

# Divisoria Night Café: Showcase of Public Space Renewal in Southeast Asian Urban Context

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This study deals with festivals manifested as the Night Café in the Southeast Asian City of Cagayan de Oro (CDO), Northern Mindanao, the Philippines. From 2003 until 2013, Mayor Vincente “Dongkoy” Emano together with the city councillors enacted Ordinance Number 8920-2003 that established the weekly Night Café in the public space of Divisoria. The Night Café offered leisure and entrepreneurship activities. Vendors and other informal sectors converged to provide dining, shopping and entertaining activities. It strengthened the informal economy through the generation of employment and livelihood. The Night Café also symbolised CDO as the ‘City in Blossom, Bloom and Boom.’ The activities and symbolism showcased renewal of public space; however, they were solely intended for economic consumption. This paper argues that the renewal process utilised cultural references to advance economic interests. Thus, this paper aims to trace the main civic actors, key drivers and the role of the city government in conceptualising the Night Café.

## Introduction

Public spaces in Asia, especially in Southeast Asian cities, are characterised as “pluralistic with visible chaotic disorder” (Lim, 2014: 220). The phenomenon is attributed to the extreme rate of the region's urbanisation. Asia and Pacific displayed a 2.3 per cent rate of urbanisation in 2014; it is higher than the 2 per cent global rates (UN- Habitat & United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2015). In Southeast Asia, the rate of urbanisation grows at 2.8 per cent; correspondingly, 47 per cent of its population lives in cities (Department of Economic and Social Affairs & United Nations, 2014). Similarly, in the Philippines, 48 per cent of its population lives in urban areas. In the southern Philippines, the region of Northern Mindanao has two Highly Urbanized Cities (HUCs), including CDO with an entire urban population of 675,950 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2003).

As CDO is the capital city of the province and region, the city possesses significant roles in the development of the area. CDO serves as the centre for education, administration, commerce and industry. As a result, CDO maintains high annual revenues. To demonstrate, the city garnered Php 2,108.23 million (estimated 35 million euros) of operating income in 2013 (Commission on Audit, 2014). The city's rapid urbanisation and economic growth complement the festivalisation vis-à-vis endured disorganisation in the streets and public spaces.

The most important public space in CDO is Divisoria. The weekly festival of the Night Café took place in Divisoria for a decade from its establishment in 2003 until its abolishment in 2013. The Night Café altered the landscape of Divisoria through gentrification. The aim of the process was primarily for financial benefit. In the end, it resulted in contestation and eventual elimination.

This narrative first elucidates the framework of the study that utilises Lefebvre's three-dimensional space. It then examines the crucial function of the city administration and the actors involved in the dispute. Lastly, it reviews the outcome following the abolishment of the Night Café.

### Three-Dimensional Space of Divisoria

The study of Divisoria is framed within Lefebvre's conceptual triad

"consisting of three elements: representations of space, or "conceived space," which for my purposes includes not only the drawings and images produced by the designer but the material manifestations of those designs in the built environment (i.e., urban form); representational space, "lived space" or the symbolic values produced by the inhabitants; and spatial practice, "perceived space" or the ways in which spaces are used. These elements are not independent, and it is the interaction between them that results in the production of space." (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 269)

To elaborate, conceived space, "serves as an organising schema or a frame of reference for communication, which permits a (spatial) orientation and thus co-determines activity at the same time" (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37). In concrete terms, urban planning of CDO incorporates schemes for Divisoria. In particular, the Framework Plan for City of Cagayan de Oro (1972: 20) explicitly designed Divisoria as a "Pedestrian Shopping Mall."

In lived space, or spaces of representation, "the material "order" that emerges on the ground can itself become the vehicle conveying meaning. In this way, a (spatial) symbolism develops that expresses and evokes social norms, values, and experiences" (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37). Divisoria is full of symbols from the monuments to the giant streetlamps. The symbols are integral to the daily life of the locals. The symbols are also embedded in the city's three historical periods—Spanish, American and post-World War II.

The third element of perceived space

“designates the material dimension of social activity and interaction. The classification spatial means focusing on the aspect of simultaneity of activities. Spatial practice, in analogy to the syntagmatic dimension of language, denotes the system resulting from articulation and connection of elements or activities.” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 36)

The Night Café significantly reflects spatial practice where the users of space or actors perceived various activities for their own advantage. Furthermore, the triangular dimension of space is supplemented by other scholars who specialise in Southeast Asia such as Evers, Korff, Lim, Lee and Kurfürst among others. The insights of these specialists are integrated into the analysis of the contestation of Divisoria.

