

Reimagining Urban Humanities

Conversations on Coastal City Resilience

*Proceedings of the Two-day Year-end Event
of the Urban Studies Program, UP CIDS*

3-4 December 2024

**NEDA Region 7 Conference Hall, NEDA Regional Office 7
Sudlon, Lahug, Cebu City**

Prepared by Jawjaw Loseñada



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

An aerial photograph of a coastal city, likely Cebu City, featuring a prominent cable-stayed bridge spanning a large body of water. The city's urban landscape is visible on the left, and the bridge's structure is the central focus. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent grey rectangle containing the title and event information.

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UP CIDS Proceedings

is published by the

University of the Philippines**Center for Integrative and Development Studies**

Lower Ground Floor, Ang Bahay ng Alumni
Magsaysay Avenue, University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City 1101

Telephone: (02) 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 4268 / (02) 8426-0955

Email: cidspublications@up.edu.ph

Website: cids.up.edu.ph



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ISSN 2718-9295 (Print)

ISSN 2718-9309 (Online)

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"Cebu City, Philippines - Panoramic aerial of the Metro Cebu Skyline and Cebu - Cordova Bridge"

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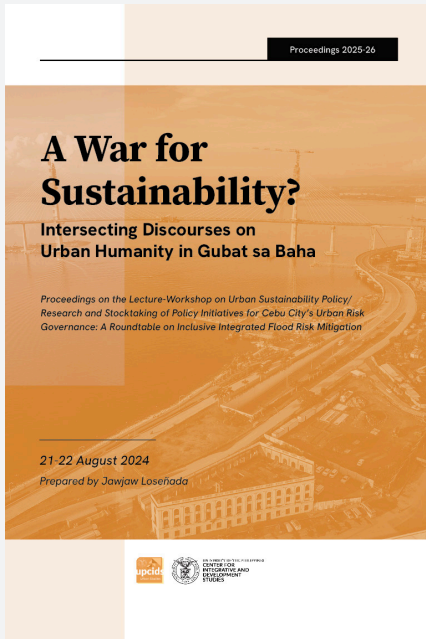
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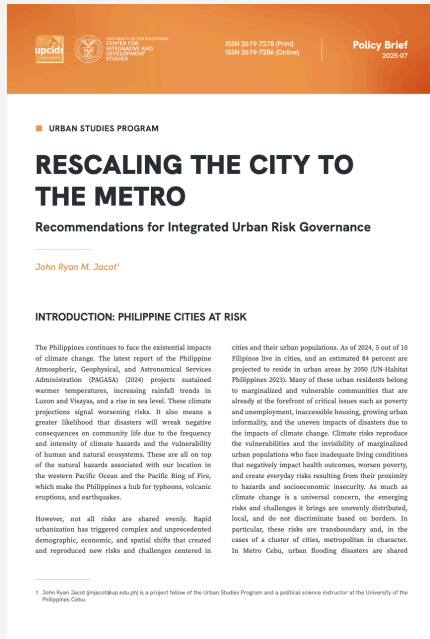
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About the Event

Last 3 December 2024, the Urban Studies Program (USP) of the University of the Philippines (UP) Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS) partnered with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Region 7, in hosting a roundtable discussion on the study of Professor Paul Hutchcroft, PhD from the Australian National University and Dr. Weena Gera of UP Cebu and Convenor of the USP program: “The Fizzling of ‘Ceboom’: How Jurisdictional Battles and Warring Factions Undermined Cebu’s Development Coalition.”

This roundtable discussion aimed to engage key stakeholders across sectors from government, business, civil society, and the academe to present the study findings and analysis, and set the tone for a critical policy conversation on concrete and innovative institutional reform solutions for urban governance and sustainability. This informs NEDA’s Beyond Border initiatives as it contemplates strategic solutions that involve effective multi-actor engagements. Although the article is centered on Metro Cebu, the roundtable discussion aims to generate insights that can serve as a springboard for reflection and effective strategic planning that can be gleaned by emerging metropolises of the Visayas and Mindanao regions.

