

Partnerships for successful conservation Far Eastern University, Manila

The Far Eastern University (FEU) campus is located in one of the congested and chaotic urban districts in Manila. The existing FEU buildings (circa 1939-1950) and their campus setting are Manila's most extensive surviving collection of Art Deco architecture today, although until recently these buildings were not considered important by most Filipinos.

The FEU Campus Conservation Programme established in 1989 aims to re-establish the lost visual landscape and identity of the university as a means to demonstrate its historical commitment to academic excellence and its contribution to the academic community and the Filipino people. The Programme conserved the five oldest campus buildings and its principal requirement was to respect university history by returning campus buildings and landscape to their original appearance. No changes were to be allowed on any heritage façade. New architecture had to blend with old to assure a visually harmonious ensemble. Interior upgrading was done with minimum intervention but providing modern facilities necessary for quality education. The Conservation Programme had to provide the regulatory framework and financial support for future maintenance of campus buildings and landscaping.¹

The campus-wide initiative achieved astonishing and unexpected results. The Conservation Programme re-established pride of place with students, faculty, and alumni. More importantly, the programme initiated a private-public initiative for neighbourhood revitalisation. When restoration was completed, neighbours, noticing that their buildings needed improvement, grouped together and agreed on improvement measures such as cleaning sidewalks and repainting façades. Upon the completion of the simple improvement, a neighbourhood association was formed that successfully requested the Manila Mayor to improve security, install street lighting, and to improve other facilities. This is the first example in the Philippines where a modest stakeholder improvement project has evolved into a public-private cooperation for urban revitalisation at local level.²

Section 2

The FEU Conservation Programme which started in 1989 sought to restore campus heritage buildings to their original appearance; remove all exterior interventions to heritage buildings; adapt and upgrade interiors with minimum intervention to provide current educational requirements; and require that all new campus architecture must harmonize with existing heritage buildings.³ Unforeseen was the extent that the FEU conservation program catalyzed neighbourhood revitalization undertaken by stakeholders in the streets surrounding the university. The aim of the resulting Nicanor Reyes (formerly Morayta) Street Revitalization Project is to improve and revitalise local urban infrastructure, both public amenities and privately owned historic buildings.

Section 3

Located in Manila's chaotic and overcrowded University Belt, FEU was the proverbial rose in a sea of thorns. Years of neglect had led to the campus falling into hard times, hardly a fit place to inspire the minds of our country's future leaders. But then the FEU administration decided to roll up its sleeves and do something. In one fell swoop, the campus morphed from an uninviting, graffiti-infested, makeshift patchwork of classrooms, food areas and dingy business stalls to restore itself to the gleaming Art Deco complex worthy of educating the best minds of the country. That the university is in the midst of one of the most high-density and polluted districts of the city did not deter FEU from battling urban blight head on. But what particularly makes the FEU campus noteworthy is that it proved to many how old

buildings do not have to mean derelict and unfashionable. In fact the restored buildings are hip and cool.⁴

Inspired by the new look of the campus, its neighbours started a revitalization programme, first volunteering to repaint their facades, then improving the sidewalks in front of their properties. After a series of small street improvement projects privately done by the stakeholders, the city government took notice of their initiative and responded by providing additional street improvement, such as repaving the sidewalks, improving street lighting, and providing better security.⁵ Their joint involvement evolved into an unprecedented public-private initiative for neighbourhood revitalization, the first such cooperation in the Philippines for urban regeneration based on conservation and an example that citizens can make government respond to their needs rather than simply wait for government handouts.⁶

The Nicanor Reyes Street Revitalization Initiative brings together the following partners:

- Far Eastern University, which has provided the forum for stakeholder dialogue and consultation and expertise in urban development
- Local home and shop owners who voluntarily improved the conditions in their street at their own expense, eventually grouping together to clean sidewalks and repaint façades before forming association of neighborhood building and shop owners
- The city government which made infrastructural improvements in the neighbourhood

