

## SOME THOUGHTS ON A PROPOSED UNIVERSITY TOWN

By Manuel Martell '47



After reading and re-reading the various communications and information which were furnished me, I would like to offer my reactions and thoughts triggered by all this material. I must emphasize that what follows are merely my own subjective points of view and are not meant to be either normative or, for that matter, predictive. And, to quote that wonderful Tagalog disclaimer, I'd like to preface what follows with, "*Bato-bato sa langit, ang tamaan huwag magagalit.*" Here goes...

I am of the impression that the University Town idea is an idea whose time has not yet come, if it will come at all. The fact that the original UP charter made provision for the creation of such a Town, with nobody doing anything about it for years and years seems to me an indication of how it was never in anybody's front burner. That, to me, would indicate that there never was a felt need to do so. If anything, it only highlights the fact that through all the years, the university and the nation as a whole had more urgent issues to contend with—as it has today. I don't know if the original charter documents state any reason or objective for providing the (eventual) establishment of a university town; I would guess that the objective was to ensure academic and financial independence. Whether it was to become a model of civic, moral and political virtue for the rest of the nation to emulate is something else, and would be a by-product but not a major *raison d'être* of its existence.

Withal, I would agree with the idea of creating this University Town if only because as alumnus and Upsilonian I feel that that the University of the Philippines deserves better than what it has been dealt with. And when I say "University of the Philippines" I do not refer to the buildings and all the physical properties in and around Diliman; rather I refer to that most important resource of any university or of any school for that matter: its faculty. I do get a bit of a fright when I read about low faculty pay and morale. Therein of course lies a host of other concerns and issues dealing mostly with the general decline of the status of teachers, from the elementary grades and up. I am old enough to remember the times when to be a teacher was to be somebody. I am old enough to remember how even in the smallest of barrios the teacher and the principal were always up there in the *entablado* along with the mayor and the parish priest. Nowadays our teachers are sometimes forced to work in the Middle East as domestics. Our teachers deserve better. Will the establishment of a UP Town help achieve this, among other things? My answer to this is a categorical, explicit, definitive - *Ewan ko*.

Lest I be accused of being facetious, let us assume, for the sake of being positive and constructive, that the establishment of a university town is achievable. Let us assume

further that there are enough concerned UP alumni who would like to contribute time, talent and treasure to this vision. Here, then, are some planning issues and consideration which I believe we must take into account.

1. This effort should not be perceived as spearheaded by the Upsilon.
2. This effort should be spearheaded and powered by a group residing in the Greater Manila Area and any participation by alumni abroad shall be considered as supplementary. Beyond the occasional alumni reunion, they are not, in my opinion, all that concerned with issues concerning UP and the nation as a whole. As an alumnus, I do try to keep up with what's going on in the Philippines and UP but if at all on the level of just keeping up, without any compulsion to do anything beyond worrying about my relatives and former classmates although for the most part, I know that they will probably be all right, barring any great catastrophe or calamity out there. Even Erap cannot be classified as a calamity; an embarrassment, maybe; but definitely not a calamity. And many alumni abroad are simply too busy earning a living or ensuring a retirement income so that one should not take it against them if they don't offer anything beyond lip service or some token financial contribution.
3. Further to #2 above, I would try to identify and depend on one or two individuals who would be, like Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, the missionary to preach, urge, cajole. I have always believed that all meaningful change has been achieved, for better or for worse, not by committees, but by dedicated individual men and women. I think of Mother Teresa, Teresa of Avila, Fidel Castro, Hitler, Lenin, Gandhi, Ignatius of Loyola, Charles de Gaulle, Francis of Assisi, Mao and other single-minded, dedicated, daring world-changers. Do we have such a one lurking unknown in the midst of the alumni? And what would be the credentials and résumé of such a man or woman?
4. Such a man or a woman would first of all be consumed by the idea of the need to create this university town. I am not talking about some kind of a fanatic here but one who is an amalgam of politician, organizer, mobilizer, orator, public relations expert, poet, rogue and saint. The aforementioned characters in #3 above were mostly all that. And in order to succeed, this paragon and his cohorts must operate in an environment where public opinion, politics, economics and good luck have to be in favorable interplay. A lot of prayer will definitely help as well.
5. Finally, the proposed objective for this exercise is "To transform the University of the Philippines into a University Town that can serve as a model for other Philippine urban centers to follow and, thus, transform the entire Philippine society into one worthy of respect by the world community." The operative words here are 'model' and 'transform,' i.e., the Town as a means towards the objective of transforming the country.

My last thoughts are:

- Looking at this objective from a management point of view - one would ask, "What or where is the Key Result Area (KRA)? Is it in creating a consciousness of and desire among Filipinos for respect by the world community? Is it in first overhauling our political system which is essentially a system fueled by tribal considerations? Is it in enlisting the help of the religious sector? What has to occur before we can even get started towards transformation? These are of course mere abstractions that must be given weight and shape by us mere mortals. But the KRA must be identified.
- Aside from UP, are there no other existing sites or aggrupations that can serve as model for a desired transformation? It could be a village or a *poblacion* somewhere in the Philippines - I have heard of a town somewhere in Bohol where the mayor actually considers himself a servant of his constituents, is honest and fair, and has actually brought material improvement in the lives of the people. There must be other such unsung heroes in unsung places which ought to shame the rest of the country into becoming 'worthy of respect by the world community.'
- If I seemed cynical or skeptical during this essay, please ascribe it to my wish to be clinical and at a distance. I believe in being my own devil's advocate. I hope to have been of some help in identifying some issues regarding the establishment of a university town as a means to transforming the country. It is a big, big dream; but, then, why not? As the poet said, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, else what's a heaven for?"