

Problematizing Mallification: Reading the Architecture of Urban Development Proposals for the Baguio City Public Market

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ABSTRACT

The mall has physically and financially taken a central position in urban life in less developed countries like the Philippines. Corporations backing private malls have the capacity to establish condominiums and satellite stores in strategic areas with mall chains effectively taking over sections of cities. Mall culture is no longer contained within the four walls of the shopping center but has seeped into urban development including public services. This paper reads the architecture of market redevelopment proposals for the Baguio City Public Market through the lens of “mallification,” highlighting the implications of the proposed physical structures on the character and culture of the pre-existing market complex and community of local vendors and residents. Through an analysis of SM Prime Holdings’ proposal on the market redevelopment plan contrasted with the proposal of the local vendors’ cooperative, BAMARVA, this paper asserts that the shopping center has become a model for purported “modern development” but it, in fact, fuels homogenization and local disempowerment by displacing local culture, local vendors, and community spaces.

Keywords: consumer culture, local resistance, mallification, Baguio City Public Market

“Mallification” is defined as the “transformation of the city into a mall” and the consequent “loss of authentic spaces” (Salazar 2019, 202–3). Emerging from the prevalence of mall culture, structures, and spaces in the Philippine capital of Metro Manila during the 1990s, “mallification” and its related terms of “mallings” and “maller” capture how malls as commercial enterprise have become “the most familiar landmarks and spectacular monuments of urban Philippine society” (Hedman and Sidel 2005, 118), persisting amidst economically and politically

turbulent periods of Philippine history. The establishment of the Crystal Arcade,¹ the first enclosed and airconditioned shopping center in the Philippines in 1932, occurred as the country's capital was being transformed through this "landscape of modernity" (Leaf 1996, 1629 cited in Connell 1999, 423), marked by the construction of freeways, the emergence of walled residential areas, and a dependence on car ownership. However, the "economic growth . . . and the lack of public planning" that emerged during this period have also "emphasized individualism and privatization" (Connell 1999, 417).

The notion that development entails the "modernization" of the Philippine urban landscape with commercial structures aligns with the proposition of modernity and modernization that "western capitalist models of urban growth and regional economic expansion needed to replace the traditional and backward ways of rural, agrarian societies that had apparently been obstacles to Third World development in the past" (Potter et al. 2012, 61). However, as Rico and de Leon (2017, 3) posit, the "most crippling" colonial legacy of the American period is "consumerism and materialism." This legacy has been effectively transmitted through the mall (Hedman and Sidel 2005), which has become a symbol of "structural inequality against the backdrop of widening wealth inequality and crippling poverty" (Rico and de Leon 2017, 2).

The homogenizing logic of consumer culture as development impinges upon local urban development practices, prioritizing profit and private corporations at the expense of the displacement and erasure of local culture and history. The transformation of consumer culture through the shopping center has resulted in the intensification of the satisfaction of pleasure and the dissemination of the middle-class lifestyle of overconsumption as well-being (Saloma et al. 2021). Operating on the satisfaction of (actual and fabricated) consumer demands, the very architecture and interior design of the mall heighten the experience of shopping, generating this imperceptible pull to lose oneself in the array of windows featuring the latest fashion, gadgets, accessories, as well as marked down prices and payment plans for customers to afford these offerings (Salazar 2019). Anchored on profit-maximizing tactics, the mall is the physical embodiment of neoliberal development that espouses progress, success, and thereby modernization as the capacity to mimic the lifestyles and aesthetics of the West. This article examines the idea of consumer culture as development around the dynamics of a specific locality. By looking into the case of the Baguio City Public Market redevelopment plan, it delves into the complications of purported development and the various facets of local considerations that propel resistance to "mallification."

Urban Development and Social Relations

Space has a critical role “in the conduct of society itself,” precisely because of how “built space (buildings, cities, landscapes)” impacts “diverse facets of human life as cognition, selfhood, social and ideological relations, economy, politics, and power” (Archer 2005, 430). Particularly, space has implications on the “social relationship between groups that determines access to use of, and control over the basic material and ideological resources in society” (Schneekloth and Shibley 2000, 138). Consequently, sustainable urban planning must be informed by the interconnections between the built environment and community social relations (King 2013; Jacobs 1961) and must consider the daily flows of the affected community of individuals (Jones and Evans 2012; Schneekloth and Shibley 2000).

Such interconnections between urban development and social relations are taken up in scholarly work on Baguio City. Scholars have discussed the dynamics and consequences of urban development projects in the configuration of city life. In her research about the politics of space in the city, Villarba-Torres (2013) points out that the public market has been a target of development plans since the 1970s. Despite local resistance against the proposed construction of a multi-level hotel at the historic Stone Market, “the stone framework” was demolished in favor of the construction of the Maharlika Livelihood Complex. Sections have been repeatedly razed by fires, some reportedly due to electrical wiring and others that informants claim are “far from accidental” (78). In their paper about the construction of Baguio Center Mall (BCM), the first mall in the city, Subido and Tindaan (2016) narrate that this project was met with contestations from the residents and officials of Barangay Kagitingan for its “encroachment” and consequent reconfiguration of their public spaces. Particularly, it halted the construction of their barangay hall and led to the enclosure of public access roads. Due to the vibrancy of the pre-existing neighborhood, areas within and surrounding the mall were reclaimed by the residents through various means of negotiation. The study of Sta. Maria-Abalos (2011), on the other hand, argues that the operation of SM Baguio since 2003 significantly influenced the city’s consumer culture. She points out that the potential of this mall was particularly aided by its strategic location on Luneta Hill that provides a “spectacular view of the city” (11), “accessibility to vehicular and pedestrian traffic” (10), and its offering of a “one-stop, multitasked area” (13) expressed by the tagline “We’ve got it all for you!”. Consequently, Sta. Maria-Abalos asserts that “observable changes in behavior reflective of consumerist culture among Baguio locals [and tourists] have become evident” (3).

While the work of the above scholars focused on the consequences of urban development in the city, Morley (2018) and

Milgram (2015) highlight local government deficiencies in urban planning. Morley (2018) discusses how Baguio City's unregulated urban growth and rapid increase of population have been exacerbated by the absence of effective urban policy, resulting in degradation of the natural environment and eventually the diminishing quality of life of residents. Despite official claims of the Baguio City Planning and Development Office in preparing an ecological urban development plan, the city still lacks a comprehensive urban development land use plan, resulting in the deterioration of the city into a chaotic and "unplanned state of being" (202). In the case of the Baguio City Public Market, Milgram (2015) indicates that the 2019 installation of the public market redevelopment plan is not the first of its kind. In 2015, Uniwide Sales Realty and Resources Corporation, a "Manila-based shopping mall builder" (Milgram 2015, 28) redeveloped specific sections of the market that brought about less than desirable changes. The maximization of usable space resulted in deficiencies in stall provisions and the absence of specifications requested by the vendors. Amidst opposition from the concerned market vendors, construction plans were finalized without adequate notification and consultation with these stakeholders followed by the demolition of their stalls in the dead of night (Milgram 2015). This project resulted in lawsuits that have dragged on until 2019 (De Vera 2020). Furthermore, it has left the public market community with anxiety over possible displacement and loss of livelihood (Roxas 2024) as well as the erasure of the market's identity (Milgram 2015).