## Historical Symbolism of Divisoria

Divisoria sits at the core of the city's Población or Central Business District. Its importance has remained since the early twentieth century up until the present time displaying the city's history while also acting as a repository of everyday life for the locals.

Divisoria is a Spanish term that refers to a dividing line. Divisoria originally served as a fire breach dividing two areas in the población. To avoid conflagrations, the revolutionary leader and town mayor, Tirso Neri, spearheaded the establishment of Divisoria (Montalvan II and Fortich, 2004).

Divisoria sits between two major tree-lined streets with six 'islands' or blocks situated between the parallel roads. The western end is bounded by the Cagayan River; the eastern end bounded by Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan. The islands exhibit monuments of Filipino political figures, namely, Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, Justiniano Romulo Borja and Ramon Magsaysay. Other symbolic reminders, such as the remains of the local fighters in the Filipino-American War, are buried underneath the monument of Andres Bonifacio. The amphitheatre, now demolished, Kiosko (stage), benches and trees offer venues for entertainment and recreation.

The monuments, buried remains, and fixtures in every island of Divisoria equate to urban symbols. Kurfürst (2012:14) considers that, “urban symbols are public symbols.” They convey meanings as symbols in public spaces (Kurfürst, 2012; Nas, 2011). To a greater extent, Lefebvre analyses symbols in the production of space as integral in spaces of representation or representational space.

“This concerns the symbolic dimension of space. According to this, spaces of representation do not refer to the spaces themselves but to something else: a divine power, the logos, the state, masculine or feminine principle, and so on. This dimension of the production of space refers to the process of signification that links itself to a (material) symbol. The symbols of space could be taken from nature, such as trees or prominent topographical formations; or they could be artefacts, buildings, and monuments; they could also develop out of a combination of both, for example as ‘landscapes.’” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37)

Divisoria eventually serves as a business district that connects several commercial pedestrian streets together. The prominence of the place rose when

"[b]y the 1920s to the 1930s, all the big commercial establishments were in main avenue Divisoria, tree-lined and traversed by horse-drawn *tartanilla* and American automobiles. There was the large *Paradies* store, the Japanese, Chinese, and Indian shops. The *Cagayan de Oro Hotel*, and the *Plaza Hotel*. A 1938 visitor to *Cagayan* described *Divisoria* as a place of 'mercantile chatter'." (Montalvan II and Fortich, 2004: 97)

*Divisoria* is not only typified as a vital commercial area but also

"a symbol of the town's progress during the American period, more so it was a picture of her migrant microcosm and an echo of *Cagayan's* colonial and revolutionary past. *Divisoria* represented the dominance that *Cagayan's* migrant class had reached" (Montalvan II and Fortich, 2004: 98).

The symbols and symbolism of *Divisoria* prevail over historical periods. Korff (1993: 230) postulates that, "Due to the relative persistence and immobility of spatial structures, they play an important role as "facts" for the invention of tradition. The tradition is easily and convincingly verified by reference to remains from history." *Divisoria* is in essence a historical landmark.

## Divisoria within CDO Urban Plans

*Divisoria* possesses a significant component in the urban plans of CDO. As a conceived space, *Divisoria* conforms to the purpose of urban designers. As claimed by Lefebvre

"Conceived space refers to "representations of space" by planners, architects, and other specialists who divide space into separate elements that can be recombined at will. The discourse of these specialists is oriented toward valorising, quantifying, and administering space, thereby supporting and legitimating the modes of operation of state and capital." (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 137)

Urban planning in CDO started with the appointment of Maximo Suniel as the first city mayor in 1948 (Along, 1950). By 1952, city zoning was determined to put order in the erection or renovation of infrastructures (Minutes of the Municipal Board Series of 1952). In the same year, the Committee for City Planning and Beautification was instituted to promote cleanliness and, at the same time, cooperation between citizens and city legislators. Two years later in 1954, the third city mayor—Justiniano Romulo Borja spearheaded the creation of the city's urban planning board.

In 1963, the CDO City Planning and Development Board was given authority to plan, study and recommend suggestions for the urban development projects. An official map of CDO together with zoning and subdivision ordinances, public improvement plans, health and sanitation, as well as building codes were formulated. A special provision included Mayor Borja's initiative to appoint private citizens to participate in the planning board. The appointed citizens represented civic organisations, schools, labour and women's groups.