On the following day, 4 December 2024, members of the Urban Studies Program were invited to a lecture-workshop and mentorship session, facilitated by urban political ecology expert Associate Professor Kristian Karlo C. Saguin, PhD from the Department of Geography of UP Diliman. This session aimed to guide scholars in effectively conveying complex data into digestible information that is accessible to policy makers and to the public. It also sought to provide strategies for scholars on how to contextualize and frame urban studies research and transform it into usable entryways for relevant, inclusive, and sustainable public policy discourse.

ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION



National Economic and
Development Authority
Regional Office 7



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
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DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

THE FIZZLING OF 'CEBOOM'

HOW JURISDICTIONAL BATTLES AND WARRING FACTIONS UNDERMINED CEBU'S DEVELOPMENT COALITION

3 DECEMBER 2024

BY INVITATION
1:30PM - 4:00 PM (PH TIME)

NEDA REGION 7 CONFERENCE HALL, NEDA REGIONAL OFFICE 7
SUDLON, LAHUG, CEBU CITY

PRESENTERS

Prof. Dr. Paul D. Hutchcroft

Professor
Australian National University

Dr. Weena Gera

Associate Professor
University of the Philippines Cebu



- Official Publication Material for Day 1 (December 3, 2024)

DAY 1

The Fizzling of “Ceboom”: How Jurisdictional Battles and Warring Factions Undermined Cebu's Development Coalition

Dr. Paul Hutchcroft and Dr. Weena Gera

The presentation by Dr. Paul Hutchcroft and Dr. Weena Gera offers a comprehensive insight into the extensive development of the “Ceboom” phenomenon, which dates back to the 1980s, up until its eventual fizzling and an evident impossibility of a unified metropolitan governance for Metro Cebu’s economic and social development. Their presentation is based on their recently published article of the same name, where they opened it by highlighting the strategic background and connection of Cebu, rooted in its historical development from the colonial period up until the present. This strategic character of the province of Cebu led to its economic flourishing, both in the country and in Southeast Asia. The economic development of Cebu can also be attributed to the numerous national policies and adaptive strategies vis-à-vis national and global upsets and crises. However, despite such economic developments, setbacks that hinder sustainable and inclusive progress for Metro Cebu and Cebuanos in general, setbacks that concern issues of shared resources, cross-boundary governance, and political tensions, among others. Prior to delving into the presentation proper, Dr. Hutchcroft and Dr. Gera outlined that their presentation will look into the three stages of “Ceboom,” namely its conception, gradual decline, and its eventual fizzling, and they also placed a disclaimer that the findings of their study may not be as



■ **Figure 1.** Dr. Paul Hutchcroft (Left) and Dr. Weena S. Gera (Right) discussing their article on the “The Fizzling of “Ceboom”: How Jurisdictional Battles and Warring Factions Undermined Cebu’s Development Coalition”

“inspiring” as the opening remarks envisioned it to be, but nevertheless, their findings hope to shed light on potential action points moving forward.

HOW THE “CEBOOM” PHENOMENON CAME TO BE

The first part of their discussion unpacked how the trend of “Ceboom” came to be by citing the initiative led by the Osmeña family, namely former governor Lito Osmeña and his cousin Tomas “Tomy” Osmeña, who served as “brokers” who opened multiple public-private partnerships, eventually placing Cebu as a lead economic center in the country. The speakers also noted that the Osmeñas, as a family and a political clan, are not known for having smooth relationships with one another, but Tomy and Lito made it work somehow. Additionally, they also mentioned that the Osmeñas did not exercise economic and political monopoly over Metro Cebu, citing its impossibility due to how diverse Cebu’s economy was during that time. Furthermore, the Osmeñas had a vision for developmentalism, which contributed to the initial success of Ceboom. The success of this initiative was also partly due to the country’s recovery phase from the Martial Law dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. During the early days of Ceboom, foreign investments were at a record high, leading to the development of some notable economic hubs and features that define Cebu today such as the Cebu Business Park and the IT Park, both of which have connections with the Ayalas, the construction of the Mactan-Mandaue Bridge, the former Lahug Airport, among other projects. During this time, Metro Cebu has also seen a bleak potential for a unified metropolitan

governance. However, this failed due to the differences in terms of direction and, undeniably, political factions and tensions.

