

## Brand Philippines

By Jeannie Javelosa



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I'm singing: "There's a light at the end of the tunnel... Alleluia!" I have a personal advocacy for all the things I write about in this article, and I know I am not alone. Finally, government is beginning to hear the cries of many of us who have been pushing for a number of things: The Creative Industries (dead for the past decade after its first attempt at mapping the Creative Industries); The Design Center of the Philippines (having lost its luster, purpose, vision and voice after Arturo Luz left it in the mid-'80s; somewhere along the way, Congress renamed it Product Development and Design Center Philippines with the acronym of PDDCP) and Country Branding (something so badly needed to help boost the image of the country and focus the country's initiatives abroad under a united front). The private sector, while pushing all these initiatives, needs to work with government's agencies and structures like Councils that can be more strategic for planning and promotions. The Creative Industries and the Design Center fall under the preview of the Department of Trade and Industry and various line agencies like CITEM, PDDCP, BOI, Trade Promotions, etc. Now P-Noy's government is trying its best to bring out the best and higher values of our country, race and people...finally, finally, there are steps being taken.

First, the Creative Industries. It's been glaringly obvious that "creativity" is a unique part of the DNA of the Filipinos and our competitive edge. Our designers, performers, artists, scientists, animators have brought pride to the country in the global arena, receiving accolades for their work. Today, there are 30,000 Filipino designers in China alone! A Filipino designer wrote out the Strategic Design Plan for Indonesia (can you believe this?!). Our creative people are the innovative minds behind industries such as furniture, performing arts, animation, IT, fashion to name a few. Almost a decade back, I was part of a conference that met to try to bring together the DTI with the NCCA (National Commission for Culture and the Arts) where strong representation was made by the Cultural Center of the Philippines on behalf of culture and the arts. An attempt to map the creative industries was undertaken but never really finished. Nothing concrete was done for the creative industries during the past two administrations. I recently was given a copy of Senate Bill 1064 introduced by Sen. Manny Villar, with recommendation for the immediate passage of the bill.

The Creative Industries Act argues for the establishment of the Creative Industries Development Council "that shall provide an environment conducive to the enhancement and stimulation of creativity and innovative endeavors." The Bill also seeks to map the creative industries in the various localities, have these industries registered and mandate the local government units to actively promote these creative industries with the assistance of the DTI. Areas covered include Advertising (print and mass media), Printing and Literature, Music and the Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Crafts Design and Architecture, Audiovisual and News Media, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Activities.

Second, Design Center Council. The move of Sen. TG Guingona in sponsoring the Senate Bill 2930 or "An Act Creation of the Design Council of the Philippines seeks to harness the huge potential of world-class Filipino talents and utilize them for the country's economic growth and socio-cultural development" — is so welcome! The bill states: "Design is the process of taking creative ideas that are borne out of limited available resources, and transforming them into tangible, high-value products, services and even social systems — and this is what the world has always called innovation." Design as a national strategy can help boost economic growth and countries like the United Kingdom, Denmark and Finland have been at the forefront of this. Closer to home, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong are neck to neck in pushing design innovation. This proposed Design Center Council will help create and oversee the promotion and design development roadmap for the country, highlighting Design in the fields of Education, Visual Communications, Information, New Media and Technology, Fashion and Environment (Green Design!).

The direction towards a Design Center Council is a sub-requirement under the Creative Industries. This will allow both private and government representation in formulating a real Design direction for country. Personal frustrations through the years have only made us in private sector do what we can. At the Yuchengco Museum where I am the Curator, we have created more design-led exhibitions under our theme "Art as Design, Design as Art"; and through ECHOstore Sustainable Lifestyle, informally we have been running ECHOdesign Lab focused on design as a driver for development and helping communities who badly needed design, product development interventions and markets. Just recently, we finally set up the ECHOSI (ECHO Sustainable Initiatives) Foundation to try to organize these design clinics and workshops only because there was no partnership with government that we could find or forge.

Third, Branding the Philippines. Bacolod Rep. Anthony Rolando Golez has filed House Resolution Number 1498 calling for the House to encourage P-Noy to adopt "You'll Love it Here, Mabuhay Philippines as a Country Brand" upon the prodding of the Management Council of the Philippines (MAP). It's so broad and generic a brand slogan that everyone can find a way to attach anything positive about the Filipino and the country on this brand. Now, this is a mere resolution that shall need the buy in of all congressmen. It is not a law and merely expresses the sentiment of Congress if adopted as a whole. This will

hopefully get transmitted to the President. It has no effect and force of law. It merely expresses the sense of one House or Chamber on matters that usually are of national interest. The end goal I so want to see, as I continue to be a part of a whole advocacy for, is the creation of a Branding the Philippines Council.

The screaming need for a country brand stems from the fact that we have no singular, powerful identity as a nation and as a people and this is due to many factors such as geographical segmentation, colonization, cultural diversity and Filipino diaspora. We need to clearly define this brand as it affects how Philippine products and services are valued in the global market.

Everybody knows that the kind of image a person, in this case, a country's projections to the world is beneficial to everything associated with the country (i.e trade, tourism, professionals, foreign diplomacy, culture). It likewise helps encourage investments and strengthens performance of country's exports and helps builds reputation of Filipino professionals.

I say: We really won't get branding our country right if we only talk about our great beaches, our shopping malls and our structural development. Going to market to position a product or a brand means bringing with it that unique quality that would make it stand out from all others. In the global market, this uniqueness is our CULTURE and our PEOPLE. And we need to redefine culture as everything we are about: how we think, our values, how we eat, do business, celebrate, our heritage, history, our land. Culture is encompassing. Culture is NOT just the arts as it is often understood. CULTURE is our DNA, that "kalooban" deep inside us that our cultural experts and scholars have called our "mutya" — that sense of spirit, soul and character that make us unique. It can be seen in the pop culture of our young generation, the stylized fashion of nationalistic logos that adorn our bags and T-shirts, the cuisine colored by our regional pride, our OFWs longing for home, it's the way we pucker our lips or dance our street dances, our processions and the way we put our costumes together. It is the lamentations of the dying intangible cultures of our indigenous peoples, the pride in our businessmen's visions, the rally cry of our people for peaceful changes and transformation, the volunteerism and NGO spirit of care and nurturing we have. The way we live life, celebrate, worship, shop, eat, cook, do business, govern in this Philippine islands through time and history... This is what our DNA is about. At the heart of this all is the FILIPINO. And thus, our country brand must center on our PEOPLE.

The Branding the Philippines Council can develop a National Road Map or National Branding Platform. This requires an integration framework that takes the country brand as the ultimate criterion for any policy decisions pertaining to the people, culture, inward investments and recruitment, foreign and domestic policy, export brands and tourism promotion. It should be institutionalized with a commitment from the private sector and large segments of society.

This national branding group should also be mandated and empowered to ensure that the National Branding Platform of the Philippines will be sustained on a long-term basis and will not change solely on the basis of shifts in the country's political landscape.

Now we must consolidate both initiatives of the House of Representatives and the Senate for these to be written into Bills and passed. We need such legislation to structure the great intangibles of our people (creativity, innovation, design, culture, the arts) within government aligned with private sector initiatives. The direction is two-fold: When government and private sector initiatives come together, they can create policies and have the funds to move the strategy forward. And from below, we the people need to claim our DNA, shout it out with joy, unite in its message, re-look and restudy our cultural roots and values, express the best of who we are... then we would be on the right track for our country brand to emerge strong and whole.

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