Community participation coupled with visionary leadership was demonstrated when *Divisoria* won the first prize in the Plaza Category National Committee Beauti-

fication Contest in 1962 (Mindanao Star, 1963). This award prompted Divisoria to gain nationwide prestige. Furthermore, this national recognition brought a new height of success to CDO due to the inclusion of community members in the city planning. Recognition was achieved because

“the community has a greater share in the design of their physical spaces. Development planning then becomes less prescriptive, modifies to become a more enabling process whose main role is to nurture the necessary conditions for a larger group to work together to plan the city. The city then becomes a place where citizens’ assets are acknowledged, co-opted and potentials maximised.” (Lee et al., 2014: 220-221)

Divisoria’s reputation above the nation’s other plazas attracted foreign urban specialists whose views added stimulus to urban plans. Craig Whitaker, an American Peace Corp Volunteer assigned in CDO, articulated the usefulness and significance of Divisoria.

“There is no question of the park’s centrality. If one says to a friend that he’ll meet him the middle of Cagayan de Oro, that same friends know that he means somewhere along the Divisoria. This centrality gives a focus to our city. It is the point towards which parades march, people wander on evening strolls, and in which rallies, meetings, and open-air radio programs are held. In short, because it is a “place” and is centrally located it is the point in the city to which almost all public activities gravitate. It has a life of its own.” (Whitaker, 1966: 8)

Divisoria exemplifies qualities that makes it distinct as a space for aesthetical and practical functions. According to Whitaker (1966: 8), Divisoria is perfectly suited to the idea of Louis I. Kahn, a prominent American architect, who conceptualises that, “the centre of the city is a place to go to and not through.” Likewise, Zukin (1996) and Sennett (1992) equate public space to a meeting point or melting pot of various activities. Given these points, Divisoria is portrayed as

“an absolutely necessary part of our downtown urban fabric. Its importance can be measured simply by saying that it is a place. To describe it we can stretch our imaginations a little and call it an outdoor room, a long large sized room that has no ceiling and whose walls are the buildings which line it on either side of the street. Once we look at the Divisoria in this light we can see also the streets which lead into it as hallways or corridors to the room.” (Whitaker, 1966: 4)

Finally, Whitaker emphasises that Divisoria fits the ideal concept of a park in an urban landscape. He highlights Divisoria where it stands in the foreground; while the rest of the city sits in the background of the schema.

“The park sits as a quiet hub to the rest of the city which is spinning around it (this effect is certainly heightened by the continuous stream of one-way traffic around it). It is as if someone places a giant thumbtack in the centre of our city to pin it to the landscape then started turning the rest of the city around it.” (Whitaker, 1966: 8)

The theory, definition, and discourse of Divisoria as shown by Whitaker, conforms to the paradigm of Lefebvre.

“representations of space give an image and thus also define a space. Analogous to the paradigmatic dimension of language, one spatial representation can be substituted by another that shows similarities in some respects but differences in others. Representations of space emerge at the level of discourse, of speech as such, and therefore comprise verbalised forms such as descriptions, definitions, and especially (scientific) theories of space.” (Goonewardena et al., 2008: 37)

Designs for Divisoria continued with the completion of the Framework Plan for the City of Cagayan de Oro in 1972. The Framework Plan turned out to be the critical juncture in the city’s planning schemes. The advent of the 1970s signalled a swift economic transformation of CDO. Commerce and industry dominated the economy of the city since it was promoted as the ‘Gateway to Northern Mindanao’ (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972: 5). The city’s industrialisation was boosted through speedy construction of infrastructure projects that included power and water supplies, roads, public transportation as well as seaports (Satur, 2009).

The city’s reputation as the business hub in the Northern Mindanao region paved the way for designing Divisoria into a Pedestrian Shopping Mall where “improvements will be made to mould a leisurely atmosphere conducive to shopping. Kiosks, in all sorts of variety will be constructed on the Mall with designs regulated within the frame of the Urban Design Concept” (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972: 20).

