

**Column for Manila Bulletin**  
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## **Of Trees and Forest**

### **The Philippines as Design Capital**

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines, as a developing country, lacks the technological advances, the financial resources, and the industrial capacity of major economies in producing many of the devices, gadgets and machinery that are sold in the global markets.

But we have inherent resource or advantage that we can cultivate, develop, and promote to catapult us into a leading position in the world.

I'm referring to the creativity of the Filipino. The Philippines is a rich breeding ground of creative talents. Creativity is a unique gift of every Filipino. It is our asset, our national pride.

In music and the stage, the world already knows Lea Salonga, apl. de. ap, and Charice Pempengco. Hollywood is home to some stars with Filipino blood. But they are the exceptions rather than the rule.

We have the advantage of being creative, artistic, but we do not enjoy its benefits from an economic point of view. Many of our painters, for example, live in poverty, and many designers still yearn for recognition.

The business process outsourcing industry provided opportunities for Filipino artists, who now create cartoons for animation projects abroad.

Our problem is not the lack of artistic talents, but the absence of coordination, which would help us gain recognition as an international design capital, like what Italy has been enjoying for so long ago.

Due to this absence of coordination on the national level, which would have provided direction and support to the development of a Philippine design industry, the Philippines has been trailing its neighbors despite the abundance of creative talents.

Filipino artists and designers are being pirated by other countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. This puts a strain on our creative manpower, thereby weakening our competitive edge in the global market.

I have filed Senate Bill 3071, the Philippine Design Competitiveness Act. And I am pushing for approval of the bill that will uplift the state of our Philippine design industry by establishing a design-led economy where we may generate jobs and livelihood for our people, maintain our competitive edge in the global market, and echo our collective pride in our culture and heritage.

Design as a tool to accelerate economic development and social progress is a concept pioneered by the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Finland. In Asia, it has been embraced by Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, and South Korea. We cannot stand idle for another minute while these countries have pushed their national design efforts into high gear.

The bill will create an environment that will allow the various sectors of the design industry to increase productivity, enhance visibility in the global market, boost competitiveness, and improve the level of innovation of our creative people.

Among the features of the bill are:

The Product Development and Design Center of the Philippines will be renamed the Design Center of Philippines to renew the commitment not only to promote and develop the local design industry, but also to create that awareness in people that design fosters innovation and sustainability, and strengthens local businesses and society.

Institutionalization of intellectual property protection in the field of design for Filipino creative designers and manufacturers.

A comprehensive and strong implementation of IP protection is one of the factors considered by both local and foreign investors in establishing start-up companies that could increase the level of innovation in the country.

The promotion of design education at all levels throughout the country to instill the importance and appreciation of Filipino culture in design. Design education is envisioned to infuse the values of discipline, productivity and innovation among the youth, industry leaders, design practitioners and professionals and the academe.

Except for a few products, it may take us a long time for us to gain recognition for the “Made in the Philippines” label.

On the other hand, I believe we have a much better chance to gain international recognition within a short period of time for the label “Designed in the Philippines.”

Let’s all support the enactment of Senate Bill 3071. This is for our creative talents, our artists, as well as for our economy.

(Please send comments to [mbv\\_secretariat@yahoo.com](mailto:mbv_secretariat@yahoo.com))

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