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SHOPPING MALL AS NEW URBAN CORE? A MORPHOLOGICAL STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY URBAN FABRIC INFLUENCED BY SHOPPING MALLS

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Abstract. A major transformation in contemporary cities is the evolution of the urban core. This paper investigated the issues associated with the surge of shopping malls as an alternative public space and how they may be classified as an "urban core" of contemporary cities. This paper aimed to interpret a new form of urban core and its set of spatial indicators relative to its socio-spatial network with its surroundings. This paper also aimed to introduce spatial indicators of urban core for the practical use of institutional units on how to create equally attractive public place alternatives to shopping malls. The paper argued that shopping malls with significant floor areas, accumulated over the years, substantially influence their surrounding area by increasing lot density and linkages. While these shopping mall complexes do not meet the threshold population to be considered "urban core", the case studies have demonstrated that shopping malls can establish social hubs that centralize urban activities, and construct a "place" or "destination" with congregated urban services such as public plazas and public transport network.

Keywords: urban core, shopping mall, urban function, alternative public space, contemporary cities, urbanism.

Introduction

Cities have always been the centers of conflict, change, and transformation (Harvey, 2007, p. 13). A recent major transformation in contemporary cities is the evolution of the urban core and its public places; public places in urban core are pivotal nodes that draw opportunities from across a wide territory, and interrelation of societal layers of social, economic, cultural, and institutional function. The contemporary transformation of public space displays a profound redrawing of the contours of the public-private relationship. As a result, a new breed of shopping malls has emerged that seamlessly integrates itself into the urban surroundings and it becomes difficult to draw any line between a city and the mall. Such new urban forms of shopping malls are examples of mall-like environments that weave into the street life of a city (Al, 2016, 2017). Another major transformation in the spatial structure of contemporary cities is the evolution of their public spaces, particularly their uses and mental construction. Considering the looseness of public space, researchers argue that contemporary public spaces have transformed into a new form that reflects the transformation of society's needs, activities, and attachment to values and places. Worpole and Knox (2007) argue that there is a widened range of public or quasi-public spaces where people create opportunities for social and economic exchange. We now live in a society dominated by the privatization of experience, of consumption, in planned, designed space, commodified and policed to ensure order, control, and stability to meet the needs of the market and capital. This is at the expense of a truly collective social and spatial solidarity and proximity, of a shared potentiality of the creative experience of being together in space (Zieleniec, 2018).

1. Study area

In the Philippines, the flourishing of malls is indicative of the country's strong economic position compounded by strong national and international investment. According to the Philippine Retailers Association, shopping malls account for about 15% of the country's Gross Domestic Product and 33% of the entire service sector. On the other hand, the rapid development of shopping malls is somewhat a response to the declining vitality and increasing safety concerns of city centers and street life. Shopping

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malls provide a domestic environment for shopping where the degree of unfamiliarity [mostly in terms of class and race] is controlled through the mechanisms of exclusions. Metro Manila is the capital region of the Philippines with a total population of 13.4 million (Philippine Statistics Office, 2020) over a land area of 639 square meters and accounts for 38.90% of the country's economic output. While the region is the dominant center of politics, recent years have witnessed the rapid deterioration of public parks – once considered the center of most important political gatherings and social events, occurring alongside the proliferation of shopping malls (Reyes, 2016). The region is home to some of the world's largest shopping malls which gross leasable areas of more than 4 million square feet or nearly 50% of the total retail space in the country. Metro Manila is widely known for its strong consumerism and admiration of shopping malls. Hence, it is the best area to explore for studying the effects of shopping malls on the transformation of public life and public spaces. Figure 1 reveals the rising retail floor area in Metro Manila over the last decade.

The dominance of shopping malls is also associated with their evolving character. Beyond their commercial nature, malls have progressively facilitated other urban functions, such as recreation, leisure, tourism, and governmental services. As Connell (1999) highlighted:

> *The particular success of malls in Manila is partly a function of there being only one park in the center of Manila–the sole significant public open space for family recreation–hence the people of Manila "had to find an alternative place where the family could get together at weekends" enabling Mandaluyong's "primary thrust to promote its malls as a wholesome family place for shopping, strolling, eating, watching movies or simply being together". In this marketing device and orientation, they have proved successful. Rather than cathedrals or marketplaces, the malls have become the new parks.*

This is supported by Dovey (1999), who suggests that "the mall" is a "city inverted", urban public life that has been "recreated" in "private space". This "urban inversion" is a realm of a collective mass culture where the mall at once captures and inverts the urban into "relative shelter, safety, order and predictability which is semantically and structurally severed from the city". Shopping malls in Metro Manila are more than just retail infrastructures; shopping malls have become the infrastructural cores of urban spaces and societies. Shopping malls are planned to be highly accessible by pedestrians, and private and public transportation. Major shopping malls are evidently located in the most accessible locations of the region and are in the most connected and visible areas.

