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