Section 4

Aside from the obvious visual, cultural and technical improvements to the site, one of the on-going outcomes of the project has been the formation of the Nicanor Reyes Street Revitalisation Initiative, widely regarded as a model for a community-based approach to urban revitalisation. In 2005, FEU was awarded a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation, the commendation of which reads “the conservation of [...] the largest ensemble of Art Deco architecture that survives in Manila today, first and foremost reconfirms the feasibility of preserving fine examples of the younger building stock and the pedagogic effect such an exemplary project has on the community”⁷ The project has led local government to designate the whole University Belt Area as its next area for development and the partnership is now undertaking a study into future public-private partnerships for urban renewal. Other universities have been inspired to undertake research into the streets where they are located, forming the Inter-University Cooperation for Community-based Urban Renewal (IUCCURE) and running a workshop to help further schools link with efforts to develop continuing local knowledge generation for the urban revitalization and cultural heritage preservation of the streets of Manila.⁸

Section 5

This case study shows us that:

- It is becoming a universally accepted concept that collaborative partnerships among the city stakeholders are the key to the continued vitality, liveability and sustainability of cities.
- City based or urban universities can be a key player in the partnership with the local authorities in close coordination with urban communities.

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- Urban partnerships can be venues where the academic and technical expertise of the universities and the practical and actual experience of local authorities and communities can converge and synergize to build a mutually beneficial connection, communication, cooperation and collaboration for the betterment of the city.
- As universities are given the opportunity to actually apply their ideas and concepts of urban development, the local authorities and urban communities are introduced to helpful processes and methodologies that can enlighten and empower them.

We recommend that a mutually reinforcing partnership should be forged between an institution that can primarily think and those that are mandated to act or implement programs and projects for the public good. The social component of “town-gown” agreements has become more critical as universities have grown more willing to be a part of the community, not just located in the community.⁹

Section 6

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Section 7

¹ UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation, 2005 Honourable Mention <http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/world-heritage-and-immovable-heritage/asia-pacific-heritage-awards-for-culture-heritage-conservation/previous-heritage-awards-2000-2010/2005/award-winners/far-eastern-university/>

² Villalón, Augusto, 2006. “Partnerships for successful conservation” in the *Report and Conclusions of the National Seminar on The Preservation of Urban Heritage in Cambodia*, held in Phnom Penh 16 & 17 January 2006
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001511/151186e.pdf>

³ Pugeda, Annie, 2008. “Conservation and Management of the Far Eastern University Heritage Structures”
http://www.hdm.lth.se/fileadmin/hdm/alumni/papers/CMHB_2008b/21_PHI_Annie_Pugeda_-_Far_Eastern_University.pdf p 31

⁴ Excerpts from September 19, 2005 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer, quoted in “Pride of Place” by Augusto Villalón
<http://www.pinoyexchange.com/forums/showthread.php?t=229026&s=ccd0eb72d86c8cf8069e5b2e37d808e5>

⁵ UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation, 2005 Honourable Mention <http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/world-heritage-and-immovable-heritage/asia-pacific-heritage-awards-for-culture-heritage-conservation/previous-heritage-awards-2000-2010/2005/award-winners/far-eastern-university/>

⁶ Excerpts from September 19, 2005 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer, quoted in “Pride of Place” by Augusto Villalón

<http://www.pinoyexchange.com/forums/showthread.php?t=229026&s=ccd0eb72d86c8cf8069e5b2e37d808e5>

⁷ UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation, 2005 Honourable Mention <http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/world-heritage-and-immovable-heritage/asia-pacific-heritage-awards-for-culture-heritage-conservation/previous-heritage-awards-2000-2010/2005/award-winners/far-eastern-university/>

⁸ Oaña, Joel, 2004 “Developing and Managing a Research Program: FEU-SURE and Urbanization Issues” in papers from *Conference on Urbanization and the Educators’ Response*, November 19, 2004, FEU Conference Center p 13 http://ched-zrc.dlsu.edu.ph/pdfs/developing_managing_research_program_enp_oana.pdf

⁹ Ibid p 22

Author profile

Catherine Leonard joined the UK National Trust in 1999, when she was responsible for the Trust's work with overseas heritage groups and managing the European Network of National Heritage Organisations. Catherine now heads the Secretariat of the International National Trust Organisation (INTO) and is the strategic lead for the organisation's international co-ordination, including resource management, programme development, communications and relationships with INTO members, other ngos, policy makers and institutions worldwide. Catherine studied languages and literature at university and has spent time living and working abroad. Prior to joining the National Trust, Catherine worked for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.