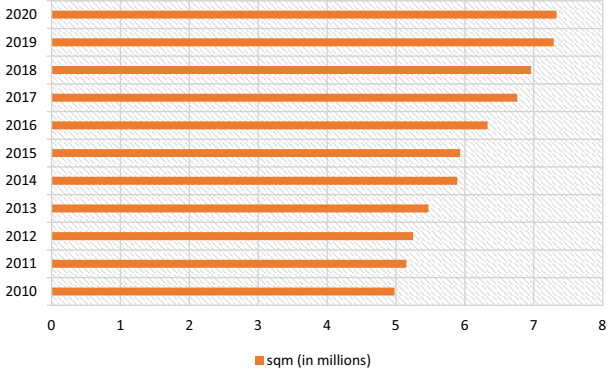

Figure 1. Retail floor area in Metro Manila from 2010–2020 (source: Alegado & Yap, 2020)

1.1. Research direction

While there are extensive discussions and research on the "publicness" of shopping malls, how the emergence and dominance of shopping malls formed a new urban form in contemporary cities, and how shopping malls transformed their surrounding built environment, literature discussions on spatial restructuring influenced by shopping malls are arguably underdeveloped. As this research discussion investigated the issues associated with the rise of shopping malls as alternative public spaces and contemporary urban cores, this paper aimed to introduce spatial indicators of urban cores for the practical use of institutional units on how to create equally attractive public place alternatives to a shopping mall. The main line of inquiry of this paper: can shopping malls be considered the new urban cores of contemporary cities in Metro Manila? Specifically, it attempted to answer the following sub-questions: how do shopping malls redefine contemporary urban fabric? Has the emergence of shopping malls spatially restructured urban functions? and, how do shopping malls spatially produce relational networks that spatially integrate the everyday practices of people? Given the multi-lateral spatial effect of shopping malls, this question attempted to explore the socio-spatial constructed meanings produced by shopping malls.

1.2. Re-territorialization and Assemblage Thinking

The emergence of shopping mall as a new urban core compounded with other city dynamics shows the formation of a new spatial structure. To understand and study the formation of shopping malls about their built environment, this research built its theoretical works from the concept of Territtorialization and Assemblage Thinking. Territorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) is a form of "Becoming", which is the key characteristic of all entities in this study. It is when a process becomes more rigid, more controlled, more striated, and more defined. This is then followed by a process of becoming which undoes the existing structure within the mechanism, which is called deterritorialization. The deterritorialized entity will then start a new territorialization process of becoming for nothing can remain unterritorialized. The "territorialization" which happens after deterritorialization is called "reterritorialization". In summary, Figure 2 shows a conceptual diagram of "territorial evolution". Assemblage can be considered as a theory of

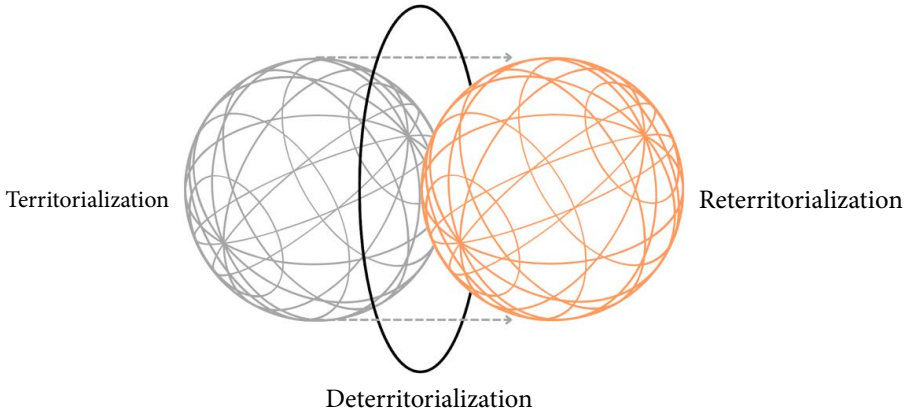

Figure 2. Conceptual diagram of "Territorial Evolution" (source: the authors)

"place" where it helps human engages with the socio-spatiality of everyday life (Dovey, 2010). To help understand the concept of urban assemblage as a process of a combination of various urban elements, this research uses Dovey's (2016) multi-scalar approach that can be used to identify the "urban DNA" which is at the nexus of density, mix, and access (Dovey & Pafka, 2017).

