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UP Systemwide Network on
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in cooperation with the

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ARCHIPELAGIC STUDIES CHARTING NEW WATERS

Jay L. Batongbacal, Editor

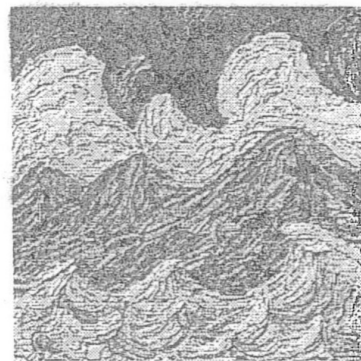
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Defining Archipelagic Studies

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At the Agenda-Setting Workshop for Archipelagic Studies and Ocean Policy Program held last March 18, 1998, Chancellor Arsenio Camacho of UP Visayas emphasized the importance of first defining the term “archipelagic studies.” This was a necessary initial step for the University to be able to forge a coherent academic program out of the concept originally proposed by Dean Merlin Magallona of the College of Law. Indeed, up until the workshop actually took place, the participants had not come to a consensus on any concrete definition of the term “archipelagic studies.” But all recognized that the archipelagic character of the country presented unique challenges for the various academic fields, challenges that have largely been ignored under the weight of decades of biases brought about by training in disciplines developed and dominated by Western continental countries.

However, to view the archipelagic character of the country as merely a means of devising interesting problems does not contribute to the objective of engaging in so-called Archipelagic Studies, as such an exercise would be applicable to practically all fields of study. Indeed, to proceed on the assumption that Archipelagic Studies is merely the application of conventional theory and practice to a specific situation is to put a new name to old ways and does not address precisely the limitations of existing thought.

THE NEED FOR DEFINITION

For the University, a more precise definition would serve at least three purposes. All of them are vital to ensuring that whatever contributions the University hopes to make will have definite impact on the nation.

First, it would help differentiate between general or “traditional” research, i.e., activities that are the logical products of applying exist-

ing theories and methodologies, and “archipelagic” research, those which do not merely apply convention but actually seek to innovate and create new ones based on the unique nature of an archipelago. The latter would result in specific directions and set clear goals for research and training projects or sub-programs. The different streams of inquiry in each field would then be directed to and processed for the presentation of common solutions to specific problems to be framed by the proposed program. The survey of activities of the various academic units, done during the first two meetings at the inception of this proposed program, showed that most academic units have engaged in exercises whose objectives were set individually by the units without reference to Archipelagic Studies. However, they could be justified as being covered by the proposed program by implication. But rather than indicating a conscious university effort, this only highlighted the fact that many academic units were approaching the problems of the archipelago from their own individual perspectives, each striving to frame questions and give answers in terms of its own disciplines. Without a broader unifying framework, the results of their studies tend to remain within their own particular fields. They fail to make the important cross-over to other disciplines that is essential to resolving the multifaceted problems presented by a complex archipelagic setting. A clearly defined concept of Archipelagic Studies would integrate these disciplines and research initiatives and meld them together as one systematic approach.

The second purpose served by a clear definition is to limit the scope of inquiries and give a more precise focus to the program as a whole. This is vital to allocating resources to the many projects and sub-programs that need to be implemented. The University is expected to provide a multitude of services to the nation as well pioneer in academic fields. Again, the scope of activities that the academic units are already engaged in and have indicated as encompassed by a fuzzy notion of Archipelagic Studies indicates that either there is no need to allot additional or special resources for a new archipelagic studies program, or the range of possible activities under such a program would need enormous resources that are almost as extensive as the whole University itself. Redundancy and inefficiency in the allocation of limited resources can only hinder future development of the proposed program and bring into question its very existence.

Finally, a definition of Archipelagic Studies becomes the basis for deciding and choosing between possibly conflicting courses of action that may be posited as solutions to the problems that are the subject of research. Any approach involving multiple disciplines is likely to gen-

erate numerous opinions, techniques, or recommended courses of action, not all of which will be consistent or complementary and are just as likely to be in direct conflict with each other. A definition will enable the program to settle such conflicts according to certain acceptable principles, and to a large extent reveal the priorities in each situation, problem, or proposed solution if the research uncovers a variety of discordant options. This function also allows the program to assemble and advocate a consistent and coherent program of action that forms the basis of recommended policies or management systems, which are the prime derivatives of the proposed program.