Proposed Developments for the Baguio City Public Market

As presented in the approved Master Development Plan created by the local government's Technical Working Group (TWG) in 2019 (Bautista et al. 2025), the market redevelopment project proposes a complete overhaul of the entire lot within the purview of the city and not just the preexisting market complex. The estimated cost for the project is PhP 6 billion, which is proposed to be financed through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) (Commanda 2022). The TWG "consists of Mayor Benjamin Magalong as the Chairperson and Councilors Mylen Yaranon and Philiann Weygan-Allan, Ar. Donna Tabangin, and Ar. Homer Soriano as chairpersons" (SP Baguio 2019, par. 4). The city received three proposals for this project: (1) a seven story structure costing PhP 5.4 billion submitted by SM Prime Holdings Inc. (SMPHI); (2) two structures costing PhP 6.4 billion from Robinsons Land Corporation (RLC); and (3) the refurbishment of the pre-existing market complex, costing approximately PhP 3 billion from the Baguio Market Vendor's Alliance (BAMARVA) (See 2020). The first two proposals were submitted by big chain mall operators in the Philippines (Robinsons

and Shoe Mart, more commonly known as SM) while the third was submitted by the public market vendors' cooperative.

SMPHI was given the "original proponent status (OPS)" by the local government and negotiations were undertaken through the PPP mode (Commanda 2022, par. 3). With the "Swiss challenge" or "comparative challenge," the local government opened the proposal of SMPHI to being matched or outbid (Cabreza 2024; Habbiling 2025). Through this process, there are continued efforts from local residents spearheaded by BAMARVA and the Baguio We Want Movement² to revise the terms of the project into a locally-financed and managed public market (See 2021). For the purposes of this study, the reading of the architecture of the proposed structures of the "redeveloped" Baguio City Public Market will be juxtaposed with local resistance to the market's mallification. Particularly, a reading of the architecture of SMPHI's proposed structure will problematize how this preliminary design seeks to "mallify" the Baguio City Public Market and to a larger extent, the city itself. The SMPHI proposal was selected for analysis due to the extent with which it has caused persistent resistance from both local vendors and residents and has contributed to debates on defining modernization in the city.

Conducting a Place-Based Case Study of the Baguio City Public Market

This study conducts a place-based case study of the Baguio City Public Market redevelopment project through the concept of "mallification". This concept has two points of analysis: (1) "the transformation of public spaces in order to align them with the mall"; and (2) "the cultivation of services in the mall that traditionally belong to other institutions" (Salazar 2019, 202–203). These two points will inform the critical discussion. Furthermore, the "case study method is used to interpret the spatial character" of a specific structure and "their vicinity . . . to analyze the socio-spatial relationship" of the structure "to their surrounding area and society" (Lontoc, Arellano, Baquiran 2023, 116).

Morris (2000, 169) indicates that "layout and design principles ensure that all [shopping] centers are minimally readable to anyone literate in their use." As such, the paper engages in a critical analysis of the market proposal of SMPHI through Erzen's (2011) concept of "reading architecture," which will be discussed in the succeeding section. The SMPHI proposed structure was submitted and released to the public in March 2020 through the Baguio City Public Information Office Facebook account (the city's online public information platform) and was published in September 2020 in the local newspaper, Baguio Midland Courier. The analysis of the proposal will pay attention to both

the features of the proposed structure and the attached captions that indicate the intentions and goals of the proposal. A critical discussion of the proposed structure will be juxtaposed with a spatial analysis of the existing market landscape of the Baguio City Public Market and the proposal submitted by BAMARVA. The paper will then conclude by raising local understandings of modernization in contrast to the assertion that malls are structures of development.

Reading the Architecture of Mallification

Mallification is the (physical and ideological) transformation of a space into a mall. The mall is an enclosed building of consumer culture structured around a careful curation of commodities and experiences intended to heighten the satiation of one's pleasure in acquiring a middle-class life through consumption. Salazar (2019) argues that participation in such a structured experience consequently leads to a "loss of authenticity" (202) for people and places. Furthermore, the shopping experience presented in malls encourages shoppers to obsess over intentionally placed merchandise without looking at the significance of their action to their community. As such, even personal narratives that occur and are memorialized in the mall are rendered unimportant against the backdrop of the "schemes of flows and networks that overwhelm the mall," so much so that human "memories, sensations, desires, and urges" are instrumentalized in the commodifying and profiteering logic of the mall (199). Malls, then, are "pseudo-public spaces" that "promote the image of public market places" but are in actuality "private places where people forgo the constitutional rights that exist in public space" (Connell 1999, 434). They are structured according to the following key elements: "markets are highly regulated"; their "layout are almost identical to those elsewhere"; "unpredictability is nonexistent"; "spontaneity and chance encounters are rare"; and they "tend to displace local businesses" (433).

In this study, the concept of mallification is complemented by the method of "reading architecture" (Erzen 2011) to provide a critical engagement with the design of a structure and its functions and impact on society. As Erzen (2011, 128) writes, "great architects throughout the world have been especially sensitive to the fact that architecture can impose certain physical and psychological attitudes on the user." The same can be said of malls and other buildings meant to attract large crowds of people, whether this be for the sake of profit or the fostering of community. According to Erzen, "reading of architecture" analyzes "certain symbolic features that have been—and still continue to be—common" (125) in most kinds of a specific type of structure like mosques, cathedrals, or even malls. For example, the reading of

a mosque's architecture articulates the way in which it embodies the Islamic view of the world as a "paradise, heavenly theater, urban sculpture, and cosmic spiral" (Erzen 2011, 216) through its architectural design (particularly, the dome shaped ceiling, the vast open space for prayer, and the use of windows and lights to conceal the placement of the sun) and decoration (such as its incorporation of floral and forest details, the presence of water through fountains and indoor pools, the use of blue and gold, as well as the use of columns and horseshoe arches). These elements, according to Erzen, impact the way in which people move and interact with the space.

In employing a spatial analysis, this study builds on the overlooked interconnection between the built environment and community well-being (Archer 2005; King 2013) and highlights placemaking embedded in the physical location of the market that renders it a primarily social space (Schneekloth and Shibley 1984; Lyson, Gillespie, Hilchey 1995; Mehta and Gohil 2013). By deploying "the reading of architecture," this study will present how the physical attributes of an infrastructure—its architectural design, the decorations that emphasize specific aspects or deliver certain messages, and the floor plan that assists in facilitating the space's intended use—impact the structure's use and fulfillment of its desired aims. Furthermore, this study contributes to the sparse "literature discussions on spatial restructuring influenced by shopping malls" (Lontoc, Arellano, and Baquiran 2023, 115).

Designing the Baguio City Public Market

Saloma et. al (2021, 11) argue that "everything present or absent in a mall has been carefully planned by highly skilled experts and professionals towards stimulating an environment of consumption and spending." Contrary to the malls as shopping centers, the Baguio City Public Market is characteristically a natural or farmers' market (Lyson, Gillespie, Hilchey 1995; Francis and Griffith 2011; Mehta and Gohil 2013) that has evolved over time. It is primarily valuable as a community space that meets local "specialized" or "niche" demands through direct supply chains from farmers, wholesalers, vendors, and consumers. It is not designed to meet the demands of mass-produced connections and experiences necessary for consumerism (Lyson, Gillespie, Hilchey 1996). The very character that makes these public markets distinguishable and cherished local places emanates from their ability to cater to the local consumers while simultaneously building social relationships and fostering local values (Francis and Griffith 2011; Rapoport 1999; Groth 1999).