2. Method

2.1. Data sources

This research adopted a mixed method of research. It specifically used place-based case studies, site observation, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The case study method is used to interpret the spatial character of shopping malls and their vicinity. It is also used to analyze the socio-spatial relationship of shopping malls to their surrounding area and society. The site selection process considered existing shopping malls that have significant impacts on their socio-spatial environment. Three qualifiers were established to identify the most representative sites for the study, namely: spatiotemporal, spatial characteristics, and actual site observation. The analysis of the case study is built on urban core indicators established from the theoretical context of Territorialization and Assemblage. The urban core indicators were established through a critical review of the interplay between the urban fabric and urban core. Finally, the results of the case studies were validated through an FGD. FGD was employed to understand the behavior of mall goers and collate their spatial impressions about shopping malls. This research conducted purposive sampling in selecting the FGD participants. Seven (7) participants were selected according to their age, occupation/profession, and avid mallgoers, as they claim. The responses were categorized into themes and then analyzed through thematic coding.

2.2. Urban core indicators

This paper built on the interplay between the urban core and urban fabric to define suitable urban core indicators. The physical elements and forms that are used to define a built-in environment are what urban fabric is. "Urban fabric" depicts urban areas as "webs or lacework" with patterns based on physical elements that are typically permanent (Cohen, 2010). In a study by Porta and Renne (2005), physical indicators that make up the urban fabric are defined, namely: accessibility, land use diversity, public/private realm, natural surveillance (fronts and backs), permeability/street connectivity, employment density, number of buildings, and number of lots, among others. Urban fabric, along with the recognized physical elements and indicators that define it, relates, and connects to relevant cases that show social understanding (Porta & Renne, 2005) – this is where the urban core and its underlying definition come into play. The centrality of a town or city is defined to be progressive depending on the social growth that weaves the urban fabric. At each level and part of a social community, the forming of a unique physical environment is essential, both as a platform for the display of such a sense of community and as an expression of itself. "Urban core" is defined generally as a focus and root of activity in an urban fabric which is highly populated in nature (Cox, 2014) and, metaphorically translated from the human scale, the "heart" (Marchi, 2016) of the town. What complements the two are the social patterns that entwine along with the physicality of the environment. The environment should be understood to include not just its direct apparency, but also the social networks we associate with it (Hussein et al., 2020). The selection of the indicators that define "urban core" is directly grasped from the urban fabric indicators, categorized under "compactness" and "network". There is a physical sense to these indicators but what makes them qualified is their direct correlation to user activity and its effect on urban and social development.

Compactness

The "compactness" of urban spaces describes the economic and urban productivity, social development and population, and characteristics of urban walkability, growth, and solidity. Despite the irregularity of its direct definition and attributes, the compactness of urban spaces leads to the connection of inhabitants and the physical urban extent

and its effects on the space itself (Angel et al., 2018, p. 3). There are numerous studies that provide ways to calculate and determine the compactness of urban development, but for this specific study, compactness will be broken down into two urban core indicators elucidated by the timeline of the following (1) density, and (2) land-use intensity.

Connectivity

The urban network and its topology, street, and road connectivity, and the paths that branch through the urban fabric are linked with socioeconomic aspects of urban systems and urban mobility patterns (Tsiotas & Polyzos, 2015). This study will be characterized by (1) public transportation network, and (2) street network and permeability. Figure 3 below shows the selection process of the urban core indicators. It shows the identified set of indicators that complements the framework o in understanding the assemblage process of a place to its surrounding neighborhood.

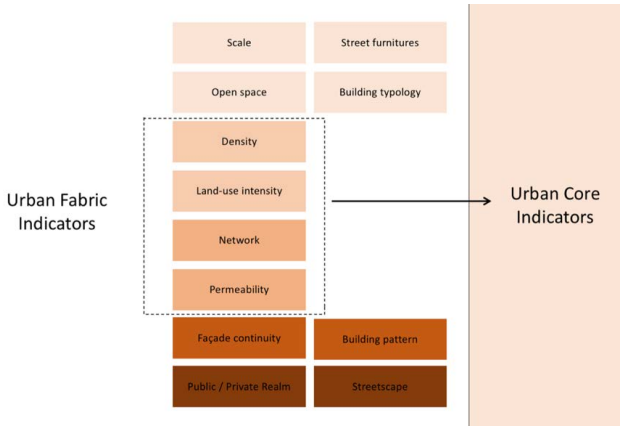

Figure 3. Urban fabric indicators (source: the authors)

2.3. Case study selection process

Spatiotemporal analysis

As the built environment continuously evolves with respect to time, the space-time framework is an essential element to analyze for the potential impact of a development typology towards its vicinity. This research, therefore, adopts a qualitative analysis using the lens of spatiotemporal changes. A spatiotemporal analysis is an approach that helps determine spatial changes in the built environment through time. The first qualifier involved spatiotemporal analysis of existing shopping malls across the region of Metro Manila. This qualifier argued that shopping malls developed and completed 25 to 30 years before this study are the best candidates to support the case study requirement that shopping malls must show substantial developmental impact across their surroundings over some time. Table 1 shows the list of major shopping malls and their respective completion year.