The need for a more precise definition therefore becomes clear: unless limits or guidelines are drawn over what comprises Archipelagic Studies, the University is faced with the prospect of everyone claiming to be working on a related work or project. The program will then find itself devoting resources to a widely dispersed and incoherent mass of activities that may not subscribe to a unified framework nor contribute to advancing the field.

The preparatory meetings, the papers presented at the Agenda-Setting Workshop, and more subsequent meetings contain the threads with which a definition of Archipelagic Studies may be weaved. From a tapestry of individual presentations, certain common premises, principles, and areas of focus may emerge and these may be encapsulated in a working definition that can be the basis for an innovative and ground-breaking Program.

BASIC PREMISES

1. Archipelagic Studies revolves around the study of the distinct characteristics of an archipelagic environment, the special interactions between its terrestrial and marine components, and their impact on the society dependent upon them.

1.1. Archipelagic environmental systems are distinct from continental environmental systems.

The field of environmental science has developed largely in consideration of continental landmasses with their own special environmental characteristics. While there have been studies of individual island ecosystems, such studies have tended to consider islands only as microcosms representative of larger continents. But hardly any research has been done on the interactions of islands in an archipelagic environment. In an archipelago, where both the terrestrial and marine components are considered as one unit, the land and the water have

their own unique interactions that are even more complex than the already intricate relationships on continental landmasses.

Perhaps the difference in complexity can be demonstrated by considering the coastal zone. With the use of coastal resources now approaching crisis proportions, and the impetus to apply integrated coastal zone management as among the strategies for Sustainable Development, the ideals of coastal zone management are currently being sought to be applied to the archipelago. Although there has not been a satisfactory and consensual definition of what comprises the coastal zone, management techniques tend to concentrate on a broad but more or less general relationship between the land and the water in the specific areas where they are adjacent to each other. However, the conceptual framework developed for coastal zone management may be applicable only for the coastal zone on a continental landmass. The influential factors, interactions, and impacts between the component elements of a continental coastal zone may be geographically located within that narrow adjacent band; this is not the case in an archipelagic environment comprised of many scattered and widely varied landmasses dotting a wide stretch of ocean. Considering that each island/water unit within its own confined space can have as complicated and broad a range of interactions as a continental coastal zone and each island/water unit can have its own unique environmental subsystem, the complexity and difficulty of managing the coastal zone in an archipelagic system is multiplied several-fold. From an environmental standpoint alone, the diversity of possible interactions within an archipelagic setting presents a greater challenge to environmental researchers, managers, and policy-makers. And this can be made even more complex by the addition of other factors such as political, economic, social, and cultural elements.

1.2. Archipelagic interactions are greatly influenced by the dynamic nature of the marine environment, which acts as the link and medium of interaction for the different elements of the archipelago.

It cannot be denied that in an archipelagic environment, the marine environment greatly influences the multitudinous exchanges with the various ecosystems for the simple reason that the marine environment is much more dynamic and fluid, its components much more mobile and sensitive to change, and its response to alterations much more rapid than the land. In the case of the Philippines, the total area of the water is even greater than the land. Further, the marine environment has an ally. By directly affecting the atmosphere surrounding the

land, the ocean's influence can extend completely inland and not merely be confined to the coast. And finally, it is the water which binds the islands of the archipelago together, acting as both the link and the medium through which the different elements of the archipelago interact.

1.3. An archipelagic setting presents unique opportunities and problems for societal and national development.

Philippine society is scattered among the many islands and the population congregates mostly within or near coastal areas. On account of its archipelagic geography, there is a very high degree of diversity of peoples, cultures, resources, and environments. The interceding waters are natural barriers to national interactions in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. They also hinder the unified and centralized delivery of goods and services expected from any national government. But at the same time, the waters are natural bridges to a variety of adverse environmental impacts of the activities occurring within the islands, such as pollution and environmental degradation. In the case of common uses such as fishing, transportation, and waste disposal, interisland waters become logical arenas for conflict and competition that result in discord among the inhabitants.