First established in 1913 (Milgram 2015), the public market of Baguio City was an open space unhampered by tall buildings and was

busy with vendors and their goods. Today, the public market complex has grown into a collection of buildings, becoming a community of its own. Within this space, one can find a wide variety of goods from clothes overruns, dry goods, flowers, fresh produce, meat, seafood, and even household items and construction needs as well as discover hidden gems in hand-painted signs, family stories of previously owned stalls, and other unexpected sights. It is a network of buildings, no more than two levels tall, connected by open-air alleyways. Galvanized sheets as roofs cover some pathways to shield the vendors and market-goers from the rain and the heat of the sun. Restrictive enclosures that separate the market from the streets and roads that line its perimeter are absent. Pedestrians walk on these paths, sometimes even reclaiming roads around the market that are designed for two lanes of vehicular traffic. These open walkways welcome the marketgoer with the aroma of fresh meat, vegetables, fruits, coffee, flowers. Among stalls overflowing with vegetables in the hangar, a staircase leads to a second floor that houses blankets, house clothes, yarn, and sewing needs. Behind these products is a community of local vendors and business owners, supporting local farmers and family businesses as well as supplying fresh and dry goods to generations of families (Roxas 2024; Aquino 2022).

The sights and sounds of the movement of people and goods within the city, the buzz and chatter of the vendors, as well as the orchestra of aromas of the different goods collectively compose the space that is the Baguio City Public Market. Undeniably, it needs refurbishment to improve critical facilities for the daily operations of the market. However, its redevelopment should also integrate the value of older structures as “usable to older members of the community” (DCLG 2007 cited in Jones and Evans 2012, 2319). Similar to other traditional public markets, the Baguio City Public Market is more than just a space of commercial transactions. It fosters and sustains a community of local history and culture.

A Redesign: The SMPHI Proposal³

Studies on malls in the Philippines have consistently identified and focused on the social and economic impact of SM in the cities they occupy (Salazar 2019; Saloma et al. 2021; Hedman and Sidel 2006; Lontoc, Arellano, and Baquiran 2023; Sta. Maria-Abalos 2011; Rico and de Leon 2017; Connel 1999). These studies point out that these malls have increased the residential, university, and commercial land-use of the surrounding area, while also facilitating the closure of small-scale and informal enterprises (Lontoc, Arellano, and Baquiran 2023). They have become a “node of transportation” by providing critical junctures for public transportation, particularly train lines and public

utility vehicles (Salazar 2019), as well as offering pay-parking facilities for private transportation. They have also become an “urban plaza” by providing facilities for “recreation, leisure, tourism, and governmental services” (Lontoc, Arellano, and Baquiran 2023, 115). SM has thereby made its mark in various urban centers in the country, providing jobs and becoming a trusted supplier of various goods and services (Salazar 2019, 200; Lontoc, Arellano, Baquiran 2023).

In the beginning of mallification in the Philippines in the second half of the twentieth century, SM was noted to have held “its own as ‘the biggest retailing chain in the Philippines’” (Hedman and Sidel 2005, 131). Amidst post-war reconstruction and the turbulent period of the Marcos Sr. administration, SM planned “to continue building one mall per year in the future” and fulfill the promise of the proprietors or SM Prime Holding group “to make SM synonymous with Filipino shopping” (Tiglao 1994, 60 cited in Hedman and Sidel 2005, 131). Notably, the different branches of SM are distinguished by the hyphenation of the city where each is located. For instance, its branch in Baguio is identified as “SM City Baguio”. SMPHI is now “one of Southeast Asia’s largest mall developers with 88 malls in the Philippines” and aims to “expand” their “footprint” to the rest of the country, including Visayas and Mindanao in the next five years (Talavera 2025, par. 13–14).

As indicated in the SMPHI proposal, the Baguio City Public Market Redevelopment project will be undertaken through a 50-year lease, where the city will pay “the developer with the depreciated cost prior to turnover” (De Vera 2020, Table 1). The construction period is estimated to take two years. The design highlights a seven-story structure composed of a two-level basement parking facility, an upper and ground floor for the public market, three floors for “SM’s commercial undertaking,” and a roof deck park intended for “events and activities” (see figure 1a). This vertical use of space turns the market complex into a commercial space of parking, shopping, and entertainment (De Vera 2020). Furthermore, the main caption attached to the proposal reads: “SM bid proposal for Baguio Public Market rehab to promote convenience, boost local tourism” (see figure 1a). This statement appeals to the key decision makers in the city by declaring that this bid for the market redevelopment project is aligned with the city’s tourism-directed identity and provides a solution for the traffic congestion frequently experienced in the area. Expounding on this main caption, the proposal highlights two central themes: (1) “Safety and Convenience”; and (2) “A new destination for locals and tourists alike” (see figure 1a).

SM bid proposal for Baguio Public Market rehab to promote convenience, boost local tourism



Figure 1a. SMPHI Proposal: Visual Depiction of the Design with Caption



Figure 1b. SMPHI Proposal: Visual Depiction of the Design

For the first theme, safety pertains to “public safety . . . during market rehabilitation,” and convenience refers to the availability of 1,900 parking spaces as well as the allocation of the market spaces to

the first two street-level floors (the Lower Ground Floor and Upper Ground Floor) (see figure 1a). Aside from indicating that the floors allocated for the market vendors will accommodate 5,300 stalls, the proposal does not present how it will ensure public safety throughout the two-year construction period. Unlike the Master Development Plan created by the local government's TWG,⁴ which features the preexisting connections of the public market with the central business district through the overpasses that connect to Malcolm Square and BCM, the featured external enclosures of the SMPHI proposal create a distinct separation from the public pedestrian and vehicular spaces. Also missing from the design are the loading/unloading bays for commuters arriving via jeepneys or taxis, as well as the terminal that transports residents to the outskirts of town and those used by trucks and *komboys* (male porters) to collect the day's delivery of fresh produce and flowers. At the ground level, surrounding the Market Mall structure is a barrier of stone pillars connected by metal fencing. This feature strictly defines the boundaries of the market complex. It also discourages pedestrian access to the main road and prioritizes the flow of vehicles to and from the structure's parking facilities [see Perspective 1 (View along Magsaysay Avenue) on figure 1a]. The absence of these public passageways is indicative of the ways in which the mall is reconfiguring the public space and in effect negating the centrality of these paths for the market's accessibility to a majority of marketgoers who go on foot and utilize public transportation.

The two-floor basement parking facility (see figure 1b) is a main draw for the city in view of its limited parking facilities and worsening problems with traffic congestion (Morley 2018; DENR 2020; Buenagua 2025). The city's assertion on the necessity of the parking facility is attributed to the heavy traffic brought on by the increased volume of private cars during peak season and encouraged by the endless road-widening projects along the two main roads that lead to the lowlands. Magsaysay Avenue, the main road in front of the market, naturally experiences heavy traffic as a core location for the residents' daily needs. However, adding a larger parking facility to an already crowded area will not reduce traffic but will further contribute to it (Morley 2018).