Table 1. Spatiotemporal (source: the authors)

Major shopping malls in Metro Manila	Gross Lot Area (sqm)	Completion (Year)
Alabang Town Center	48, 000	1982
Robinson's Place Manila	241, 000	1997
SM Megamall	474, 225	1991
Robinson's Galleria	216, 000	1990
SM Southmall	205, 120	1995
Glorietta	250, 000	1991
Greenbelt	250, 000	1991
SM City Fairview	282, 681	1997
SM City North-EDSA	497, 213	1985

Spatial characteristics

The second qualifier selected existing shopping malls that are located outside planned unit developments and are described as the center of public activities in their respective locations. This qualifier excluded shopping malls that are in planned unit developments (PUD) that can be classified as Central Business Districts (CBD) or mixed-use developments. This typology of development deviates from the intended character of the existing shopping malls which are needed for the case study. Ultimately, this qualifier considered shopping malls that organically grew over time rather than preplanned developments. Table 2 shows the shortlisted shopping malls and their respective development classification.

Table 2. Spatial characteristics (source: the authors)

Major shopping malls in Metro Manila	Development Classification (Stand-alone or integrated)
Alabang Town Center	Integrated community
Robinson's Place Manila	Stand-alone
SM Megamall	Ortigas CBD
Robinson's Galleria	Ortigas CBD
SM Southmall	Near Alabang Town Center, which is the center of public activity of the area
Glorietta	Makati CBD
Greenbelt	Makati CBD
SM City Fairview	Stand-alone
SM City North-EDSA	Stand-alone

Spatial characteristics and site observation

The final qualifier identified existing shopping malls which showed consequential changes to their built environment over some time, and that became the epicenter of socio-geographic changes in their surrounding environments. As shown in Table 3, this qualifier identified that SM City Fairview and Robinson's Place Manila are the most representative sites through their distinct character and less complex urbanity as opposed to SM North EDSA. On the one hand, Robinson's Place Manila

provided a hub or center for the existing but dispersed socio-spatial patterns from the already established city life. The mall is a representative site for the case study because of its unique characteristics that show how malls can reshape an existing community without the collapse of existing socio-spatial forms. On the other hand, SM City Fairview revealed another urban scenario wherein the contemporary community around it has gained its built form after its completion. Figure 4 shows the location of major shopping malls in Metro Manila.

Table 3. Most representative sites (source: the authors)

Major shopping malls in Metro Manila	Stand-alone or integrated
Robinson's Place Manila *Case Study 01	Stand-alone
SM City Fairview *Case Study 2	Stand-alone
SM City North-EDSA	Stand-alone

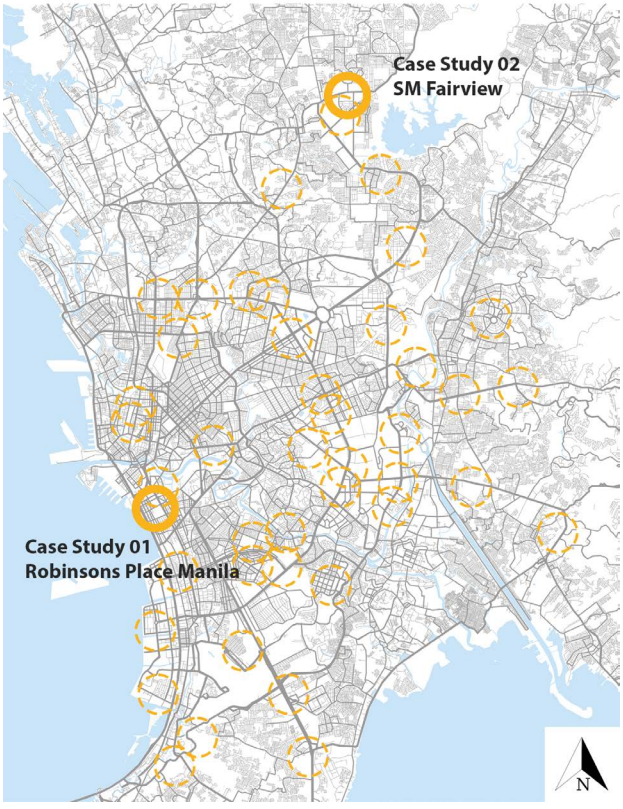

Figure 4. Location of major shopping malls in Metro Manila (source: the authors)

2.4. The case of Robinson's Place Manila

Robinsons Place Manila is situated over the western portion of Metro Manila, within the Ermita district. It is located in Manila City, which is the capital of the Philippines, and at the former site of Ateneo de Manila University, a premier Philippine university. The transformation of the city's zoning and land use has a little far-reaching change because Manila City started urbanization in Metro Manila as early as the 1980s. As early as the 1980s, Manila City had its lands already filled and zones already instituted with function Ermita was envisioned as the new civic center during the expansion of Manila in 1898 from the idea that starred Ermita to become the heart of the new Nation-State (Zialcita, 2011). As early as the 1960s, Ermita held the city hall of Manila, the U.S. Embassy, the country's first state-run educational institution, and the Philippine General Hospital. For an urban image as early as the 1960s, Ermita already had an established sense of urban life with a grid form of urban fabric ready to be filled as the years passed by.