The economic development of the city prompted a re-interpretation of the symbolic meaning of Divisoria. The design to convert Divisoria into a mall brings forth, “archetypal public spaces of modernity” (Zukin, 1996:188). In effect, the planned transformation signals “symbolic economy” (Zukin, 1996: 265). The modern design of Divisoria confirms that, “symbolic economy is determined by growth in cultural consumption and its industries” (Kurfürst, 2012: 148). It is further determined that

“the symbolic economy features two parallel production systems that are crucial to a city’s material life: the production of space, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and the production of symbols, which constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity. Every effort to rearrange space in the city is also an attempt at visual re-presentation.” (Zukin, 1996: 24)

The Framework Plan not only advances the city’s economic prospects, but it also “embodies a community’s vision” (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972: 75). The Framework Plan primarily considered the participation of urban dwellers. As Lim (2014: 22) notes, “How the city can be perceived is by the intensity of active participation of local urban citizens.” The contribution of the locals, ordinary as it may be, allows redefinition of the symbolic economy of public spaces in the city (Kurfürst, 2012; Lefebvre, 2003; Zukin, 1996). For these reasons, the designs for Divisoria “are geared towards attracting tourist-oriented activities in the area without forgetting the needs of local residents and shoppers for a better place to shop and relax” (Architects, Urban Designers and Regional Planners, 1972 20).

Community participation also extends to the vendors in Divisoria. The Framework Plan aimed at “expanding the scope of vending within the park without sacrificing sa-





There were two major urban plans following the period of Martial Law. In 1991, the Cagayan de Oro-Iligan Corridor Master Plan was conceived primarily to facilitate agro-industrial development in the region of Northern Mindanao. The Master Plan was based on a macrostructure encompassing nineteen municipalities and two cities (Louis Berger International Inc., 1991). For this reason, plans for Divisoria were not given attention. Nine years later in 2000, the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) was launched under Mayor Emano. However, the CLUP proposed no rectification for Divisoria. Rather, the CLUP merely recognised Divisoria as part of the built-up area in the Major Urban Node (City Land Use Coordinating Committee of Cagayan de Oro, 2000). Although both plans missed out community participation, Divisoria nevertheless remained an unaltered microcosm of the city. Divisoria maintained its traditional symbolic meaning as the primary public space in the city, however, not until the advent of Night Café in 2003. On balance, the lack of community planning provides an avenue for new forms of re-interpretation of public space in the city. The conception of the Night Café re-interprets the symbolic meaning of Divisoria.

### Key Drivers in the Conceptualization of Night Café

Élites define and redefine images of the city (Evers and Korff, 2000; Kurfürst, 2012). The Cagayan de Oro City Council (2003), with the approval of the mayor, created Resolution Number 5779-2003 declaring CDO as the “City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom.” The élites supported the legitimization by citing well-grounded socio-economic factors. Accordingly, the resolution outlined satisfactory peace and order conditions, continuous foreign investment, the spread of multi-million infrastructural projects such as bridges, public markets, bus terminals, malls and residential subdivisions as determinants of the city’s economic prosperity. It highlighted the “average growth rate of investment over a 5-year period from 1997 to 2002 of 6.14 percent and Php 8.54 Billion worth of investments poured in 2002 alone” (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003). In addition, the established image of CDO as the “Gateway to Northern Mindanao” (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003) was reinforced in the resolution.

The élites, who are the authors of the resolution, ultimately decided on how CDO was portrayed. The portrait of the ‘City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom’ appertains to “urban constructions” by “an urban ideology of élites” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 17). The ‘blossoming, blooming and booming’ (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003) of CDO are “cultural strategies that initially represented the results of economic development turned into strategies aimed at stimulating economic growth” (Zukin, 1996: 280). The construction of the images of CDO by élites, coupled with the growth of investments and infrastructural programmes, are the key drivers in furthering economic prospects as manifested by the establishment of the Night Café.



## Role of City Government in the Conceptualization of Night Café

Mayor Vicente Emano originally conceptualised the Night Café in order to find a viable solution to informality. Emano approached vending as a “phenomenon to be managed” (Recio and Gomez, 2013: 177). The mayor’s “vision is power” (Zukin 1996: 257) is transparent in the streets of Divisoria. Emano envisioned a venue where hawkers could exhibit commodities on weekends (Palmes-Dennis, 2013). In offering an alternative for the marginalised sector in the city, his idea was supported by the city councillors who articulated and converted it into a statute.