Furthermore, the proposed structure invades the natural terrain of the market, which has maintained the mountainous character of the city known for the inclines and declines that embrace the hills and mountains thereby starkly contrasting the flattened terrain in other urban centers of the country. This flattening is more convenient for both vehicles and pedestrians, thereby homogenizing landscapes in favor of convenience. By encouraging more vehicular traffic in the area with its increased capacity for parking and the bulldozing of the hill terrain that provides a good flow for the torrential rains during the typhoon season, the SMPHI structure will further contribute to the pollution within the

area and disrupt natural flood control systems in place. The emphasis on parking facilities and green-retrofitting techniques, therefore, does not address the main infrastructure concerns of most natural markets which are: access of vendors to potable water and toilet facilities, well-lit surroundings and stalls, solid waste disposal and drainage facilities (Mehta and Gohil 2013).

For the second theme, the emphasis on tourism, the caption on the proposal indicates that the design is informed by “basic concepts which are native in Baguio”: (1) the terraced views, (2) Igorot handwoven clothing, (3) stone columns and (4) *pasiking*, the hand-woven rattan backpack (see figure 1a). As the structure appears to be devoid of any windows, the use of terraced balconies limits accessible viewpoints of the city to these strategic areas in addition to the roof deck park, a technique similarly deployed for SM Baguio to capitalize on its prime view of the city (Sta. Maria-Abalos 2011). In addition, the interior design features the use of wooden accents for the staircase balcony as well as the walls. These elements are paired with stone texture (that brings to mind the riprapping used in the Cordillera to prevent landslides) as well as pillars in the exterior of the “black market” section for overseas products and the *pasalubong* (souvenir) section. These elements are not merely “native” to the city but are part of the culture of the various Indigenous Peoples of the Cordillera region. The other representative elements of local culture that the proposal claims to “pay homage” to are not visible or emphasized in the design; neither is the proposal’s indication of preserving “the existing stone columns” by converting these into “green hallways” (see figure 1a and figure 1b). The SMPHI Market Mall structure also announces that it will be an “eco-friendly multi-level elevated garden complex . . . which will reduce carbon emissions in the area.” In place of the natural terrain of the market, the proposed structure is greened through the presence of trees that outline the structure and decorate the roof deck park. However, if the rooftop garden and the exterior landscaping of SM Baguio are any indication, this rooftop garden may simply feature boxes of ornamental flowers and shrubs but not natural trees that are intended to provide shade and absorb carbon dioxide emissions.

By replacing the open-air market complex with a multi-level enclosed structure, the proposed market mall closes off the marketgoer and vendors from the outdoors and subjects them to a hyper-conditioned environment. This artificial environment consists of lighting, ventilation and air-conditioning to facilitate air flow as well as trap or eliminate the various aromas that often freely circulate in an open-air market. It also includes a strategic floor plan that constrains the individual’s movement and imposes a rigid categorization and arrangement of stalls. These elements are key design features of the mall deployed to promote a “culture of consumerism” within a “highly sanitized” and

"hyper-conditioned environment" that not only "decontextualize" spaces "from their natural, local environment" (Saloma et al. 2021, 105) but also facilitate the "complete integration of surveillance, security, climate control, pedestrian flow, and aesthetics" (Judd 1995, 146 cited in Connell 1999, 434). Although the interior design mimics the key natural characteristics of the city, it reinforces the hyper-conditioned environment that is contradictory to the current public market's openness and harmony with its landscape.

Although SMPHI's proposal claims to honor "native" elements of Cordilleran culture, it selectively incorporates local and indigenous culture based on the designers' assessment of what caters to the tourist gaze in order to "boost local tourism." The incorporation of trees, wood and stone textured elements, as well as the utilization of the terrace feature appear to be nods to local culture but these features, by virtue of having been selected and isolated from the distinct cultures of the Indigenous Peoples of the region, have the tendency to homogenize these cultures thereby reducing them to mere material symbols that primarily serve neoliberal economic models (Lyson, Gillespie, and Hilchey 1995). The design's motives of appropriating indigenous symbols mask the environmental alteration of the area and the displacement of local vendors at the cost of redevelopment. The imposition of the mall's box-like design and use of vertical space for parking facilities and commercial spaces serves more to erase integral features of the public market that have defined its long-standing identity and which have been used as locational markers for Upper and Lower Kayang as well as Hilltop Road. The erasure of these features that are familiar to Baguio residents will cause a disorientation of place in addition to the erasure of memories nurtured in the spatial configuration of the public market.

The proposal includes a statement from an SM official that reads: "We want to make this project world-class . . . something [the] City of Baguio will be proud of and can call their own. This is our way of giving back to the community" (see figure 1a). The description of the project as "world-class" invokes the idea of making Baguio's market into something at par with international developments. While such an aspiration presents a thinking that locates the place of Baguio in the international arena, its projection of pride and ownership of the market as necessarily defined by a structure informed by external developments runs counter to pride and ownership that are based on local identity and culture. From its inception as a city, Baguio has had a distinct identity tied to its geographical features, its pine-clad hills and cool temperature that have given rise to specific ways of life among its residents. For SM to state that a world-class market will bolster pride and ownership among Baguio residents indicates a lack of knowledge on strong place-based identifications that have been asserted by these

residents as indicated by historical objections to earlier urban projects in the city thought to be disruptive of local lifeways.

The emphasis of SM's design on being world-class likewise invokes the discourse of tourism potential. This structure is projected to attract wide interest with its upscale features. In an era of social media self-broadcasting, the prospect of drawing a throng of tourists with a new structure seems to be a foregone conclusion. But the city of Baguio has, in recent times, been plagued with problems due to overtourism. The influx of tourists has resulted in water shortage, challenges in waste management, persistent traffic congestion, and overall space and mobility concerns that have forced residents to prefer staying home during peak tourist seasons. These problems have sparked discussions on the debilitating effects of overtourism to the quality of life in the city. Therefore, a question could be asked whether it is truly in the best interest of the local community and the city's environmental integrity to draw more tourists with a new attraction.

Despite SMPHI's attempt to create a "culturally informed" structure for a redeveloped public market, it alienates the locals through the reconfiguration of the physical space and the displacement of the vendors themselves. Furthermore, the design and facilities mimic the preexisting SM Baguio structure that sits atop Session Road. If the construction of this structure will push through, Baguio will truly become an SM City bookended by SM mall structures, capitalizing on the city not only through commercial spaces but also through the further objectification of Cordilleran culture. Therefore, SMPHI's proposal prompts two critical questions: (1) Do the regular marketgoers find their visits to the public market inconvenient? (2) Has the public market had problems with attracting customers or even tourists? In response, Milgram (2015, 17) writes, Baguio City's "extensive public market, offering wholesale and retail sales of fresh produce, manufactured foods, and regional crafts, supports businesses throughout the region." It is frequented by pedestrians from the nearby barangays, those who work in the central business district, and even those who go for early morning jogs in the nearby park. During the pandemic, residents still made visits to the public market during their weekly schedule or patronized vendors who created an online platform to receive orders and make deliveries. Thus, the market has continually been a trusted source of goods for the residents as well as a hub of activity, even amidst a global pandemic.