Compactness

Commercial and institutional zones were already dominant in the area even prior to the construction of Robinson's Place Manila in 1997. Followed by the opening of the shopping mall, a patch of university cluster zone slowly formed over the eastern side of the mall. The introduction of a university cluster zone, which attracts profit-generating activities anchored to university essentials, intensifies urban activities within the area. The low-intensity commercial areas that were once dispersed around the current location of the mall were replaced by the university cluster zone and most of which are presently being absorbed by Robinson's Place Manila. Figure 5 highlights the location of Robinson's Place Manila which is at the interface of land-uses with high-generating activity that signifies its position at the nexus of a major congregation of people.

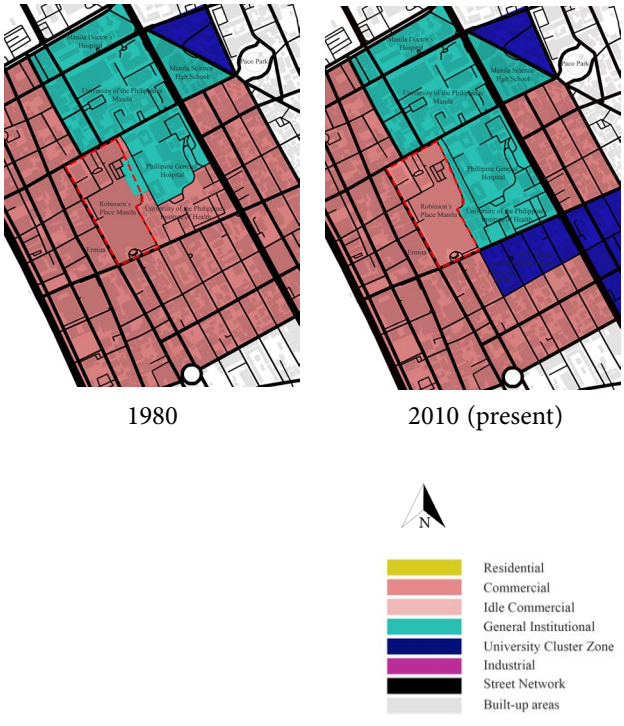

Figure 5. Specific change in land-use from 1980 to 2010 around Robinson's Place Manila (source: the authors)

Figure 6. Urban changes around Robinson's Place Manila (source: the authors)

Figure 6 reveals that while the development around the shopping mall is already horizontally dense since 2001, the lots around the shopping mall slowly developed vertically. The evident increase in the number of residential units per lot signifies that the general lot density around the shopping mall has grown significantly over the past 20 years which consequently influenced the increase of urban activities around the mall as well. Although the horizontal character of its surrounding area possessed a tightened fabric, the urban texture around Robinson's Place Manila is rather sharpened over time by the spill-over of the mall through the influx of formal commercial establishments replacing informal and small enterprises.

Connectivity

Figure 7 reveals that there is no substantial change in street connectivity over the years due to the long-attained and accomplished sense of urban life in the area. Street connectivity for the area is apparent. The extensiveness of the street connectivity around the area is well established. As early as 2001, the street network in the area already attained density and tightness in the urban fabric. Hence, this research assumed that the influence or contribution of the shopping mall to the existing street network is minimal. Street permeability of primary rounds around Robinson's Place Manila is pervious and more previous in interior streets, which allows more walkable paths around residential areas while also allowing a substantial number of public transit routes passing through the shopping mall. All the streets that surround the shopping mall are permittable for pedestrian access and circulation.

Figure 8 highlights the public transportation options in the city include jeepneys, tricycles, pedicabs, buses, taxis, Light Railway Transit (LRT 1 & 2), and Philippine National Railways (PNR). All these public transportation options pass through the roads leading to Robinson's Place Manila

Figure 7. Street network changes in and around Robinson's Place Manila (source: the authors)

Figure 8. Public transport network around Robinson's Place Manila (source: the authors)

and are provided with transit stops surrounding found along the edges of the mall. It was evident that there were no restrictions for pedestrian and private vehicular access around the shopping mall and that travel restriction was only applicable to public transportation due to the current road capacity. While Point to Point (P2P) bus routes, Utility Vehicle (UV) express, and jeepneys which come from various major nodes in Metro Manila go through tertiary streets and the nearest LRT 1 station are approximately 400 meters away from the mall, informal pedicab hubs can be found in key entry points of the shopping mall.

