

Rural-Urban Interactions and Interdependence: Policy Implications for the Enhancement of Linkages between Iloilo City and the Province of Guimaras

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to analyze the rural-urban interactions and interdependence between Iloilo City and the Province of Guimaras with the aim of identifying policy implications for the enhancement of linkages. Mixed methods approach was employed involving both quantitative and qualitative analysis based on secondary and primary data gathered through service statistics, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and direct field observations. The study found out that there is interdependence between the two areas which has been in existence for over a century based on historical records. The nature and characteristics of linkages are consistent with theories on rural-urban interactions in terms of the flow of goods and sectoral activities. There were mechanisms established in the past for the establishment of a metropolitan arrangement which served as facilitating factors but were not sustained primarily due to changes in local leadership and priorities. There were also barriers that limited its development arising from lack of an enabling policy at the national level to sustain the alliance. Policy gaps at the national and local levels likewise hindered the development of rural-urban linkages primarily on transportation and infrastructure. Despite the challenges, there are prospects that can be pursued towards the development of tourism and livelihood opportunities anchored on the attributes and assets of both areas which can be maximized through improvements in the value chain. There is also a prospect for the revival of the metropolitan arrangement which can pave the way for the integrated development of the Metro Iloilo-Guimaras (MIG) region.

Keywords: metropolitan arrangement, local government alliances, regional planning, transport, public policy

INTRODUCTION

Most development theories and practice focus on the distinction between rural and urban areas as a dichotomy that requires different and separate interventions. This approach overlooks the fact that what takes place in rural areas will affect the urban areas to which they are interacting. Similarly, changes in urban areas will ultimately affect the rural areas surrounding it. As Tacoli (1998) observed, although a distinction between "rural" and "urban" is probably inescapable for descriptive purposes, it often implies a dichotomy which encompasses both sectoral and spatial dimensions. The reality however, is much more complex and the lack of understanding on the interconnectedness and interdependence of activities and functions between the two areas results in policies that are not responsive to the challenges faced in promoting growth and sustainability and thus, limits the social and economic benefits that can potentially be maximized.

The urban-rural interactions between Iloilo City and the Province of Guimaras exemplify the relationship between a highly urbanized city and a rural island-province. It primarily involves the flow of goods and services

between a predominantly rural area and an urban area that is incidentally also the regional center. The interaction is highly dependent on sea transport which is the primary mode of travel between the two areas.

The city as the urban service provider offers amenities and specialized services in the areas of health, education and finance, provides employment and is also the source of processed products and consumer goods. The tourism industry of Guimaras is highly dependent on the transportation facilities of the city, particularly the Iloilo International Airport as the gateway for domestic and foreign tourists. Iloilo on the other hand is positioning itself as a convention destination and benefits from the tourism destinations of Guimaras by having these as attractions in the packaging of tours under the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE).

The increasing intensity of the rural-urban interactions presents both opportunities and challenges that need adequate understanding of the factors affecting change. Socio-economic improvements in both areas resulted in the challenge of effectively managing the linkages as evidently manifested by the inadequacy of transport facilities

and services to serve the increasing volume of passengers passing through the seaports. This was aggravated by a Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) entered into by the city government with a private entity which involved the imposition of terminal fees and other charges to commuters which was opposed by Guimaras commuters as it did not undergo a consultative process.

A mechanism for cooperation was initiated through the creation of the Metro Iloilo-Guimaras Economic Development Council (MIGEDC) by virtue of Executive Order No. 559 issued by then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo on August 28, 2006. The MIGEDC development plan laid down the desired conditions that the cooperation aimed to achieve through a metropolitan arrangement involving other local governments adjacent to the city of Iloilo in the areas of tourism, investment promotion and infrastructure support.

However, while there is substantial data that exist at both government and private institutions, these were not fully analyzed for the purpose of understanding and describing the interactions between rural and urban areas as inputs to informed decisions and policy formulation. The issues encountered in the sea transport as a result of an initiative of Iloilo City are possible manifestations of this gap.