THE CHALLENGES THAT “CEBOOM” FACED

The presentation then continues by outlining the challenges that ultimately led to the gradual fizzling of the “Ceboom” phenomenon. One challenge that was cited during the presentation was the fragmented governance structure of Metro Cebu, wherein among the member constituencies of Metro Cebu, the cities of Cebu, Mandaue, and Lapu-Lapu are considered as highly urbanized cities, where their jurisdiction is independent from that of the province, compared to the rest of the component cities and municipalities that are still under the jurisdiction of the provincial government of Cebu. This fragmentation often produces jurisdictional disputes that also stem from fragmented policies, ultimately resulting in inefficient addressing of province-wide and interjurisdictional issues, as seen in the worsening flood situation and traffic congestion in Metro Cebu.

The said fragmented governance structure of Metro Cebu is complemented by rising and existing political tensions from provincial powers ever since the conception of “Ceboom.” For example, suspended Cebu City mayor Michael Rama was allied with Tomy Osmeña, even to the point that the latter had endorsed the former as his successor, which took a different turn when Rama opposed Tomy’s candidacy in the next election cycle. Furthermore, newer political elites have sprouted after the conception of “Ceboom,” namely in the persons of the Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia (2019–25), and the mayor of Cebu City, Raymond Alvin Garcia (2024–25), both of whom are connected through bloodline to Pablo Garcia. The rise of the Garcias heavily influenced the trajectory of “Ceboom,” especially with the various tensions that exist between the highly urbanized cities and the component cities and municipalities under the province. As cited in the article of Dr. Hutchcroft and Dr. Gera, and re-echoed during their presentation, former city mayor Rama and Gwen Garcia did not necessarily meet eye-to-eye in terms of their vision for Metro Cebu, where a locale for contestation is situated in likes of the Bus Rapid Transit initiative of the city, among others, which do not necessarily align with Garcia’s vision. The tension between the city and the province can be summarized by how the provincial capitol still resides in a strategic point, overlooking the city of Cebu.

Another issue highlighted during the presentation was the differing directions and priorities of the members of the metropolitan coalition, specifically on Tommy Osmeña's obsession with developing the South Reclamation Project (SRP), which he envisioned as Cebu's newer breakthrough economic zone. The said initiative has raised contention between the city and the province, ultimately ending in Osmeña withdrawing Cebu City from the Metro Cebu Development and Coordinating Board (MCDCB), only for Rama to rejoin the city during his term. Osmeña's obsession with the SRP also resulted in the evident neglect of the more pressing needs and concerns of Cebu City residents, which led to a growing distrust and discord in the then-unified "Ceboom."

However, despite the various challenges that Metro Cebu has faced ever since the rise of "Ceboom," there were development efforts that attempted to retain and provide longevity for metropolitan governance. Three of which included the Metro Cebu Planning Advisory Authority (MCC), the Metro Cebu Development Project in 1989, and lastly, the Metro Cebu Development Coordinating Board (MCDCB). Firstly, the MCC was created to conduct collaborative planning among six local government units (LGUs), which was an early attempt to resolve the gradually fragmented governance of Metro Cebu. However, as Dr. Hutchcroft and Dr. Gera noted, the MCC had its own share of shortcomings, ranging from limited staff, a lack of enforcement power, and resistance from various jurisdictions. These concerns essentially minimized the body's potential effectiveness. On the other hand, the Metro Cebu Development Project in 1989 was an attempt to streamline development efforts across Metro Cebu. However, it faced challenges of overreliance on foreign donor funding, affecting its sustainability as a body, which provided hurdles to effectively creating institutional reforms. The last development body created, as mentioned in the presentation, was the Metro Cebu Development Coordinating Board (MCDCB), which was originally launched in 2011 and spearheaded by the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Inc. (RAFI). MCDCB was a response that highlighted an approach led by the private sector to develop cross-boundary collaboration, through its flagship initiative of Mega Cebu Vision for 2050. However, just like the two previous bodies, Dr. Hutchcroft and