The challenge of maintaining Philippine society as a single socio-political unit, a task accomplished through the functions of government, is therefore cast in a new light, which may not have been taken into account in the formulation, formalization, and implementation of the institutional and governance arrangements that are now in place. For decades, the Philippines has often teetered on the edge of internal conflict, whether as low-level as ethnolinguistically-based rivalries or as high-profile as outright rebellion. These conflicts arise from the wide differences among the diverse socio-political or cultural groups and are exacerbated by the disparate environments in which they are located. Thus it can be seen that not only does an archipelagic setting create complexity in the environment, it also creates a much greater intricacy in the interactions needed to keep society together and moving toward a common goal.

2. Archipelagic Studies requires innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to the analysis and resolution of complex issues and problems in an archipelagic setting.

Marine or ocean studies around the world have generally proven that the land-based and sectorally-focused theories, philosophies, and frameworks used for national management and social development are

not always compatible with the issues, problems, and situations found in the coastal and marine areas. Examples of this are: environmental management policies are formulated chiefly for the land environment, neglecting our vast seas; public works planning and implementation rely on models developed for entirely different continental environments that do not experience the relatively wild fluctuations present in a tropical archipelago; the national government structure, patterned after Western models built for unified continental landmasses, is hampered by geographic obstacles to transportation and communication; national development planning methodologies presume a unified level of control over economic activities that simply do not exist over the many disparate islands; and, the political systems transplanted from Western societies simply do not account for the political diversity and very high potential for political fragmentation in the country. There are many other issues and problems that may be traceable to archipelagic barriers and/or factors.

In the marine environment, a sectoral or unidisciplinary approach to the complex problems created by an archipelagic environment will likely be insufficient and probably have multiple externalities that only present even more difficulties later on. Decision-making based only on consideration of specific sectors, exclusively of the impact on or of other sectors, has long been recognized as a source of problems in marine management. An archipelagic research effort will, therefore, require an open-minded and interdisciplinary approach to issues. It can not be subject to the constraints of any one field, but should be capable of taking multiple viewpoints and analyzing more than one facet of a given problem. Thus environmental issues are not solvable merely by legislating standards for activities, but can be supplemented by systems of social interventions or economic incentives. Solutions arrived at through a scientific determination of simple cause-and-effect relationships need not be the only approach to problem-solving; analysis of the purposes and human motives behind the cause, and thus requiring remedies beyond the scope of scientific and/or technological adjustments, is also necessary in a closely interactive human and natural environment.

3. Archipelagic Studies seeks to contribute to the proper management of the archipelago at both national and international levels.

As originally conceived, Archipelagic Studies was intended to provide inputs for the purpose of policy-making. The premise is that the archipelagic geography is very influential on how society uses the resources and opportunities it offers. This, in turn, necessitates the cre-

ation of governance and management structures that are relevant to the goals and objectives to be achieved, be they political, social, or economic.

The governance of the archipelago may be considered on two levels, the national and the international. On the national level, a proper balance among domestically-applicable policies that will assist in the marshalling of resources toward predetermined national objectives is sought. On the international level, the balancing of national policy and interests with those of other nations, and the pursuit of national objectives within a broader international framework, is the general goal. In both cases, policies are the tools through which the ideal of proper management is to be realized. They should encourage cooperation between the inhabitants of the archipelago and the non-inhabitants whose activities nevertheless have an impact on it.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

1. Archipelagic Studies strives to promote a better understanding of the archipelagic environment by a broader range of people.

For Archipelagic Studies to accomplish its task of contributing to proper management, it has three basic functions: (a) research, (b) information dissemination, and (c) policy-formulation. Research and information dissemination are essential for making informed decisions, which are in turn the building blocks of sound and effective policies. The function of disseminating information to a broader range of people is vital to the reorientation of Filipino perspectives towards a greater sensitivity to the archipelagic nature of the country.

This is not to say that the general concern for the environment is inexistent. However, environmental issues are currently framed either very broadly on a global scale (such as global warming, ozone depletion), or very narrowly based on the resource (for example, logging, coral habitat destruction, fishery collapse). While these are valid topics of discussion from an advocacy standpoint, a comprehensive framework of information and advocacy that weaves these concerns together is needed. There must be a frame of reference that considers these environmental issues as parts of a bigger national picture to be viewed in the light of a defined perspective, i.e., an "archipelagic" perspective. This archipelagic perspective ought then to be adopted by a broad constituency whose support for and cooperation in the implementation of programs, plans, recommendations, or policies are prerequisites for success.

2. Archipelagic Studies is inherently in favor of Sustainable Development and thus places priority on the understanding and conservation of the archipelagic environment.