Considering the information gaps that exist, there is an evident need to undertake a study to have an in-depth analysis of the interactions and interdependence between Iloilo City and the province of Guimaras.

The traditional practice of dichotomizing rural and urban areas is evidently happening in the study area resulting in gaps in terms of the desired conditions stipulated in the plans and programs of local governments. The dichotomous approach fails to recognize that rural-urban linkages exist in a space continuum as argued by Ndabeni (2015) and as such, the inter-relatedness of the two areas are not considered in planning and policy formulation.

The importance of effectively determining the site-specific context of rural-urban interactions as stressed by Tacoli (undated) needs to be appreciated by development planners and policy-makers both at the local and regional levels. For this to happen however, adequate knowledge on the nature and extent of the linkages need to be analyzed and the policy implications identified. The responsiveness of interventions by both government and civil society hinges on a sound decision-making tool that can be provided by the study.

The case of Iloilo City and Guimaras presents an opportunity for

a study that can contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of rural-urban interactions and interdependence and provide valuable insights from a developmental perspective. It can potentially influence the re-thinking of traditional approaches to consider the rural-urban continuum in an integrated approach which will benefit local governments and national agencies. It is also a significant source of information for organizations that promote social and economic development.

Objectives of the Study

The general research objective is to analyze the rural-urban interactions and interdependence in terms of social and economic aspects between Iloilo City and the Province of Guimaras with the primary purpose of identifying policy implications and providing recommendations for the improvement of the linkages.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe the nature and extent of interdependence in terms of social and economic aspects between Iloilo City and the Province of Guimaras.

2. To identify the facilitating factors and barriers influencing the development of rural-urban linkages.

3. To identify the problems, issues and gaps that constrain urban-rural linkages.

4. To identify aspects of national and local policies that affect rural-urban interactions.

5. To determine the operationalization of these policies.

6. To know the perspectives and views of the stakeholders in terms of the linkages between the two areas.

7. To identify the prospects in improving rural-urban linkages between Iloilo City and Guimaras and its potentials in contributing to regional and national development.

8. To determine policy implications and provide recommendations for the development of rural-urban linkages as a result of enhanced understanding of the interactions and interdependence.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized the theoretical rural-urban interaction model crafted by Cesar B. Umali, Jr. in his master's thesis at the School of Urban and Regional Planning, U.P. Diliman in 1987. The model describes the relationship between rural and urban areas wherein there exists a symbiosis for exchange of goods and services. The study examined how this theoretically healthy and symbiotic relationship applied to Iloilo City and the Province of Guimaras (Figure 1).

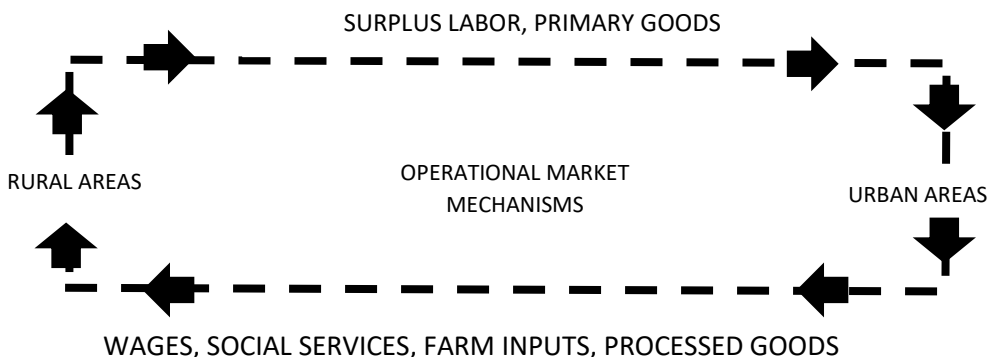


Figure 1. Rural-urban interaction model (Source: Cesar Umali, 1987)

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 2 was based on the theoretical model of Umali (1987).