Dr. Gera also cited MCDCB's lack of juridical authority, among other factors, which led to its dissolution back in 2020.

From the attempts, the presentation also emphasized the crucial role of the private sector in the development and fizzling of the “Ceboom” phenomenon by citing its capacity and potential to help fill in the gap in a unified metropolitan governance. For example, public–private partnerships (PPPs) like that of the South Road Properties and the Metro Cebu Flood Control and Drainage Master Plan highlight the potential of PPPs to provide infrastructure solutions. However, as the speakers warned, overreliance on PPPs and the private sector can lead to an oversight in terms of equitable development and, most importantly, public accountability. Another potential of the private sector can be seen in business-led initiatives where the likes of Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Inc., among other organizations, have attempted to bridge collaborations with various local government units. However, these initiatives can also be constrained by institutional frameworks, as seen in how the Mega Cebu Vision for 2050 has gradually dissolved.

An interesting point that was raised during the presentation was a comparison of the Cebu metropolitan governance to that of the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), where the sustenance of the said body lies in the collaboration and equal footing of constituencies under such metropolitan governance, which can aid in resolving metropolitan-wide issues and concerns. However, while admirable, directly translating the framework and operationalization of MMDA to the context of Cebu, as the speakers advised, proves to be quite a challenge given that adapting such a metropolitan body would require strong political will and consensus-building among its stakeholders—both of which have been missing in the multiple attempts as mentioned previously.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the data presented during the presentation can be considered more sober than inspiring, the speakers, nevertheless, provide strong recommendations to help address the challenges that surround the possibility of a unified Metropolitan Cebu governance, which are ultimately latched in pushing for effective institutional reforms, such as:

- the creation of a central coordinating body which can be patterned after that of the MMDA, but efficiently tweaked to fit the unique political landscape of Metro Cebu;
- strengthening PPPs where attempts to align initiatives from the private sector with that of public policy must be highlighted to streamline equitable development, and lastly;
- a need for long-term planning that covers essential social services such as transportation, waste management, and disaster resilience, which can be achieved through centering on sustainable planning.

The presentation finally ends with a reminder that in the absence of efficient metropolitan governance, Metro Cebu is running the risk of losing its competitive edge as an economic hub and center in the Philippines.

OPEN FORUM

The open forum that followed was divided into two parts: (1) Questions, and (2) Insights. The participants for the open forum included members from local government units and government agencies, as well as representatives from civil society organizations and the academe as well.

One participant asked a question about how Cebu can potentially overcome the mentioned political fragmentation in order to pave the way for a possible revival of a unified metropolitan governance. The speakers responded by highlighting how complex the political landscape of Metro Cebu is, which will require building stakeholder trust and introducing incremental reforms. They suggested that a good starting point would be forging inter-LGU arrangements that will hopefully serve as a foundation for broader cooperation. Another participant proposed that maybe Metro Cebu can adopt a similar model to that of MMDA, which could be tailored to the context of Cebu.

Another participant raised the question of the role/s that the private sector plays in advancing the development goals of Metro Cebu, to which another participant added another layer to the question by asking how the involvement of the private sector can be balanced with public accountability. In response, the keynote speakers emphasized that the private sector can serve as a bridge to fill in the gaps, but reiterated cautions for potential oversight.



■ **Figure 2.** Participants ask Dr. Hutchcroft and Dr. Gera inquiry questions and insights regarding their article.