The city council created Ordinance Number 8920-2003, which legitimised the establishment of the Night Café in September 2003. The ordinance defined the Night Café as a regular weekend festivity, open to the public, specifically in Tirso Neri and RN Abejuela Streets in Divisoria, from seven in the evening until two in the morning. The Night Café permitted vendors to operate under the 2003 Cagayan de Oro City Revenue Code. Correspondingly, the ordinance laid down the rules on the set-up, lay-out, food and beverage preparation, services, sanitation and waste disposal (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003a). The city government, headed by the mayor and dominated by his allies in the city council, took on the role of legitimising the Night Café.

The legitimisation of the Night Café uncovers “changes in the configuration of élites” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 17). The mayor, together with the councillors, envision a renewed CDO. The Night Café symbolises the renewal of the city. Therefore, the reconfiguration by the city government “imply re-definitions of the meaning of the city and urban “re-construction” so that the new social and symbolic demands are satisfied” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 17).

## Renewal of Divisoria

The physical renovation of Divisoria started a year after the installation of the Night Café. The Cagayan de Oro City Council (2004a), through the issuance of Resolution Number 6864-2004, endorsed the designation of Divisoria as a ‘Business-Tourism Park.’ The resolution-initiated guidelines in coordination with the City Tourism Board, Public Works and on Commerce, as well as the private organisation of local businessmen known as Cagayan de Oro Chamber of Commerce and Industry Foundation, Incorporated (Oro Chamber). Moreover, the resolution recommended the installation of lollipop lights (giant, multi-coloured lamp posts), permanent toilets, a dancing fountain, and paving stones on footpaths. Ultimately, it “aimed at reviving Divisoria’s old glory days” (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2004a).

Renewal is manifested not only through re-interpretation of image but also by architectural alteration. Architecture, as Eco (2005: 194) articulates, “is an act of communication, a message, of which the parts or the whole can perform the double action of every communication, connotation and denotation.” The new objects and fixtures in Divisoria refer to architectural parts or symbols that communicate new meaning. Their installation connotes that the Night Café in Divisoria symbolises “blossoming, blooming and booming” of CDO.

Zukin (1996: 263) observes how “Culture is often reduced to a set of marketable images.” “City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom” and “Business-Tourism Park” are merchantable images. These images, combined with marketable symbols such as the lollipop lights, are then utilised as cultural references to reinforce economic interests. The Oro Chamber partnered with the city government to foster profit-seeking interest through the renewal of Divisoria. In other words, “people with economic and political power have the greatest opportunity to shape public culture by controlling the building of the city’s public spaces in stone and concrete” (Zukin, 1996: 11).

*Figure 2: The Night Café*



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## Contestation

Power in public space does not totally belong to the élites. It is important to realise that spatial practice is evident in Divisoria. Zukin (1996: 11), succinctly addresses that, “public space is inherently democratic. The question of who can occupy public space, and so define an image of the city, is open-ended.” Various actors participate in public spaces and indeed partake in the contestation of public space. Kurfürst (2012: 62) posits, “Cities are socially constructed and therefore politically contested. Conflicts between different groups are likely to arise about the shape of the landscape. This stems from the fact that a “unitary culture” does not exist.” In the context of urbanism in Southeast Asia, Evers and Korff (2000: 6) make the case of “the struggles of different actors, who are trying to shape the city in a conscious effort, or who simply put their stamp on the city through

their everyday life within it.” In the case of the Divisoria Night Café, the actors can be categorised into four groups: vendors/informal sector, mayors/city government, local citizens and the private-business sector. The following sections discuss the contestation.

## The Vendors/Informal Sector

As soon the Night Café began, vendors installed makeshift stalls, chairs, tables, grills and patio umbrellas in the streets where locals, as well as tourists, gathered to eat, drink, and shop. They grilled meat and seafood especially for low-and-middle-income consumers. They displayed assorted goods such as imported second-hand apparel (i.e., Ukay-ukay), pirated DVDs, domestic pets and other affordable everyday products. The Night Café was equally open to the services provided by masseurs, henna tattoo artists, prostitutes and band players. By and large, the activities provided by the informal sector were for economic consumption. To interpret precisely, the Night Café advocates a culture of selling. Zukin (1996: 12), contemplates that, “culture is a system for producing symbols, every attempt to get people to buy a product becomes a culture industry.”