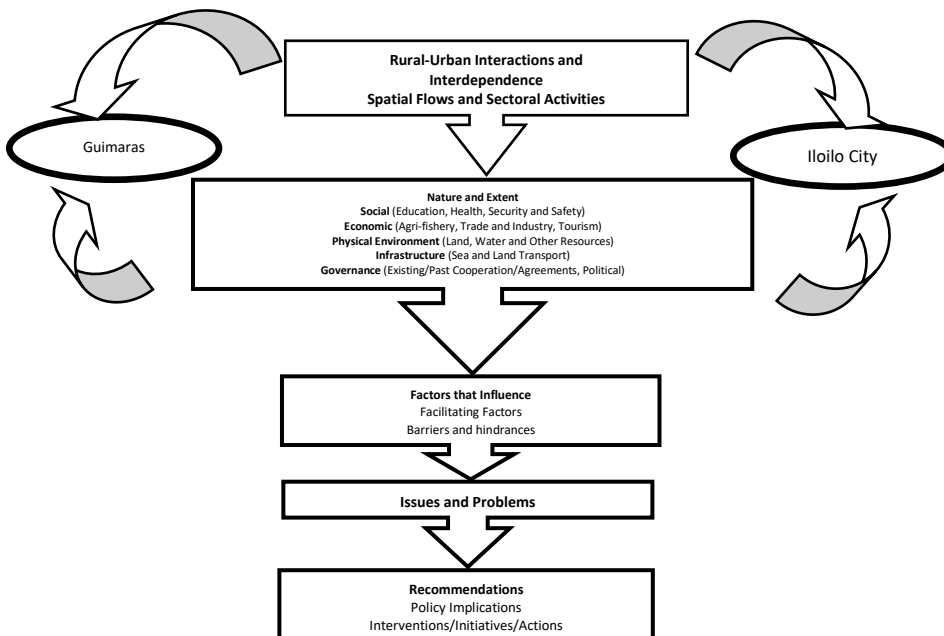


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for Rural-Urban interactions between Guimaras and Iloilo City

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the Mixed Methods Approach which involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools. This method was used because of the nature of the study which requires the validation and confirmation of quantitative results derived from secondary data with primary data describing qualitative experiences.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were the primary tools used for qualitative data while secondary data from service statistics and past surveys were the quantitative data utilized. These were supplemented with actual field observations to enrich the understanding of existing conditions and validate both quantitative and qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Historically, the interactions between Iloilo City and Guimaras were documented by journals and books as early as the 18th century. Guimaras Island was identified as a potential source of potable water for the city (Philippine Journal of Science, 1915) and serves as a recreational area and conducive retreat for Iloilo residents (Dauncey, 1906). Travel between the two areas is through sea transport using the traditional sailboat called the Parao.

Approximately 18,000 passengers pass through the 4 seaports on a daily basis with workers comprising the highest percentage at 38% followed by students at 23%. Considering that two groups constitute 61% indicate that the dominant rural-urban interactions are related to employment and education. It is notable that senior citizens account for a significant 4% and as revealed in the KII is primarily due to the dependence of Guimaras' elderly population on health services in Iloilo (Figure 3).