In recognizing the complexity of the archipelagic environment, the limited space and resources available, and the need for society to grow, expand, and progress in order to perpetuate itself, Archipelagic Studies considers Sustainable Development essential for survival. If the viability of archipelagic resources is not assured, they will not be able to sustain the society that depends on them. The understanding, conservation, and preservation of the archipelagic environment for present and future generations is a central concern. In addition, the sensitivity of the complex archipelagic environment to change emphasizes the primacy of precautionary approaches to development in order that the future is not jeopardized.

3. Archipelagic Studies seeks to promote the empowerment of local structures of governance.

The dispersion of Philippine society throughout the various islands means the existence of natural obstacles to transportation and communication. This points to the need for a greatly decentralized and democratized system of government. Highly autonomous local governance is the more appropriate system for the widely diverse social and physical environments that exist in the various islands of the archipelago. It is unrealistic to expect that this diversity can be managed by a single centralized governance structure.

Political autonomy and empowerment of the people through an autonomous and participative system of local government is the key to ensuring meaningful citizens' participation in national development. Archipelagic Studies, therefore, emphasizes a search for a truly decentralized national system of government and public administration. Local governments should be able to exercise full autonomy in the management of their respective local jurisdictions, while the national government retains a largely coordinative and supportive role. From planning to implementation, the local government systems are given a bigger role in policy- and decision-making.

4. Archipelagic Studies advocates closer coordination and integration of policies and programs at both national and international levels.

On a national level, the advocacy of decentralized governance is complemented by the encouragement of closer coordination, coop-

eration, and integration of management policies and programs vertically between subordinate and superior government units, and horizontally between adjacent government units of equivalent powers and jurisdictions. Political divisions and boundaries are commonly not well-attuned to the integrated ecosystemic approaches to problem-solving that are likely to result from the application of an interdisciplinary approach with an archipelagic perspective. Nature and necessity will likely demand management that crosses jurisdictions, integrates the management of resources on the basis of islands and ecosystems, as well as looks into several hierarchical levels of integration, coordination, and autonomy. Thus, Archipelagic Studies must be ready to propose solutions that go beyond the artificial limitations imposed by the political system.

On an international level, Archipelagic Studies likewise accepts the need for cooperation and advocates peaceful actions to resolve common problems and achieve common goals. Though the dimensions of this aspect of management are quite different from those entirely located within archipelagic boundaries, the basic approach remains valid and regards political boundaries as not insurmountable.

5. Archipelagic Studies strives to develop practical approaches and solutions to pressing issues and problems that can be implemented with available human and material resources.

Despite the lofty goals that may be set in the name of Archipelagic Studies, approaches and recommendations must be formulated and implemented in the context of a developing nation with inherent limitations. This means that the pressure on scarce resources is already quite high and is exacerbated by the priority given to rapid development and to achieve the status of a Newly Industrialized Country. Therefore, wherever possible, Archipelagic Studies must strive to develop practical and low-cost approaches and solutions that can be efficiently implemented with minimal local human and material resources.

Not all problems necessarily call for the capital-intensive “technological fix” that First World Countries commonly apply to their environmental problems (though Archipelagic Studies recognizes the utility of the latest technological developments). Given that the nation has many competing resource needs, Archipelagic Studies must propose solutions that can achieve the most impact with the least strain on these resources. This means a greater emphasis on preventive and anticipative measures that encourage local innovation, invention, and technologies.

This philosophy of “greatest impact with least effort” applies to the University as well. Instead of creating new institutions or channeling resources to new entities, Archipelagic Studies advocates the strengthening of existing institutions, building upon available expertise and resources, providing support where necessary, as a means of more quickly and efficiently responding to the needs of approved projects and programs.

6. Archipelagic Studies recognizes the diversity presented by an archipelagic setting and attempts to sustain and build on such diversity as the key to preserving the integrity of the archipelago.

In the Philippine archipelagic setting, there are several different levels of diversity: environmental, cultural, social, etc., all of which must contribute to political and economic unity. Rather than taking an assimilative attitude as in previous systems of government, Archipelagic Studies recognizes the richness of this diversity and looks into how it can be used to enhance the maintenance and existence of the archipelago. It strives to create synergy out of the component geography, peoples, resources, and environments produced by an archipelagic setting. It seeks to make use of archipelagic characteristics as strengths rather than as weaknesses. It attempts to unify the diverse and disparate elements of the nation through a recognition of their mutually-reinforcing interactions. It tries to resolve conflicts in a manner that provides the most benefits to the most people.