After several months of operation, the vendors began violating the rules in the ordinance. Firstly, the vendors did not follow the prescribed schedule. The rules stipulated that operations started at 6:00 p.m. and ended before 3:00 a.m. However, in reality, the vendors set up their stalls earlier than 5:00 p.m. and their operations ended after 3:00 a.m. Secondly, the vendors who sold dry goods occupied the islands. Thirdly, the garbage disposal system was not followed. Worst of all, liquor was made available to minors, particularly the students coming from nearby schools and universities.

The city government responded to these violations by amending the rules. First, Ordinance Number 8948-2003 issued prohibition on the use of the islands to the vendors and also restated the precise opening times (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003c). Second, Ordinance Number 9008-2003 regulated the use of umbrellas; vendors were only allowed to erect umbrellas when rain occurred (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2003b). Thirdly, Ordinance Number 9372-2004 prohibited the sale of alcoholic drinks to minors below the age of eighteen (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2004).

Despite the amendments, official regulators assigned in the Night Café lacked the capacity to implement the guidelines. The violations continued to escalate. As a result, the Night Café elicited reactions from the locals.

## Local Residents

The issue of the Night Café divided the locals into opposing sides and neutral parties. The various groups highlight either the advantages or disadvantages of the Night Café.

Supporters of the Night Café sympathise with the vendors, reasoning that vendors are part of the locality and contribute to the economy. To demonstrate, a mango vendor profited as much Php 3,000 (60 euros) per night from the Night Café; in contrast, she earns only up to Php 700 (14 euros) per night without the Night Café (Interview with

Street Vendors, 2016). In short, the Night Café generated a livelihood and employment for the underprivileged.

The Night Café brought pride and uniqueness to CDO; it was the “trademark of CDO”, (Pagapulaan, 2016) as articulated by a former barangay councillor. The advocates further claimed that the Night Café revitalised Divisoria because it promoted local tourism. In effect, the city government achieved its goal of renewing Divisoria.

On the other hand, the opponents of the Night Café complained of several problems. First, drunken customers desecrated monuments of local heroes (Alegre, 2013); they urinated on the statue of Andres Bonifacio that is also the burial site of soldiers from the 1900 Battle of Macahambus when Filipinos defeated the Americans. The result was that urine combined with vomit on the streets, walls, fixtures, and other monuments to fill the air with a stench. Second, as there was no proper water supply, the vendors did not follow sanitation rules. Instead, they stored pails of water in the streets to be used for dish and hand washing. In addition, piles of garbage were left on the streets and, every night after the market ended, Divisoria was plagued with filth. Third, the loud music from live bands disrupted classes in the university adjacent to Divisoria. Fourth, the closure of two streets, Tirso Neri and RN Abejuela, two main thoroughfares of the city, caused a traffic jam that lasted for hours, with the congestion affecting all drivers and passengers. Fifth, the opposers to the Night Café claimed it to be an event where crime and prostitution flourished. Moreover, a female prostitute earned as much as Php 5,000 (100 euros) per night during the Night Café; in contrast, she collected a mere Php 300 (6 euros) per night in the absence of the Night Café (Interview of Prostitutes, 2016). Given these concrete points, “limitations of the administration allow the market to emerge as the dominant mechanism for the structuration of urban space” (Evers and Korff, 2000: 13).

One of the locals argued that a “plaza is not for business” and stressed that the Night Café was not a “food centre” (Interview of Local Residents, 2016). Instead, he proposed to find ways of establishing a proper venue and alternatives for the vendors. The Night Café could be transferred to another public space such as the rotunda. Lastly, the locals suggested the need for stricter enforcement of rules to maintain sanitation.

## Private-Business Sector

It may be noted that at the beginning, the private-business sector organisation in the city, otherwise known as the Oro Chamber, coordinated with the government to endorse the Night Café. However, the group later denounced the weekly event. Oro Chamber members who own commercial establishments in the private spaces of Divisoria complained of decreasing sales since the traffic congestion discouraged clients. When the Night Café ended in 2013, the president of the Oro Chamber announced, “We are happy to receive reports from our members on sales improvement” (The Mindanao Current, 2013). Surprisingly, the occupation of vendors in Divisoria adversely affected the profits of private enterprises. Thus, the renewal of Divisoria produced a paradoxical effect on legitimate enterprises.

Another private entity, the Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan, equally detested the presence of the Night Café. Students inside classrooms across Divisoria lost concentration due to the loud and constant music. The university further criticised the negative influence the Night Café had on the undergraduates in terms of encouraging an unhealthy lifestyle. By and large, the private sectors opposed the negative effects of the Night Café as it encroached on their private spheres.