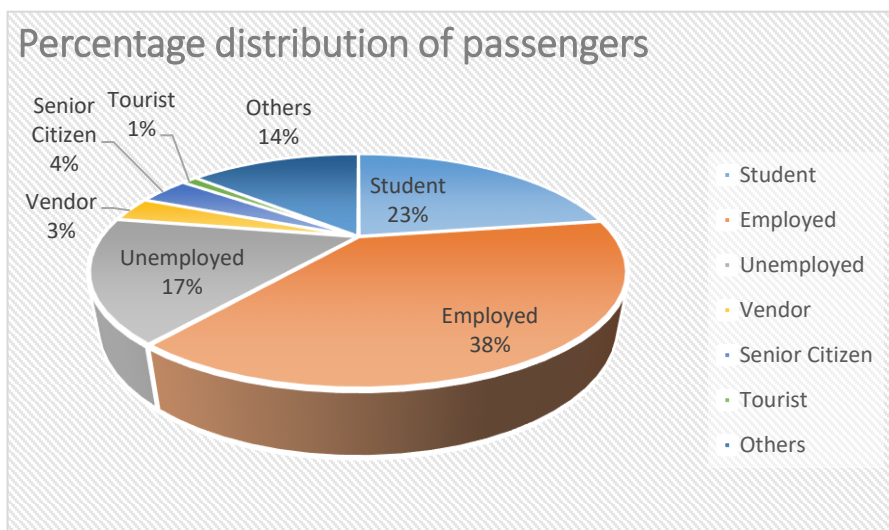


Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of Passengers per Classification

Guimaras supplies agricultural and fishery products to Iloilo City and one significant product is native chicken wherein approximately 99.5% of the production being shipped to Iloilo City and only 0.5% sold in Guimaras. Data showed that native chickens are regularly supplied to Iloilo restaurants and hotels with a weekly average of 7,600 heads per week during regular months and increases to 8,500 heads per week during peak months. It was also found out that 40% of the chickens shipped are supplied to popular restaurants in the city. Fishery products are regularly shipped to Iloilo primarily to the fishing port which serves as the ready market for milkfish. An estimated volume of 20 tons are shipped quarterly by three

major producers in Guimaras. The information on prevailing prices are through informal channels by traders as there is no established formal structure for information on trading, selling or buying. High quality fish and crustaceans are also regularly supplied mostly to restaurants in the city.

Data on cargoes transported showed results consistent with the Rural-Urban Interaction Model that a symbiotic relationship exists on the exchange of goods and services (Umali 1987). The inbound cargoes consist primarily of consumer goods and farm inputs such as fertilizer and feeds which are regularly transported to Guimaras. Construction materials are also regularly shipped.

The previous political leaders of both areas recognized the need for a cooperation to achieve common objectives and became the champions that paved the way for the creation of the MIGEDC. However, while the council was able to chart the development direction, the implementation was hampered when the city's change in leadership resulted in different priorities. The lack of consultative and participatory process was evident resulting in decisions that are contrary to the objectives of the alliance. This was exemplified in the JVA with its disadvantageous provisions. This resulted in dissatisfaction on the part of Guimaras officials who felt that they are not treated as partners on equal footing.

At the onset, an external stimulus through a foreign-funded project propelled the MIGEDC to move forward but after said stimulus ceased the alliance entered into a state of inactivity and initiatives were not sustained.

There are existing laws or policies with potentials of facilitating or hindering the development of rural-urban interactions. These primarily affect agriculture and fishery productivity (AFMA or R.A. 8435), mandates of the Philippine Ports Authority that do not cover small boats and the resolution of Iloilo City that paved the way for the JVA with a private entity.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is Interdependence between Iloilo City and Guimaras and the two areas need each other. Despite the issues and challenges, prospects abound and if proper interventions are implemented, social and economic benefits arising from tourism, agriculture and fisheries can be achieved.

The MIGEDC was potentially a good mechanism that started well but was not sustained owing to leadership

factors. The JVA of the city government with the private entity was a manifestation of non-observance of the alliance's principle of inclusive growth.

Policy gaps at the national level constrain development of rural sea transport which is a major factor in the interaction.

The MIGEDC is worth saving and it is recommended that it should be revived. However, an external and independent evaluation should first be

undertaken to determine what went wrong. It should be anchored on clearer policies with consultative and participatory processes as essential principles to be adhered to. It would be worthwhile to consider other models of alliances that worked and good practices adopted.

Consequently, the JVA should be reviewed and appropriate actions taken to rectify the shortcomings.

Improvement of the sea transport system should be vigorously pursued with private sector participation.

National and local government policies should be reviewed with an urban-rural lens taking into consideration that it is not dichotomous but exists in a continuum and hence, interventions should be responsive and appropriate.

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