7. Archipelagic Studies recognizes the need to better protect and enhance the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the archipelago within its terrestrial, fluvial, and aerial domains, while promoting good relations, amity, and cooperation with all other nations.

While Archipelagic Studies conducts its search for appropriate policies and governance mechanisms, it cannot ignore the fact that nature and history place the country at the crossroads of international interests, as well as in competition with its regional neighbors. These have manifested themselves in the challenges to the country’s assertions of sovereignty and jurisdiction such as the continuing problems over the South China Sea, issues with the provisions of the Law of the Sea, the operation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, among others. Recommendations for policies and national governance mechanisms must consider these aspects with the objective of ensuring the best protection of Philippine interests. Rather than seeking isolationist solutions, Archipelagic Studies should strive to encourage international respect, recognition, and cooperation.

PROGRAM CRITERIA

The following elements must be present in projects or programs under Archipelagic Studies in the near-term:

1. The research activity focuses on interactions within the archipelagic environment, and aims to make the information generated available and useful to a much wider range of disciplines.

Research proposals which seek to provide information previously unavailable but have a wide range of applications are to be considered as strategic projects with multiple and long-term uses. Since the proposed program for Archipelagic Studies is at its initial stage and can be expected to cover a wide range of research activities in the future, the acquisition of data that can be useful to many disciplines and researches should be given priority. Research initiatives which take data gathered from previous works may also be the basis for Archipelagic Studies if the new research proposals take the data to a new and much more inter-disciplinary level of inquiry.

2. The research activity allows various disciplines and academic units of the UP System to be linked together and reinforce each other's strengths and resources.

An interdisciplinary approach is vital to Archipelagic Studies. As a University-wide program, it must promote closer ties and joint activities among the academic units and campuses of the UP System. Researches that allow different disciplines to interact and learn from each other help promote true interdisciplinarity. Experiences in joint problem-solving can expand the capabilities of those people previously experienced only in their individual disciplines. Joint activities can also encourage the efficient and productive use of UP System resources.

3. The research activity contributes to the promotion of understanding of the archipelagic environment and its impact on Philippine society.

The research activity must contribute to the understanding of the archipelagic environment and its importance to and impact on our nation. It must help create a consciousness and sensitivity to the archipelagic nature of our country and how it affects us as a people so we may see the value of protecting and preserving it.

4. *The research activity will produce concrete policy recommendations and definite plans of action, or make a significant contributions to the formulation of a policy with respect to the subject of study.*

Given that Archipelagic Studies is intended to contribute to proper management by influencing policy, then research activities must strive for concrete contribution. Its output should either be concrete policy recommendations or information that is essential to a pending policy formulation exercise.

CONCLUSION

To encapsulate this bold new perspective, it may be said that, for the University of the Philippines, *Archipelagic Studies is an interdisciplinary inquiry (or inquiries) that encompasses the unity of the structures and processes unique to the Philippine archipelagic environment, the corresponding impact of such structures and processes upon Philippine society, their implications for future management in the political, social, cultural, economic, and environmental spheres, and the promotion of an archipelagic consciousness among the Filipino people.* Though the University has yet to precisely define the complete purview and methodology of this new perspective, it has already sown the seeds for future development. The creation of an Archipelagic Studies Network from this series of meetings and the workshop has already produced this collection of thoughts that can influence the scope and focus of the University's academic endeavors for years to come. Given time, it is possible that these modest efforts will develop into full-blown and wide-ranging projects and programs that shall revitalize the University's pioneering role in the academe.

In establishing an Archipelagic Studies Program, the University poses a common challenge to almost all the major academic fields, made all the more difficult by the subtlety of the basis for its existence. It takes a long- and commonly-known idea—the archipelago—and uses it to question the very assumptions of academic disciplines and perspectives that the University itself has nurtured. The idea of archipelagic unity is no longer merely an abstract political concept, but an actual basis for analysis and inquiry into the challenges posed by contemporary developments in law, the environment, the economy, and society. The University pushes the limits of the archipelagic concept beyond mere semantics and opens new doors to the country's future.