2.5. The case of SM City Fairview

SM City Fairview is located in Quezon City which is located in the northeastern portion of Metro Manila. The city has proposed a protracted strategy for its occupying space that will enable the city's goal to be attained through its Comprehensive Land Use Plan's (CLUP) Long-Term Spatial Strategy. It reveals that the city's many parts, areas, or centers will be classified into the following categories: (1) Growth Centers, (2) Non-Growth Centers, and (3) Special Development Areas. For the goals and objectives of this research, the chosen case study is located in the Growth Centers category which is defined as the smaller parts of the city with the capacity to become "nuclei" for long-term socio-economic and political development in its surrounding region, and pivotal locations that perform functions or provide services to a diverse population that extends beyond their immediate surroundings. SM City Fairview is one of the sources of urban progress in the growth center and is observed to determine how shopping malls are functioning as the contemporary city centers of urban communities. The early 2000s showed significant land-use changes bringing more residential and commercial areas. The development of vacant lots into dwellings and business facilities was due to the continuous expansion of SM City Fairview.

Compactness

While the intensity of land use around SM City Fairview since the 2000s has been significantly high, the actual urban activities around SM City Fairview only grew from its completion year to the present. Figure 9 reveals that large-scale residential exclaves were expanding around the mall despite the property market and built-up areas then were yet to be developed. These residential enclaves started to fill up through a low-density residential development as soon as the mall was constructed. The residential and commercial markets steadily grew around the mall which consequently replaced industrial uses, located at the northern portion of the mall, with mixed-use areas. As the mall expanded, commercial activities continued to intensify through the activation of commercial lots along the major roads and the influx of private institutional developments such as private hospitals, universities and colleges, and supermarkets. With all these developments, it suggests the critical role of a shopping mall in activating urban development and activities.

Note: Referenced from 2011–2030 comprehensive land use plan by Quezon City Government.

Figure 9. Land-use transformation from 1997 to 2021 around SM City Fairview (source: the authors)

Figure 10. Urban changes around SM City Fairview (source: the authors)

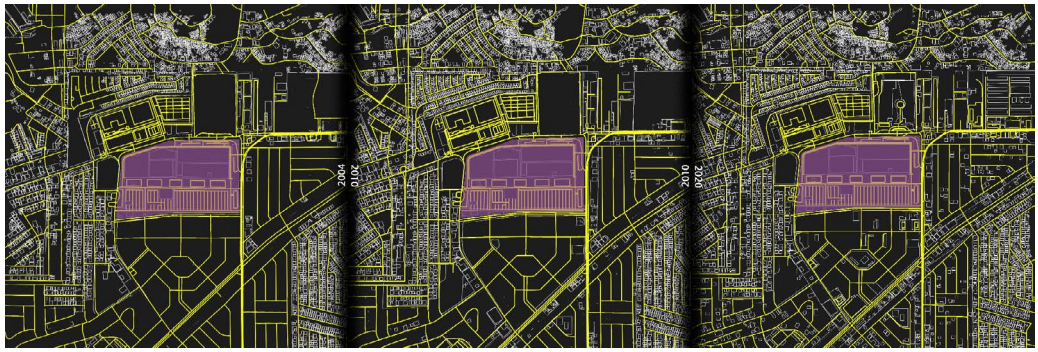

Figure 11. Street network changes in and around SM City Fairview (source: the authors)

Significant changes are seen from the early years of the mall to the present. Figure 10 shows looser lot configurations with fewer populations and several buildings per lot were evident around the area of the newly built SM City Fairview but as soon as the nearby shopping malls were completed and SM City Fairview expanded a tighter urban fabric was seen through the infill developments caused by the new construction developments of previously idle residential and commercial areas. Residential areas were populated and became more compact as the number of buildings per lot significantly grew over the last decade. The introduction of mid-rise towers and the slow infilling of institutional, residential, and commercial development within the nearby business park are the apparent urban landscape transformations around SM City Fairview.

Connectivity

Urban network shows behavior, activity, and mobility in an urban space. The network of the urban fabric is the thread itself and it varies in thickness, contraction, and circulation. As shown by Figure 11, SM City Fairview is surrounded by primary and secondary roads which through time have significantly improved their regional importance brought by rapid urban development. The general street network around SM City Fairview is well-established and no substantial changes happened over the last decades however the development of service roads within the shopping mall, including Fairview Terraces and Robinsons Novaliches, became the thorough access between public roads which eases the traffic around and make immediate surrounding area connected. With the development of the nearby Business Park, the street connectivity has sharpened around the vicinity of the mall, allowing further through access similar to the effects of service roads of the nearby shopping malls. As opposed to the growing concern in the 20th century where large blocks do not encourage movement, the development of shopping malls has arguably brought additional access to public roads. Although the street network is established and has continuously improved, access is limited to cars and less to pedestrians. Street permeability around SM City Fairview is less previous on primary roads and more permeable in interior streets, allowing more walkable paths around residential areas and limiting vehicles to enter, especially public transport.