## The Mayors

The Night Café ultimately became a political issue in the 2013 mayoral election. It triggered a contest between the two leading candidates: the incumbent Mayor Emano, and Oscar “Oca” Moreno. Both contestants shared similar educational and political track records. Both were former provincial governors of the Misamis Oriental province where CDO is the capital city with Emano governing from 1986 to 1995 and Moreno from 2004 until 2013.

Although both Emano and Moreno possessed public charisma and originated from influential political clans, they differed in vision and agenda. On the one hand, Emano remained with his program to continue the Night Café and promote the slogan “City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom.” On the other hand, Moreno’s campaign centred on *Hapsay nga Panggobyerno* (Orderly Governance). In other words, Moreno aimed to re-establish order in the streets and within city government. The election was a close race with Moreno winning over Emano by a thin margin.

Immediately following his victory, Moreno mobilised the programme *Hapsay Dalan* (Orderly Streets). Moreno eradicated the Night Café with his first Executive Order 001-2013. The Oro Chamber then supported the new program to clean up the city’s streets. Specifically, the Oro Chamber agreed with the official order to eradicate the vendors in Divisoria in order to regain income. The informal sector was immediately alarmed and threatened by the sanction. The impact of the sanction can be summed up by the following:

“Daghan kaayo nawad-an trabaho, nanga pasmo, nanga boang ang uban na giwala diretso na wala gi taga-i ug trabaho. Mura mig mga kawatan, kriminal” (Many lost their jobs and starved. Some whose livelihoods were abolished abruptly without prior notice and without any job prospects went crazy. We were like thieves, criminals) (Interview with the Leaders of the Association of Massagers in Divisoria, 2016).

The afflicted further lamented

“Na apektohan gyud mi pila ka bulan. Nangita mi aha maka pamaylo ug kwarta para makalingkawas. Nag ampo gyud mi sa Ginoo na malouy si Mayor [Moreno] na tagaan mi ug lugar” (We were affected for several months. We tried to find ways to borrow money in order to survive. We prayed to God that the Mayor [Moreno] would pity us and find a space for us) (Interview with the Leaders of the Association of Massagers in Divisoria, 2016).

Notwithstanding the complaints, the mayor intensified the implementation of the sanctions. The Night Café was prohibited for the reason that “it was a tragedy” (Moreno, 2016). The mayor reiterated the point that “There was tremendous traffic, bad smell and even criminality” (Moreno, 2016). He further rationalised his decision to close the Night Café by commenting “What happened was that the Night Café—that the intention of making Divisoria a cultural place had been abused by too much commercialism. The Night Café became a nightmare” (Moreno, 2016). Nevertheless, the mayor agreed the Night Café had been a “good idea in the beginning” (Moreno, 2016).

The following evaluation summarises the contest between the two mayors:

“Kung sa masa, medyo epektibo si Emano kay daghan man pobre nakapahimulos; Pero kung koan lang may katungod sa kahapsay, mas epektibo si Moreno kay naka baton man ug kalinaw” (For the masses, Emano is quite effective since many of the poor benefitted [from Night Café]; however, if we refer to orderliness, Moreno is more competent because peacefulness [on the streets] was achieved) (Interview with a Disabled Vendor and Toilette Fee Collector in Divisoria 2016).

Emano may have had the best intentions for both the marginalised and the privileged. The Night Café served the informal sector on one hand, while, on the other hand, the slogan ‘City in Blossom, in Bloom and in Boom’ fulfilled the promotional needs of the private-business sector. In spite of the success of the Night Café, the weak implementation of rules and regulations encouraged disadvantageous consequences for all stakeholders.

The contestation between the political élites proved who could dominate over the public space in the city. Importantly, it must be recognised, that the winner depends on support from business élites. For some time, Emano retained domination because the Oro Chamber supported his vision of furthering economic interests through cultural references. Evers and Korff (2000: 13) stress “The rationale for the production of space is its exchangeability and the profitable usage of space, while the administration tries to develop the cities following the rationality of their plans.”

Then again, Emano might have underestimated the business élites and instead overestimated his influence on the masses. The moment Emano lost the support of the business élites, the momentum shifted to Moreno. Oro Chamber’s approval of Moreno illustrates the shift in control. Therefore, the partnership of political and economic élites ultimately controls the city. Evers and Korff (2000: 11) encapsulate the idea that, “Cities are made and experienced by the people. Not in a harmonious cooperative effort but through conflicts between those dominating and imposing their understanding of the city on those dominated.”

