

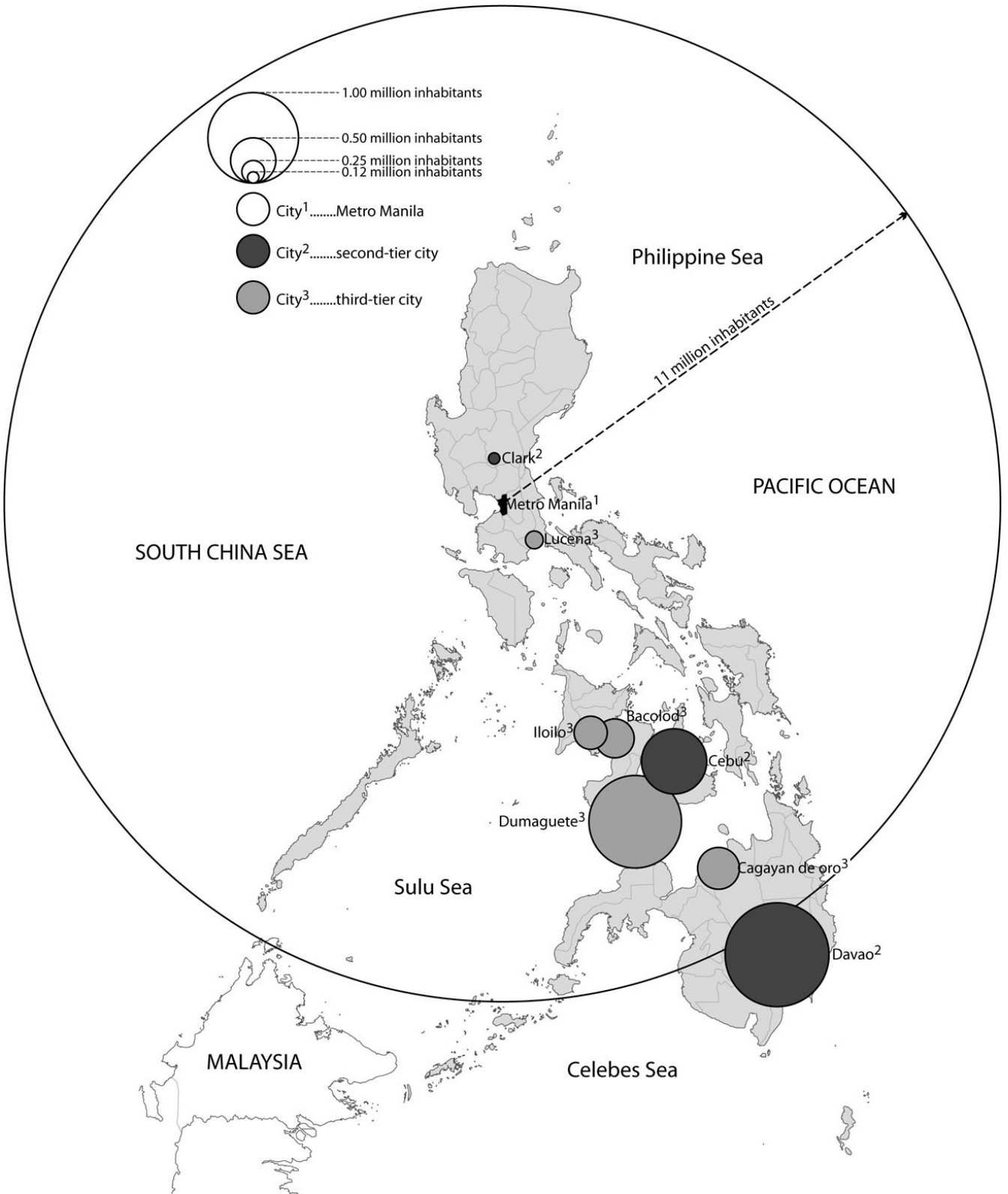
Bonifacio Global City. Ideal Manila.

by Ursula Faix/ bad architects group

Bonifacio, south-east of Manila, a large real estate investment marketed as Bonifacio Global City, is actually a former American Fort built during the American colonial period that served as a detention centre for dissidents under the Marcos regime. MTV Philippines and other global corporations, as well as information technology and business process outsourcing companies, are based here, and it has become a second-tier Central Business District (CBD) gaining increasingly more advantages over its main rival in the Metro Manila area: Makati City. Against this backdrop, this article investigates how a second-rate CBD can be the first choice for global corporations and expatriates, and explores what is global about Bonifacio Global City.