Mehta and Gohil (2013, 277) indicate that "the chaos of the natural market" is "felt most strongly by occasional visitors." In fact, this "perceived chaos" of public markets belies an organized system driven by vendors who sustain local economies and who provide accessible employment especially to the urban poor. Furthermore, vendors have an intimate relationship with the space and thus possess comprehensive

knowledge of the area and the collective practices that shape the market's identity. The organizing logic of the public market is and has been built over time as customers locate goods and stalls through their senses and familiarity with the space (Villarba-Torres 2013; Mehta and Gohil 2013). These experiences and skills that enable local residents to find what they are looking for without signs or arrows are foreign to the tourist. It is such mastery of place that gives the local residents a sense of belonging and ownership of the market.

Designing for the Public Market

In 2013, locals were "quick to disagree" when the local government "packaged" the public market as "clean, cool, cheap and complete" to draw in tourists. However, "there is more to the market than the tourist gaze that fails to see beyond the façade of order, security and tidiness." Its "labyrinthine alleys and side streets . . . not only defy and decenter the prescribed order of urban spaces like [SM malls] but are home to creative and innovative spatialities" (Villarba-Torres 2013, 78). The public market's distinguishable landscape of inclines and declines is filled in with various structures that house a variety of produce, fish and meat, dry goods (e.g., household and crafting needs), local eateries and grocery stores, and more. Similar products are not contained within particular sections but are scattered across the entire market complex. Patronage to these various stalls and shops is dependent on one's preferences such as their relationship with their vendors and the proximity of the stalls to entry points. Market-goers each have their own routes and are often privy to the conversations of vendors or are alerted to incoming *kombos* pushing heavy wooden carts filled with produce. The terrain of the landscape is physically strenuous, depending on where you need to go; but a majority of the public market takes place on one level.

As a public space, it is devoid of entry inspection posts thereby allowing unobstructed access into and out of the space. It communicates that everyone is welcome to the public market, regardless of their purchasing power (Francis and Griffith 2011, 262; Lyson, Gillespie, and Hilchey 1997). Entrepreneurial street children and the elderly go around hawking eco bags to market goers who have come unprepared for the surplus of goods they procured. It is an environment where market-goers can negotiate the prices of products, inspect and choose the produce that meets their needs, and return to vendors they are familiar with. The rundown and dusty buildings along and within the market complex are distinguishable from today's high-rise buildings with their wooden pallet exteriors, their gabled windows, and hand-painted signs that let a passerby know that a dentist or an attorney can be found in

these buildings. These structures do not serve the “aesthetic” needs of tourism but are markers of local lifeways.

When unsolicited proposals for the market redevelopment project were being accepted by the local government, the market cooperative submitted their own proposal for the redevelopment plan. Similar to the proposal of SMPHI, the caption on the proposal of BAMARVA (see figure 2a) highlighted key aspects of the design: “Heritage of Baguio,” “Sense of Community,” “People’s Vision,” “Low Impact Development,” “Carbon Consciousness,” “Smart Systems,” “Indelible Identity,” “Our City, Our Market.” Visual depictions of the architectural design provide familiar but revitalized areas of the pre-existing market: It revitalizes prominent areas, relocating the flower section to the Stone Building and maintaining the characteristic pillars. It improves vital facilities, particularly the transport terminals for jeepneys servicing locals that live in the outskirts of town, which incorporates the local government’s plans for “smarter” transport systems, and improved ceiling coverage with lightwells. The proposal adds that in order “to retain Baguio Market’s distinct identity, significant historical structures including The Old Stone Building, Carinderia Building, and Hangar Building are retained and adaptively reused with new functions. The old and new developments will complement each other as a monument to documenting the Public Market’s contribution to Baguio’s history and its role to Baguio’s future” (BAMARVA 2020). The proposal also incorporates lived elements, particularly realistic images of the stalls and products of vendors in the *pasalubong* section, the flow of traffic from market-goers and *kombos* transporting heavy loads in halls, and stalls of vegetable vendors in the hangar. Furthermore, in reference to the Mayor’s statements that the redevelopment project aims to provide a public market that the city can be proud of, the BAMARVA proposal states: “Our City, Our Market – With this masterplan, the public market is recognized as a significant cultural and commercial asset of Baguio City – one which the tourists can enjoy and which the people of Baguio can truly be proud of” (see figure 2a).

The BAMARVA proposal indicates that the proposed architectural design is environmentally sensitive and socially aware. The refurbished structures conform to the current physical landscape of the market complex, while incorporating newer design elements such as the following: stone-textured tiled flooring, well-lit ceilings, and repainted facades with additional wooden roofing. It depicts the different pedestrian and vehicular access points to the market, reflecting knowledge of the relationship of the public market to its immediate surroundings. It thereby adapts to the pre-existing landscape of the market and maintains the form of the market complex, retaining the main occupant groups’ pathways while incorporating minimal adjustments. As the proposal indicates, it utilizes “low impact development”.

“The terraced design embraces, instead of alters the existing terrain, and ensures walkability while maintaining harmony with the urban fabric of downtown Baguio through weaving a pedestrian-friendly connection with Burnham Park, Session Road, Malcolm Square and Baguio City Hall” (BAMARVA 2020). The BAMARVA proposal enhances the physical and cultural character of the pre-existing built environment (see figure 2a and figure 2b). The estimated cost of the project is Php 4 billion, an amount that will be raised by the vendors themselves (Castillo 2024).



Figure 2a. BAMARVA Proposal: Visual Depiction of the Design with Caption

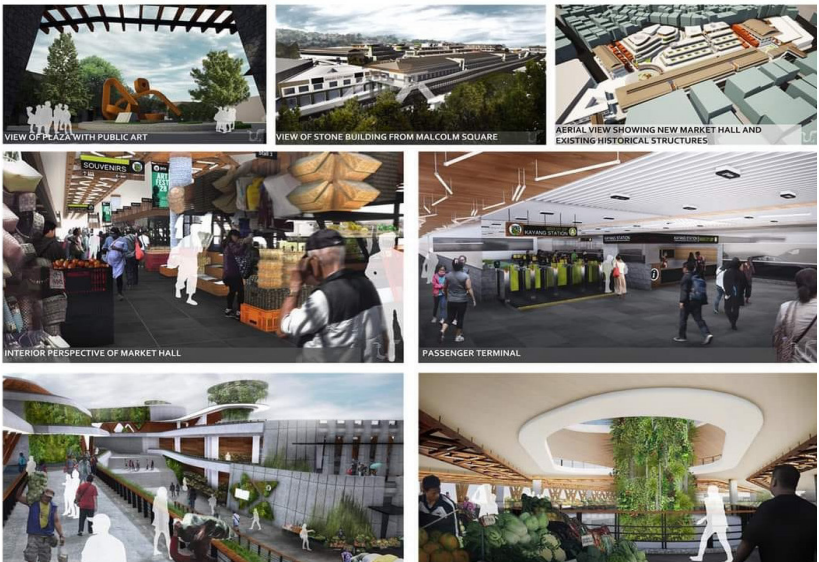


Figure 2b. BAMARVA Proposal: Visual Depiction of the Design

However, the proposals from BAMARVA as well as from RLC were rejected because of legal issues and incomplete documentation, respectively. According to Bonifacio Dela Pena, the City Administrator and the Chair for the Public-Private Partnership for the People selection committee (P4-SC), “The market cooperative group’s proposal had not been accepted at the outset for lacking some legal documents which were basic requirements as to form” (Refuerzo 2020, par. 11). However, it must be mentioned that despite a lack of documents submitted by RLC, their proposal was initially accepted and was awarded the OPS by the committee (P4-SC) in charge of the market redevelopment project due to a majority vote (See 2020). This decision was later overturned. As Mayor Magalong pointed out, “the proposal from Robinsons is incomplete as to substance, which should have been the primary basis of the valuation by the P4-SC” (See 2020).⁵