Figure 12 shows that SM City Fairview facilitates transit stops such as jeepney stops, Utility Vehicle (UV) Express stations, taxi stations, P2P stations, and soon Manila Rail Transit (MRT) station access. Being located at an advantageous location which is at the intersection of three

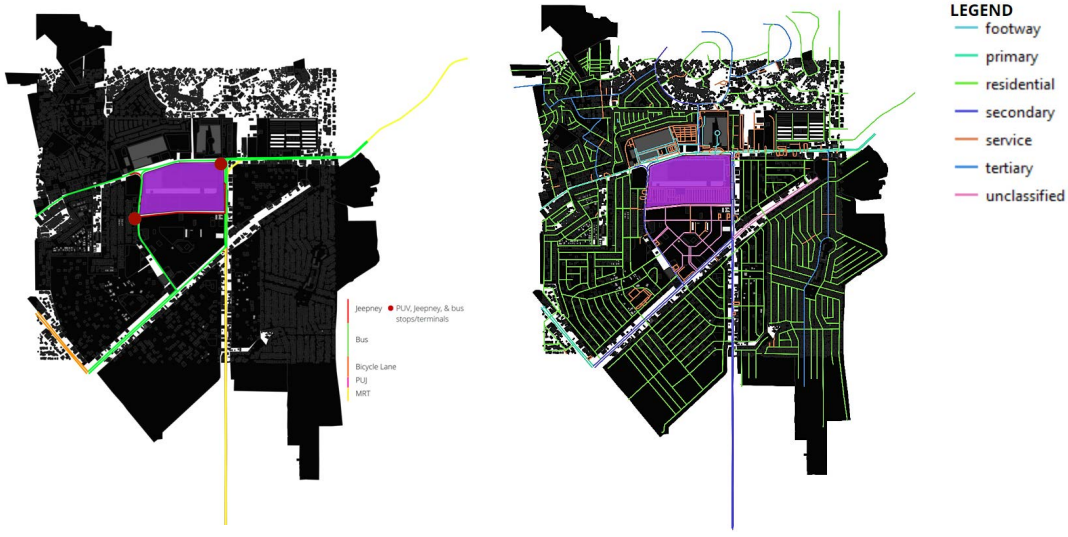

Figure 12. Public transport network around SM Fairview (source: the authors)

Table 4. Comparative results of the case studies (source: the authors)

	Urban Core Indicator	Robinson's Place Manila	SM City Fairview
COMPACTNESS	Land-Use Intensity	– Mixed fabric of retail and residential development – High-intensity land-use	– Mixed fabric of retail, residential and private institutions such as hospital and educational – Mid-intensity land-use
	Lot Density	– Vertically densed – High-intensity land use – Significant growth of high-rise buildings – Number of floors per lot significantly increase	– Horizontally densed – Adequate growth of mid-rise buildings – Number of buildings per lot significantly increased
CONNECTIVITY	Street Network and Permeability	– Adequately connected – Reasonable density on narrow grids on curvier orientations/lines. Passable	– Highly connected – Facilitates through movement between public roads via its service roads
	Public Transportation Network	– Provide facilities for public transit stops and stations	– Provide major facilities for public transit stops and stations

Table 5. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) results (source: the authors)

Socio-spatial function of shopping mall	Activities and relational life in shopping mall
Socialization space	– Meet up/waiting place for family or friend – Bonding place with family and classmates either dine or shop
Recreation space	– Leisure sightseeing – Relaxing ambiance to go to on weekend
Transit space	– Waiting place with/for family or friend – Access to public transport
Communal space	– Event sightseeing on weekends
One-stop place	– Access to other every daily need such as church, bank, government services – Variety of choices for difference services

old public routes, the mall is viewed as a commuter transition point resulting from the generated high volume of automobile and pedestrian traffic. Passenger jeepneys and buses are the most frequent means of transportation in the area and run on several routes. Primary roads are the most utilized for the public transit network of the site and only reach secondary roads to catch passengers around commercial nodes and terminals.

3. Results

Two separate and considerably different situations can be seen; on the one hand, Robinson's Place Manila shows how a variable can create new urban forms out of an already-established urban fabric, and on the other hand, is out of the plain ground. The case of SM City Fairview casts urban progress from vacant space, while Robinson's Place Manila challenges already compressed space to progress vertically. Table 4 presents the comparative analysis using the urban core indicator defined by this research.