One main reason why a city is defined as first or second rate, does not relate to the number of its inhabitants, but to the amount of media attention it receives. Thus cities with only a few inhabitants or none at all, such as Pompeii or Angkor Vat, can be dubbed “first rate” whilst large cities such as Chengdu - with over four million inhabitants in the Chinese hinterland - are considered second-rate since they receive very little media attention.

Large media events can bring fame to a city, however it is how long the fame can be sustained that decides whether it a first or second-rate city. Some events cause media attention towards a city to fall hours or days after the event, other events make a city live off it for decades or even define its identity. E.g. Innsbruck still lives on as the place hosted the Winter Olympics twice, more than forty years ago.



The Philippines
 First, Second and Third-Tier Cities

Second-rate cities, especially in Russia, China, India and the Philippines are favoured locations for outsourcing information technologies (IT) and business processes (BP) (1). The development or colonisation of those second-tier cities always follows the same path: as soon as the first-rate city has been fully developed and prices for labour, renting and infrastructure are getting too high whilst profits are starting to fall, companies look for alternative cities. The government usually supports this process and seeks to attract businesses for instance by creating special economic zones or investing in the tertiary educational system. As soon as the balance between risk and gain is about to be reached, low-risk companies also become willing to relocate their outsourcing businesses to the second-tier cities - and the same cycle starts again.

the past five years, from below 10 million to over 11 million, whereas one third of the 17 Metro Manila cities (2) have suffered population decline, among them the major municipalities of Manila and Makati City.

One of the districts expanding the fastest is Taguig, with an annual growth rate of 4.5% from 1995 to 2000. This does not even account for the land and population gains that Taguig made in 2003, when Taguig City won a court case concerning Fort Bonifacio against Makati City. Fort Bonifacio is actually a former American Fort built during the American colonial period; it served as a detention centre for dissidents during the Marcos regime. Today it is a large real estate development and is being marketed as Bonifacio Global City. (3)



In the Philippines the top three potential second-tier cities are Cebu, Davao and Clark; Cebu and Davao have both approximately one million inhabitants, while Clark is a comparatively small city with 250,000 inhabitants only. Cebu, Clark and Davao have all increased their population, Cebu by 8.5% and Davao by 18% over the past five years - these three second-tier cities have already caused population migration as well as attracted expatriates. Metro Manila, officially called "National Capital Region", has also increased its population over

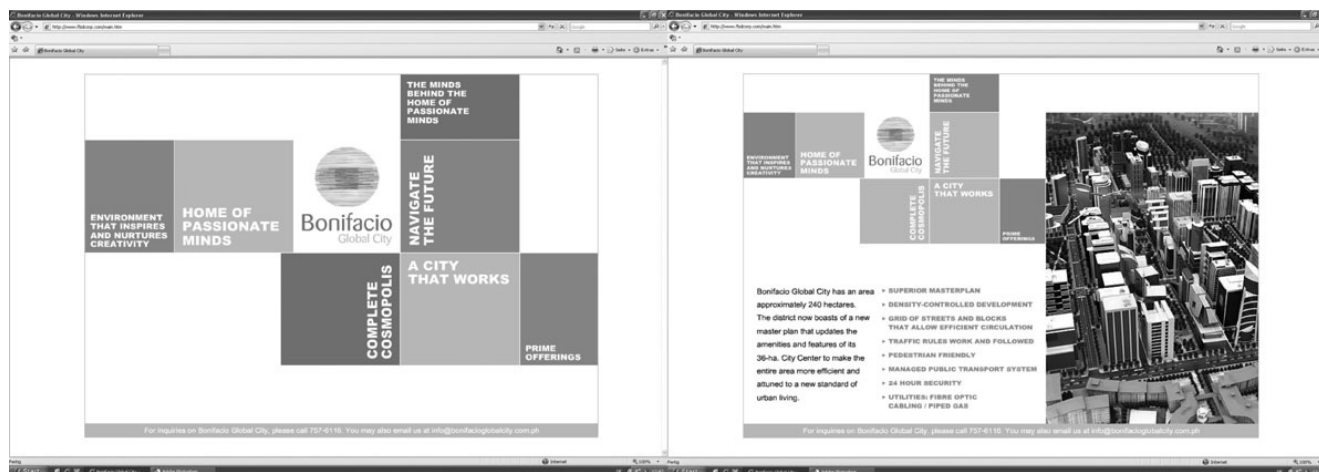
Since Makati City has increased its business taxes while at the same time Taguig has decreased them, Bonifacio Global City has profited from these measures by being able to attract global businesses such as HSBC, tetraPak, Ericsson, Fujitsu and MTV, as well as prestigious schools - among them the International School, the Japanese and the British School. With the arrival of the first embassy in Bonifacio Global City (embassy of Singapore), Taguig is also about to undermine Makati City's position as prime location for embassies.