In opposition to SMPHI’s status as the proponent of the market redevelopment project, the “Save Baguio Market Movement” emerged on social media as a Facebook Page and a hashtag (#SaveBaguioMarket).⁶ In addition to statements against the undertakings of the project under a mall corporation and calls for support to stop privatization, images of iconic-touristic scenes of Baguio were posted along with local vignettes of the market. An exhibit at Malcolm Square, also known as the People’s Park, located across the road from the public market’s entrance presented “thirty panels of poems, essays, images, paintings, newspapers clippings, photos, infographics, that weave together the many reasons why we can’t turn the charm of a local colorful homegrown market to another mall with no soul” (Baguio Chronicle 2021, par. 3). A collaboration among Baguio local creatives, this exhibit spoke on the value of public markets for community life but especially on the very life of Baguio’s public market throughout its century-long existence. As a well-known Baguio writer penned, “we don’t just do trade or business there. We pass by there, meet there, eat there, date there, fight there, fall in love there, sell there. . . . So now we’re back here again, fighting for our stinky market” (Cimatu 2021, par. 5–10).

In 2014, the *Markets of Resistance* “visual and interdisciplinary trade-barter” exhibit took place within the market itself to expand its dimensions as a community space. In collaboration with the “Philippine Women’s University, the AX(is) Art Project, and Baguio artists” (Chua and Lim 2024), art installations and performances touched on the Baguio Public Market labyrinth as “a product of a menacing American colonial past where Cordillera art, heritage, and culture struggle to thrive” (Ateneo de Manila 2025, par. 4). As Angel Velasco Shaw, the event organizer, indicated, the event articulated how “capitalism in the business of art should be resisted” (Chua and Lim 2024, par. 4). Furthermore, it “aims to highlight the sense of community

in the market” (par. 7). As Shaw stated, the market is where people “develop rapport and friendships with people which are lasting” (par. 8). The public market, therefore, is not just a community space but it is a community itself. As Lontoc, Arellano, and Baquiran (2023, 116) highlighted, “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.”

Local Resistance to Mallification

Operating through a combination of formal and predominantly informal arrangements (Mehta and Gohil 2013; Lyson, Gillespie, and Hilchey 1995), public markets are often perceived as “unplanned, publicly appropriated spaces” (Francis and Griffith 2011, 262). They are characterized as “overpopulated without adequate space to accommodate all occupying groups and the multiple activities”—the solution to which the “local authorities, city planners, designers, and many citizens” believe is the “inevitable” removal of the vendors (Mehta and Gohil 2013, 295) as well as the reconfiguration of the market landscape to facilitate smoother flows of vehicular traffic.

The often cited rationale for the need for the Baguio City Public Market Redevelopment project are (1) to improve hygiene and sanitation facilities; (2) to better facilitate vehicular traffic around the area as well as create designated bays for market needs; (3) to provide parking spaces for private vehicles; (4) to improve the work environment of market vendors and eliminate informal/illegal tenant practices; (5) to overall provide a world-class market-going experience for tourists and locals alike (Aquino 2022; Sanchez 2024). These urban development concerns over creating a more efficient and economically competitive public space have equally crucial implications on the overall political, social, and cultural landscape of the city. In the course of deliberations and information disseminations about the redevelopment plan for the Baguio City Public Market, the open-air traditional market is repeatedly painted as backward, deplorable, and outdated (Sanchez 2024; Aquino 2022; Baguio Public Information Office 2021). Consequently, local disapproval of and opposition to the redevelopment plans is painted as anti-modernization and thereby anti-development.

Local struggles in the 1970s and 1990s, against the destruction of the historical location of the public market at the Stone Market and to the encroachment of public space through the construction of BCM, respectively, demonstrate time and again that locals have been crucial to resisting the mall’s complete usurpation of public space (Subido and Tindaan 2016; Villarba-Torres 2013). For the Baguio City Public Market, the vendors and local residents have played a key role in seeing past the smoke and mirrors of tourist framings of the space and so-called

development plans (Milgram 2015; Villarba-Torres 2013). When SMPHI was declared as the lead proponent in 2020 for the redevelopment plan, the threat of mallification and thereby the privatization of the Baguio City Public Market was feared because, for the concerned parties (local residents and public market occupant groups), it signaled an increase in rent, the entrance of mall-approved products sold at lower prices, the impending closure of small and medium enterprises that have operated for generations, as well as the erasure of the market community's culture and history. These sentiments were consistently expressed by market vendors and local residents in the October 2020 protests that took place in front of the Baguio Convention and Cultural Center, an area across SM Baguio, and in the March 2021 protest in the market itself (see figures 3 to 5). Market vendors declared their opposition to the project verbally, using on-hand instruments and materials (e.g., gongs, hand drums, *bungkaka* or buzzer, metal basins, wooden sticks), and through visible posted signs, declaring their rejection of the lead proponent and staking their claim of ownership, if not stewardship, over the public market.



Figure 3. “No SM. You can’t have it all. #No to Corporate Takeover.”⁷

Image Source: Northern Dispatch



Figure 4. “Prioritize Baguio Citizens! Our City, Our Market!!!”⁸
Image Credits: Northern Dispatch



Figure 5. “YES to Modernization! But NO to mallification!”⁹
Image Credits: Northern Dispatch

Notably, the redevelopment of Baguio's public market under SMPHI is not the first of its kind in the country. SMPHI is set to redevelop two public markets in Iloilo City with a 25-year lease. These projects have been questioned by local residents due to their impact on local heritage (Yap 2022). Iloilo's Central Market, one of the markets set for redevelopment, holds the status of Important Cultural Property. Despite agreements to maintain this built heritage, the art deco tower was "suddenly demolished by the contractor of SM without public consultation" (Yap 2024, par. 7). Only after concerns were raised online did the mayoral administration cite that demolition was necessary because it was "structurally unsound" (Yap 2024). In the same manner, the establishment of one out of three SM malls in Pangasinan displaced the public market located beside the mall (Roxas 2024).

Similarly, the opening of SM Baguio in 2003 negatively impacted business in BCM (Sta.Maria-Abalos 2011; Subido and Tindaan 2016). It "significantly reduced BCM's foot traffic, resulting in the closure of legitimate businesses inside the mall" (Subido and Tindaan 2016, 71). The mall's recent expansion that came at the cost of the of "182 trees" (Ngalob 2015b) was met with resistance from local residents through protests and legal measures (Ngalob 2015a; Ngabit-Quitasol and Ngalob 2015; Northern Dispatch 2015; Quitasol 2015; Pulta 2019). Concern over further environmental degradation of the city in the central business district was dismissed with the local government issuing SM Baguio with tree cutting permits (Ngabit-Quitasol and Ngalob 2015). Furthermore, the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of SM in a court case filed by Baguio residents due to a lack of "clear and convincing evidence" regarding the tree cutting's "'irreparable' harm to the local environment, as well as to the city's heritage" (Quitasol 2015, par. 3-4).