## Alternative Spaces

The dissolution of the Night Café pushed displaced vendors to seek other avenues, such as the semi-public spaces at Paseo del Rio, or, what is commonly known as the rotunda. The rotunda is a roundabout where one can drive around its perimeter road and occupies an estimated area of 10,000 square meters. This land had been donated to the city



government by the prominent family of Dr. Jose Golez and Rafaelita Golez (Cagayan de Oro City Council, 2000). The family then initiated the step of renting out the rotunda to provide an alternative venue after the Night Café ended. The vendors paid minimal rental fee to the city government. The experiment succeeded for some time, particularly during fiestas and the Christmas season; nonetheless, it ultimately proved infeasible because of its inaccessibility (Escobar-San Juan and Pastrano, 2016).

Centrio Mall opened a night market, *Mercato de Oro*, within its indoor garden, months after the closure of the Night Café. *Mercato de Oro* was modelled after *Mercato Centrale* at Bonifacio Global City/BGC (Ayala/Centrio Mall, 2013) in Makati city. The Ayala family corporation owns both BGC and Centrio Mall, along with its emerging business park. The two establishments are located in the central business districts of their respective cities. Most importantly, both business centres embody the “small urban spaces,” like privately managed public parks that can be refashioned to project an image of civility (Zukin, 1996: 44). The two commercial spaces exhibit the “monopolistic formal players in a globalizing economy” (Recio and Gomez, 2013: 177) since their spaces contain global brands, shops, hotels, offices together with condominiums. BGC and Centrio Mall project “an image of global power and influence” (Shatkin, 2005: 591). In short, both commercial hubs exhibit artificial public spaces exclusive to wealthy clients.

*Mercato de Oro* replicated the Night Café by following a similar weekend schedule: Fridays and Saturdays from 4:00 p.m. until 3:00 a.m. This new night market promoted the selling point: “The Night Food & Lifestyle Market of Northern Mindanao” (Ayala and Centrio Mall, 2013). *Mercato de Oro* then used the pineapple icon, a trademark of Northern Mindanao, where the Del Monte Philippines Corporation has the largest pineapple plantation in the country. The night market promised to offer arts, crafts and food at reasonable prices, along with free live music. *Mercato de Oro* accelerated the end of the Night Café; however, it excluded those vendors who could not afford the rental of mall space. The privatisation of urban spaces by the entry of malls erodes the claim of the vendors to public spaces (Shatkin, 2005). Yet, for the most part, *Mercato de Oro* was a failed alternative due to the exclusivity of its customers. The night market in Centrio Mall quickly faded owing to exclusive artificiality.

After the unsuccessful attempts in the rotunda and Centrio Mall, the mayor sought another alternative and contemplated relocating the hawkers to *Isla de Oro* (Moreno, 2016). The city planners, however, noted that the planned relocation was discussed in the previous years by the heads of the local private business sector (Escobar-San Juan and Pastrano, 2016). Most importantly, the devastating effects of typhoon Washi on *Isla de Oro* in 2011 must be seriously considered, as the area has been declared a no-build zone. The hawkers could face the risk of disastrous floods.

## Conclusion

None of the alternative public spaces offers a solution to the needs of the informal sector. The vendors face the challenges of accessibility in the rotunda, affordability in Centrio Mall, and security in *Isla de Oro*. Notwithstanding the spatial challenges in the informal sector, the masseurs, after their vehement protest, have managed to remain



legally in the westernmost island of Divisoria. Moreno allowed exemption for the masseurs because of their work ethic, including their adherence to sanitation standards and general reserved demeanour. In contrast to the vendors, the masseurs occupy and leave their area without waste because they are equipped with only chairs and massage kits consisting of oil/lotion, wooden reflexology tools, towels, and disinfectant. In contrast to other vendors, the masseurs desist from using or making loud music (Interview with the Leaders of the Association of Massagers in Divisoria 2016). In conclusion, the actors from the informal sector prove the 'idea of public space cannot be guaranteed as it can only be gained through struggle and contestation' (Wee, 2014: 23). The appeal of the masseurs convinced Moreno. Thus, they regained their rights and won the confidence of the mayor. Kurfürst (2012: 110) stresses "Urban landscapes are socially produced; they are the outcome of processes of negotiation between diverse social actors."

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