Metro Manila (NCR)
 Consisting of 16 Cities and 1 Municipality
 Population Development 1995 - 2000

With Bonifacio Global City as its main driving force, Taguig City is about to become a serious rival to Makati City's supremacy as Central Business District. Usually the characteristics of a central business district (CBD) are as follows: dominant share of jobs in the service sector, decrease in resident population, highest level of transport accessibility, main shopping streets, high land rates, and high rents. But Bonifacio Global City is trying to go a few steps further, enhancing its bandwidth by combining heritage, business and housing.

to be an ideal city not only conceptionally but also formally, - literally trying to square the circle. Since traffic congestion is a huge problem in Manila - the average speed has fallen from an average 20km/h in the Eighties to less than 8km/h lately (4) - Bonifacio seeks to attract its future inhabitants by featuring four points concerning traffic solutions on its website menu "a city that works", namely: a grid of streets and blocks that allow efficient circulation, traffic rules which work and are followed, pedestrian-friendly streets and a managed public



Bonifacio Global City - A City that works

While central Manila suffers from the constant problems of traffic jams, crime and air pollution, and the Central Business District of Makati City is, like any classical business district, too mono-cultured and car-oriented, Bonifacio Global City tries to exist as the perfect combination and antithesis to Manila and Makati, attracting business (global corporations), public facilities (schools and universities), retail and leisure facilities (shopping centres and restaurants) as well as low-rise and high-rise housing developments and condominiums, thus seeking to become an ideal city. The master plan of Bonifacio Global City bears an undeniable resemblance to both the classical layout of the Renaissance Ideal City and Hippodamus' grid; both idealized iconographic paradigms of the concept of a city, expressing its endeavour

transport system. Bonifacio Global City is made to look like the antithesis, - a veritable paradise, - compared to central Manila. It promises that everything, that does not work in the old city or the Makati business district, will work here.

"...Unlike other business districts in the metropolis, Bonifacio Global City is prepared to provide an environment where residences, offices, schools and commercial centers are within walking distance of one another. The new masterplan of the City Center resulted to more efficient traffic flows for vehicles as well as for the people on the ground. Bisnar noted: "This advantage will allow residents and other locators to spend quality time with their family, on their various interests and hobbies in life,

and on what really matters to them. Our innovative masterplan includes a modern road network that works, attractive amenities that encourage walking, lush parks and open spaces and other elements that contribute to better quality of life and good health because of the invigorating and clean environment of Bonifacio Global City....” (5)

The French urbanist Francois Ascher distinguishes two main poles of “metropolisation”: on the one hand homogeneity and on the other hand distinctiveness. Bonifacio Global City fits well into this concept: while it tries to be homogenous - with the usual choice of brands such as Starbucks, McDonald’s and Pizza Hut - it tries to set itself apart

within the Manila Metropolitan Area as being tailored to the needs of specific clients and hosts. So far Bonifacio Global City has managed to attract some Philippine headquarters of global brands, making itself even more attractive for company headquarters. Future employees, (expatriates from all over the world) will easily adapt to their “new” city. With an extraordinary golf course close by, dating from the 1920s, as well as the Fort Bonifacio, Bonifacio Global City has its own identifiers and links to the past, a sort of own “Intramuros”(6). Of course it risks being outstripped by a different community, a present-day, third-tier municipality, unless its attempt to embody the ideal city should succeed in breaking the cycle.

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The article was edited by Roxanne Powell, Vienna.

Images

Illustration 1 “The Philippines”: bad architects group
Source: www.citypopulation.de

Illustration 2 “Metro Manila (NCR)”: bad architects group
Source: www.citypopulation.de

Illustration 4 “Bonifacio Global City - A City that works”
Source: www.fbdcorp.com

Notes

(1) Compare: “Outsourcing to The Philippines: Metro Manila and Beyond” by Offshore Insights Market Report Services <http://www.neolT.com>

(2) Metro Manila is composed by sixteen cities and one municipality (Pateros)

(3) Parts of the site of Bonifacio Global City belonged to the district of Makati City, parts of it to the Taguig City. A trial court has adjudged Taguig City the whole site.

(4) Reese, Niklas and Werning, Rainer (ed.): “Handbuch Philippinen” p. 73, Horlemann, Bad Honnef, 2006

(5) In: The Sunday Times (Manila Times), July 1st, 2007

(6) Intramuros is the old city nucleus of Manila