As evidenced by the cases above, SMPHI has a track record of indifference toward the culture and people of cities that are being subjected to its mallification. Despite fears and opposition from residents as well as a lack of other competing proponents, the local government supports and justifies redevelopment under SMPHI (Baguio City Public Information Office 2021; Sanchez 2024; Catajan 2025).¹⁰ As the number of established SM malls demonstrates, the private mall corporation appears as a financially suitable partner in public projects. However, their proposed structure for the redeveloped public market not only forwards a mall structure but also a "mall-like environment" (Lontoc, Arellano, Baquiran 2023, 114) that will transform the public space as well as substitute for local government functions. As such, there are underlying sentiments against the possible rendering of the lived space of the Baguio City Public Market into another structure of a bygone era. The proposed complete overhaul of the public market complex has

implications on the political economy of the space itself and the city in general.

The proposed replacement of the pre-existing market complex with a mall-like structure is not only a financially massive undertaking but is also a drastic construction project that amputates a vital community space. The local community opposes the proposal for several key reasons. First, they believe the project displaces existing vendors and businesses. A key criteria for the vendors' assured return to the redeveloped public market is that they are lease holding vendors or stallholders (Habbiling 2025). Although this proposal is meant to address illegal subleasing schemes and safety hazards from the emergence of more stalls under these arrangements, it also serves to further marginalize local vendors who lack the means to sustain formal arrangements with the city and a majority of the informal labor (e.g., *komboys* and ambulant vendors) that is crucial to the daily functions of the market. SM's reputation for hiring contractual workers (Rondilla 2020; Salazar 2019) paired with the city's aim to rid the space of informal renters and vendors heightens the hazards of the market vendors' impermanence in the new market structure. As such, the proposed market redevelopment will not only eliminate informal vendors and businesses, but may, in fact, replace them with contractual workers, given the mall's established hiring practices.

Second, the local community is concerned with the erosion of public access and communal space. In addition to the designated retail levels of the proposed SMPHI structure, by accommodating "flea markets and Panagbenga flower festival programs and exhibits" (see figure 1a) in the roof deck park, it appears that this designated "community space" primarily needs to be income generating. This function thereby encourages more commercial activity in the area as well as fuels a shift in consumer preferences (Aquino 2022). These added commercial spaces not only reduce the visibility of local vendors but negatively impact the vendors' relationships with local farmers and thereby the city's connections with the region's agricultural sector. The architectural design maximizes profitable usable space, consequently reducing open areas for socialization among vendors, local consumers, and other stakeholders in the market. Likewise, it prioritizes wider access and mobility to private vehicles over pedestrian movement, as the proposal potentially converts public spaces as vehicular lanes to serve the mallified market's traffic flow.

Third, they perceive a failure in democratic governance and transparency because the proposed designs from SMPHI and Robinsons were not products of consultations or dialogues with the public market's main occupant groups as well as collaborative place-sensitive design approaches (Aquino 2022; Sanchez 2024). As issues regarding transparency have been raised (Habbiling 2025), the public-

private arrangement with the mall impacts the democratic function of the government with negotiations primarily taking place between these two parties as the primary stakeholders, wherein the impacted occupant groups of the site are represented by the local government. In addition, the affected local population is perceived as incapable of making key decisions and ignorant of legal procedures as indicated by the treatment of public consultations as mere information dissemination sessions that enable the dominance of the financing private entity (Baguio Public Information Office 2021; Cabreza 2024).

Lastly, the local community contends that the project threatens local culture because the imposition of a mall-like structure reinforces social stratification where community interactions are mediated through consumption (Connell 1999; Edler 1996; Saloma et al. 2021; Salazar 2019). Malls, therefore, are concrete impositions of consumerism as modernization that demolish community relationships as well as local culture and history. Local creatives have asserted the public market as the “Heart of the City” through various initiatives such as the Save Baguio Market Movement exhibit, the documentaries *Palengke Day* by Mervine Aquino (2022) and *A Market Stalled*¹¹ by Hendrix Sanchez (2024), the publication of *Markets of Resistance* (2024) and “Nadumaduma: Istorya para iti Palengke” (2025), and other creative outputs. However, to this day, concerns over the preservation of the market’s community, culture, and history that are embedded in the market complex appear to be disregarded.

Redevelopment as Modernization

Built environments are lived spaces; they shape and are shaped by the various interactions that occur in a physical space (Groth 1999; Rapoport 1999; King 2013). However, “Putting people in the buildings is at times forgotten” (Groth 1999, 149). The emphasis of the Baguio City Public Market redevelopment project on architectural plans of a public market structure treads toward valuing buildings as ends in themselves and thereby reduces this lived space’s rich history and embedded social and cultural processes to procedural actions of production and consumption. “Given the importance of place in policy and practice, the question is raised about what can be done practically to create a sense of place in (re)developed areas beyond simply building them in accordance with the latest fashions in urban design” (Jones and Evans 2012, 2322).

Malls in the Philippines have provided valuable substitutes to open green spaces, providing facilities for recreation, leisure, and socialization. These functions, however, are mediated by consumer culture, espousing not merely the need to constantly purchase and consume international products “like everyone else” but to consistently

consume amidst worsening poverty and income inequality. As income generating structures of mass production and consumption, the business and design approaches employed by malls embody economic development and “modernization.” Modernization, however, does not only impact the physical geography but also the very society that inhabits these spaces and thereby their culture (Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart and Welzel 2009). The pursuit of modernization as primarily economic development is expected to bring about particular changes in “culture and social and political life” (Inglehart and Baker 2000, 21), such as “systematic change in basic values” as well as “the persistence of distinctive cultural traditions” (19).

Adverse effects of modernization, such as marginalization, necessitate the need to shift from purely economic and technology-driven innovation toward social development. Thus, modernization should be seen as an effort to optimize social functions through social innovations that contribute to meeting the demands of the people to achieve positive social change (Lubelcova 2012, 295–96). In the case of the redevelopment of the Baguio City Public Market, the need for improvements in basic necessities and infrastructure can be better informed by place-sensitive design thinking that is informed by sustainably innovative business forms, such as “social economy” and “social entrepreneurship.” These “hybrid business forms” interconnect “social aims with economic and business approaches” in order to achieve social objectives, foster job creation, and promote social inclusion for disadvantaged groups (301–302).

In 2023, negotiations with SMPHI concluded with “a joint certification of successful negotiation” (Habbiling 2025, par. 13). With the acquiescence of SMPHI to reduce the allocation for commercial spaces and thereby the profits they will earn, their partnership with the local government for this project was rebranded as a “legacy” (Cadlag and Palangchao 2023).¹² What legacy, whose legacy, and for whom is this legacy? With the implementation of a national PPP Code (Republic Act No. 11966) that same year, “re-negotiations were held from January 30 to September 3, 2024” as well as the “reconfirmation” of SMPHI as the OPS on September 2024 (Habbiling 2025, par. 14). Under the 2023 PPP Code, the decision for the approval or rejection of the updated SMPHI proposal rests on the City Council. However, their “inaction” within the given period of 120 days “would mean the proposal is good as approved” (Palangchao 2025, par. 4). It will then proceed to the “comparative challenge stage where other proponents may submit counter-proposals” (Habbiling 2025, par. 15).