In addition, Table 5 summarizes the results of group discussions using thematic coding. The motivation of the discussion is to identify the participants' spatial impressions of shopping malls and how they formed a socio-spatial kinship with shopping malls in their daily life routines. Several themes emerged from the group discussion using the following questions: (1) Three words come to mind about shopping malls. (2) What are some fond memories you have about the shopping mall? (3) Apart from dining or ordering food, and shopping, what else do you often do in a mall? (4) What are the needs/wants to be fulfilled when you visit a shopping mall? Results generated from the group discussion suggested the following themes/categories, shopping malls as a place for socialization, a place for recreation, a place for transit, a communal space, and a one-stop place.

Conclusions and discussions

This part covers discussions and conclusions that ultimately answer the main question, "*How shopping malls are spatially becoming the urban core of contemporary city ?*" The following themes were used to specifically answer per sub-question.

Shopping mall as an engine of land-use intensification, and as a hub for public transport facilities: Contemporary shopping malls as "place" are arguably the anchor of mixed-use developments that integrate activities and

land uses within its complex and around its vicinity. As Dovey (2016) suggests, contemporary shopping malls are new urban places at the nexus of density, mix, and access, assemblage. It is widely recognized that shopping malls influence the agglomeration of various land uses. Malls tend to intensify land use in their vicinity and are mainly driven by their nature of convenience and the variety of options provided. In addition to the increased number of buildings per lot and concentration of population over time, surrounding areas of shopping malls capture its support-related and other spill-over services.

Public transportation networks as the bloodline of a city seamlessly link people and places together. The transport attractiveness of shopping malls is undeniable. These two urban elements complement each other by co-location to bring in a wider population for their determined advantages. The prerequisites of contemporary shopping malls such as good location and a highly accessible vicinity allow easy access to a public transit facility. As evident from the case studies, public transport facilities are well integrated with shopping malls in the form of organized (and unorganized) transit stations and stops. The integration with public transport facilities expands the patronage of shopping malls not only from private vehicles but also to mass commuters. The co-location brings about the vast majority of the population to congregate as part of their daily urban life and activities.

Shopping mall as a center of public activities: It is very evident that shopping malls are at the nexus of public activities is evident. The rapid growth of contemporary shopping malls generates a highly competitive retail environment that challenges mall developers to upgrade, expand, and integrate new urban functions to attract mall-goers and daily commuters. Multi-functional facilities provided by shopping malls transform mere commercial functions into the contemporary center of public activities. The one-stop shop nature of contemporary shopping malls elevates their function into an important activity center. Such a one-stop nature provides the focus not only on urban services but also on employment and social interaction within the city. Contemporary shopping malls are where people shop, work, live, meet, relax, and more importantly, are serviced with sufficient public transport options. Public activities both from the shopping mall itself and its vicinity area generate synergistic activities through their public transit network and high-intensity land uses.

Shopping malls as an urban amenity: Due to the evolution of public spaces in contemporary cities, mall developers are compelled to re-appropriate urban functions of public spaces such as town squares into their mall designs. Mall-goers perceive shopping malls as urban spaces for communal and civic activities that were once conceived by traditional public spaces. As evident in the group discussions, these activities include commercial gatherings, cultural performances, religious worship, and leisure strolling while waiting for friends or family members. Contemporary shopping malls are designed to provide privatized open plazas or atriums built as town squares for the community under comfortable and controlled conditions. These amenities have become the essential element in attracting consumers to often visit and spend more time in the shopping mall, which contributed to satisfying the need of undersupplied urban areas for public amenities. In comparison with public parks, especially those located in the Global South, not only one can find quality and dynamic parks in shopping malls, but shopping malls also provide within-reach access to other urban services essential to daily activities.

As contemporary cities undergo urban transformation, some of their critical functions are at the forefront of evolution. The attractiveness of traditional urban core in contemporary cities is declining due to the continuous transformation of urban structure, and the emergence of new urban forms such as shopping malls. In most contemporary cities, the traditional mono-centric urban structure is being replaced by a poly-centric urban structure due to the unparalleled growth of the global urban ecosystem. Shopping malls, being an evolving urban element, attract and integrate these displaced urban functions in a distinct interface between the public and private realms. Findings of this paper demonstrate that shopping malls with significant floor areas, accumulated through the years, substantially influence their surrounding area through increased lot density, physical linkages, and social behavior. While these shopping mall complexes do not meet the threshold population to be considered "urban core", the case studies have demonstrated that shopping malls can establish social hubs that centralize urban activities, and construct a "place" or "destination" with congregated urban services such as public plazas and public transport network. As this paper focuses on the qualitative aspects of a shopping mall as the contemporary urban core, future papers may conduct studies on the quantifiable qualifications of a shopping mall as the contemporary urban core, and how technology, particularly online shopping, may affect the becoming of shopping malls as new the urban core.

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