Lastly, a question was raised on the role of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), referencing how the government agency is involved in crafting regional development plans. The speakers acknowledged the role that NEDA plays in long-term planning for the region. However, they also emphasized that there must be robust implementation strategies to ensure that the policies set out by NEDA will translate to outcomes across local units. A representative from NEDA also highlighted that while NEDA exerts effort in crafting these development plans, they are constrained by quasi-constitutional laws such as the Local Government Code of 1991, which, for them, needs revisiting.

The open forum then transitioned to insight sharing among its participants. One participant highlighted a potential solution rooted in environmental action, such as mangrove reforestation to enhance urban resilience vis-à-vis flooding and the experienced climate crisis. The speakers welcomed this suggestion, citing examples from Jakarta and Tokyo, and ultimately called for integrating environmental strategies in terms of urban planning. Another participant raised a concern regarding how marginalized communities might be excluded from the development projects in Metro Cebu, to which the speakers emphasized the importance of participatory planning mechanisms in public policy making in order to uphold inclusivity and equity in the face of long-term development.

Another participant coming from the academe highlighted how it might be a ripe opportunity to actually lobby for a president hailing from Cebu to emerge and win the national elections in order to advance the interests of

the region to a national level. The speakers, while highlighting how regional leadership can potentially advance fresh perspectives to national governance, additionally forwarded the need to address structural barriers to ensure that representation from the regions is observed and effectively practiced.

Ultimately, while the participants in the event expressed reservations about potential government reforms, referencing dynasties and political clans, causing tensions in Metro Cebu, the speakers reiterated the need for a simultaneous cultural shift as well as institutional change, both of which aim to increase the public's engagement in the process.



■ **Figure 3.** Participants from various local government units, government agencies, and members of the academe gathered for a photo opportunity, closing the event.

DAY 2

Lecture on Coastal City Urban Governance and Resilience

Dr. Kristian Karlo Saguin

The second day of the Urban Studies Program Year-End event was centered on a lecture presentation by Dr. Kristian Karlo Saguin, associate professor at the Department of Geography at the University of the Philippines Diliman. He began his presentation by introducing the concept of land reclamation as a contested urban development practice, framing it as a paradoxical process of creation and destruction. In such a process, there is a simultaneous creation of new spaces while displacing existing communities and causing ecological damage. He continues by emphasizing how land reclamation becomes a mainstream trend in the Philippines, especially in urban centers such as Manila with Manila Bay, Cebu with the North and South Reclamation Areas, and Davao, while underscoring how these projects are driven by narratives of urban progress at the expense of compromising social justice, environmental concerns, and sustainability.

He then provided a historical context of land reclamation, tracing its origins in the Philippines way back in the country's colonial period, wherein reclamation projects began during the Spanish and American occupations, with projects such as the Dewey Boulevard (presently Roxas Boulevard), which was aimed at expanding Manila's urban spaces. The country's reclamation landscape expanded during the Marcos Sr. regime in the 1970s, where such projects aligned with the regime's efforts to "nation-building," citing the likes of the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex. Dr. Saguin then contextualized land reclamation by providing an account occurring in the 1990s up until

the present with the emergence of Bay Cities, which serve as commercial hubs, hosting entertainment complexes and casinos, opening a new era of reclamation projects.

Dr. Saguin also highlighted the current trend in terms of land reclamation. He began by citing Manila Bay as a reclamation hotspot where 22 proposed projects cover nearly 10,000 hectares, equivalent to five percent of the total bay area. Notable projects include the Bulacan Aerotropolis owned by the San Miguel Corporation and the Bacoor Bay Reclamation, which is a mixed-use project, both involving commercial and residential developments. However, the boom in terms of reclamation projects is not only exclusive to Manila, as similar reclamation projects are planned in other urban centers such as Cebu and Davao, and even smaller municipalities such as Minglanilla in Cebu.