The latest update of the proposal features three main structures: an eight-story multilevel parking structure, a three-story structures designated as retail spaces for the private partner, and a four-story structuredesignated as the public market that will accommodate

all lease holding vendors with an open space at the center of these structures (Baguio City – Sangguniang Panlungsod 2025). As Habbiling (2025) reports, the relocation site for the vendors at the Slaughterhouse Compound addresses the need to “minimize disruptions to the business operations of current stallholders and preserve the market’s organic flow” (par. 8). However, the limited published information regarding these updates do not provide information on the capacity of the site to accommodate the daily flows of the entire market complex. In addition, a clarification was made that the private partner will only manage the allocated commercial spaces, while the public market space “will be fully owned, operated, and maintained by the city government, with rental and usage fees governed by city ordinances. All revenues will go directly to the city” (par. 5). The proposed structure also features green spaces and Cordilleran-inspired architecture, particularly geometric shapes wrapping around the exterior of the structures.

From the standpoint of building codes and projected economic returns, an entirely new structure that houses the production and consumption flows of a public market may be more efficient. However, a question may be asked whether this will enhance the very identity and culture of the Baguio City Public Market, and maintain networks of community and familiarity. The market vendors acknowledge the need to improve the facilities to better their working conditions and the market-going experience of the locals. As a market vendor clearly expressed, “*For the people of Baguio sana ang palengke natin. . . . Ang gusto naming development is yung ma-develop ang building, ma-develop din yung kita ng manininda, ma-develop din yung feeling ng pupunta’t mamimili sa palengke*” [I hope the market will be for the people of Baguio. The development we want is the improvement of the building as well as the earnings of the sellers and the experience of those who go and buy in the market] (Aquino 2022, 09:30–09:52; translation mine). The demand and necessity to improve the facilities of the public market are, however, punctuated by vehement objections to the mallification of the market.

Amidst the urbanization of Baguio City and the unabated rise of infrastructure projects, grassroots resistance persists in defending what the participants claim as the very ecology of an urban center rooted in its environmental and socio-cultural identity. Continued efforts to oppose the mallification of the Baguio City Public Market are fueled by the locals’ understanding of the workings of the natural market in fostering and sustaining Baguio’s unique sense of community. Calls to prioritize the citizens of Baguio regarding a development plan that completely reconfigures a central location for the public and services the daily needs of the locals continue as concerned local government officials deliberate on the issue. The locals demand that Baguio residents be treated as the key decision-makers in the gradual redevelopment of the public market according to the financial capability of the local

government and the market community. They likewise point out that the organic relations that shape and sustain the city's culture cannot be replaced by the selective inclusion of "representative" local culture through architectural and interior design elements or the incorporation of plant life where they are not entirely necessary.

In line with research on sustainable and holistic development, for the locals, modernization as development is defined by how it generates an environment of "effective democracy" that "empowers ordinary citizens" and reflects "the degree to which officials actually respect" citizens' "civil and political rights" (Inglehart and Welzel 2000, n.p.). While economic development pushes societies in similar directions of "modernization", cultural heritage causes them to move in "parallel trajectories" rather than converging into a uniform global culture (Inglehart and Baker 2000). A redeveloped public market that strives for modernization, therefore, can be possible when building plans are anchored on the intertwined relationships of the space's history and culture as well as the community of relationships that have been fostered over time.

Through the various multi-billion projects the local government is planning to undertake through a public-private partnership, the local government has forwarded that modernization can only be realized through private funds. In the case of the public market, it asserts that the improvement of the area can only be achieved through these circumstances, citing that the city lacks the funds for the multi-billion peso project it designed. The redevelopment project for the Baguio City Public Market turns our attention to the local government's priorities as it is only one among a long list of similar projects to enhance or recreate the city's identity. Resistance and hesitance to the redevelopment project is not merely a matter of nostalgia or the strong headedness of locals against change. It is a concern for the deeply embedded relationships and flows of local life that make up the integrity of the city's very culture and identity.

The Author

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Notes

1. The Crystal Arcade “ushered in an era of a national culture centered on commodity” (Rico and de Leon 2017, 3; Hedman and Sidel 2005, 122). It “attracted mesmerized gazes from less privileged passersby” (123) so much so that “people went there as much for the prestige of being seen as for the airconditioning, which was uncommon then” (Ira 1977, 60–61 cited in Hedman and Sidel 2005, 122).
2. The Baguio We Want Movement emerged from a summit that was held on February 25, 2015, where “concerned citizens of Baguio gathered to discuss various issues affecting the city” (e.g., local elections, government projects, etc.) to “encourage an intelligent and productive exchange of ideas that can help make Baguio . . . a sustainable city moving forward in harmony with its natural environment” (Baguio We Want Forum, n.d.).
3. The SMPHI proposed structure was published in the Baguio Midland Courier on September 20, 2020 and online through the Baguio Public Information Facebook page on March 20, 2020.
4. See SP Baguio, 2019, “City Council okays public market’s Master Development Plan.” Facebook, October 19, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1J4h8zrb3C/>. See also Baguio City Public Information Office, 2020, “Market development to be undertaken through public-private partnership,” Facebook, March 11, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1MkUuSYuCU/>.
5. See Baguio City Public Information Office, 2021, “WATCH | Updates on Market Development from City Mayor Benjamin Magalong,” posted September 27, 2021, Facebook Video, 10:44, <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18o5ozrJFG/>.
6. The Facebook Page for the Save Baguio Market Movement can be accessed through this link: <https://www.facebook.com/savebaguiomarket>.
7. This image was posted on October 27, 2020 on the NordisOnline Twitter account. The original caption reads: “NO TO CORPORATE TAKEOVER | Groups opposing corporate-led redevelopment of the Baguio City Public Market staged a protest in front of Baguio Convention Center, October 27.” See <https://twitter.com/nordisonline/status/1321071975368777728/photo/2>.
8. This image can be found on the Twitter account of Northern Dispatch online. It was posted on March 4, 2020 under the caption: “SAVE BAGUIO MARKET | Protest against SM’s corporate takeover of the Baguio City’s Public Market rehabilitation intensifies as city bares negotiating terms with the mall giant.” See <https://twitter.com/nordisonline/status/1367461389741125633>.

9. Posted on March 4, 2021 on the NordisOnline Twitter account. See: <https://twitter.com/nordisonline/status/1367461389741125633/photo/4>.
10. See Baguio City Public Information Office Facebook updates on the Baguio City Public Market Redevelopment Plan: (a) "PUBLIC MARKET MODERNIZATION | Mayor Benjamin Magalong gives updates on the ongoing negotiations on public market modernization." Video posted on April 22, 2024; (b) "CITY PUBLIC MARKET MODERNIZATION | Mayor Benjamin Magalong explains why the city needs to pursue the modernization of the Baguio City Public Market." Video posted on August 9, 2024; (c) "PUBLIC MARKET REDEVELOPMENT | Mayor Benjamin Magalong provides updates on the city's Public Market Redevelopment which is currently under deliberation by the City Council." Video posted on October 27, 2025.
11. For the full version of *A Market Stalled* by Hendrix Sanchez, see <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1825184352215989>.
12. This reframing as a means for the corporation's aims to "give back to the community" was presented by the city's mayor, Benjamin Magalong, in a meeting with relevant SMPHI decision-makers. See Baguio City Public Information Office, 2021, "WATCH | Updates on Market Development from City Mayor Benjamin Magalong," September 27, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18o5ozrJFG/>.

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