This part of the discussion also underscored how the approval process under the Duterte administration was expedited, eventually moving the permitting authority from the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) to the Office of the President.

The next part of the lecture covered the socio-ecological implications of reclamation. Environmental concerns, such as disruption of marine ecosystems, which contribute to declining fisheries and biodiversity, and alteration of water circulation, were raised together with the issue of the displacement of coastal communities and fisherfolk who are often relocated to distant areas away from their sources of livelihood. This has been illustrated in the case of the residents of Naic, Cavite, as well as cases of double displacement, where some communities that were previously relocated for urban projects, such as the case of the construction of the SM Mall of Asia, are being displaced again for newer reclamation projects.

He also discussed the idea of speculative urbanism, where reclamation projects serve as speculative ventures that create financial assets through land conversion. These projects are being marketed as “smart cities” promising technological and economic gains, but often at the expense of marginalized communities. Closing his lecture, Dr. Saguin tackled governance challenges such as regulatory processes, including the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), which are often scrutinized as bureaucratic



■ **Figure 4.** Dr. Saguin presenting his lecture entitled “Land Reclamation and Speculative Climate Urbanism in Manila Bay.”

formalities rather than being genuine forms of evaluation, as well as a lack of transparency and public consultation in approving these reclamation projects.

OPEN FORUM

Atty. Cyril Bryan Cuizon thanked Dr. Saguin and opened the floor for the open forum. The questions focused on concerns regarding the displacement of communities and the trend of gentrification, the lessons that Cebu can learn, especially in housing and relocation projects, the challenge to marketing “smart cities,” and the consideration of a national land use policy.

One participant raised the concern about how reclamation projects displaced communities without providing them with adequate relocation assistance, and also mentioned the trend of gentrification, which often excludes marginalized groups from benefiting from urban development. Dr. Saguin responded by emphasizing how situating relocation sites that are far from their original settlements breaks social networks and disrupts their livelihood, citing the case of the off-city relocation programs in Metro Manila following the 2009 floods, which failed to address the needs of the residents, forcing them to return to the danger zones.

Another participant asked about the potential lessons that Cebu can learn, especially in housing and relocation, provided that Cebu City residents would opt more for horizontal housing than vertical infrastructures, while at the same time ensuring inclusivity. Dr. Saguin responded by highlighting participatory planning in housing projects to meet community needs while

also considering mixed-use developments that combine both residential and commercial space to maximize limited land resources.

The next concern centered on how civil society can challenge the appeal of a “smart city” branding in reclamation initiatives, to which Dr. Saguin responded by highlighting how socio-ecological costs are being obscured by the narratives of smart urbanism, and advocated for the creation of alternative urban visions grounded in inclusivity and social justice.

Finally, to officially close the open forum, one participant asked whether a national land use policy can possibly address inequities in urban development and land allocation, to which Dr. Saguin responded by mentioning how such a policy can provide a unified framework that balances development with both social and environmental considerations; however, lobbying and vested interests might prove to be significant challenges.

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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.

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THE PROGRAM

The thrust of the **Urban Studies Program** is to bring to the fore the critical issues around urbanization and urban humanity in the policy discourses for the country. It brings together studies on cities especially with acute vulnerabilities such as coastal cities across the Philippines that directly respond to emerging concerns on urbanism with a specific lens on inclusive and just resilience framework. It highlights the uneven impacts of disasters and adaptation mechanisms, and the often ignored tensions and fragmentations between technocratic infrastructure solutions and community deliberations and perspectives, especially in the strategic allocation of resources, infrastructure, and services to not only optimize space and reinforce infrastructures but also to ensure the well-being of residents and avoid displacements while rehabilitating and promoting the environment. It aims to revisit and take stock on the intersections between underdeveloped institutions and human resources for urban planning, the political dynamics anchored on territorial scales and jurisdictions of accountability in the context of metropolitanization and urban agglomeration, and the fundamental questions of cultural identity, citizenship, and solidarity in urban communities for resilience.

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