

Spain struggles to save historic buildings from ruin and botched ‘vigilante repairs’

CASTRONUÑO, Spain — The Romanesque church that sits above the river in the village of Castronuño used to look like many others that dot the land: not too decrepit for a 750-year-old, but not particularly well-kept, either.

Then in November, Mayor Enrique Seoane noticed something that gave him a shock and caused a scandal in Spain.

In a photo taken by one of his neighbors, Seoane spied a seam of very modern cement that someone had poured into a decidedly ancient archway. It was an apparent homemade repair job to keep the church's eastern flank from falling in.

The work was done by an unknown “masked restorer,” the mayor told a local journalist in a story that soon spread across Spain.

While this might conjure visions of a superhero secretly coming to the aid of an aging church, that is not how the mayor's words played in Spain. Instead, they stirred up bad memories in a country whose small towns and villages had been scarred before by the eyesores these sorts of vigilante repair efforts leave behind.

The figure of do-gooder gone bad was epitomized in Spain by Cecilia Giménez, a grandmother then in her 80s, who made headlines around the world after her botched restoration of a century-old fresco of Jesus crowned with thorns called “*Ecce Homo*.” The result was so bungled, authorities at first thought the painting had been vandalized.

Spain's art and architecture conservators vowed to stop these amateur, and unwanted, restorers.

Yet in Castronuño, in Valladolid province northwest of Madrid, a mysterious someone had struck again, this time at the Church of Santa María del Castillo, built around 1250 by the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem.

It could be said that the problem of Castronuño is the problem of Spain: This ancient land just has too many old things in need of fixing. There are Phoenician forts, Celtic castles, Moorish minarets, Roman ramparts, granite Greek graves — all left by bygone civilizations that came here conquering, all bent on leaving something for posterity.

Even the name of the Spanish heartland, Castille, means something like “land of castles,” since so many were built after 800 years of battles between Christian and Muslim rulers.

As she stood outside Castronuño's damaged church on a recent day, Mar Villarreal, a children's book writer who doubles as the hamlet's part-time tourism promoter, observed that if Spain's blessing was that it had so much history, then its curse was that so much was at risk of being lost for neglect.

Take the old castle, she said, for which the village had been named but that had been razed by Ferdinand II of Aragón in the time of Columbus. Or Castronuño's first church — built even earlier than the one in use today but demolished in 1919 (decades after its roof had fallen in).

More recently, the villagers had been begging the government and the local Roman Catholic Archdiocese to come fix Santa María del Castillo before it suffered a similar fate.

But with no sign that any help was on the way, someone was moved to take matters into their own grossly misguided hands.

“The cement is a scandal; it is ugly, yes,” Villarreal said. “But you want to know the real scandal? It's that those in charge let the church get this way.”

While the mayor's report this fall of a “masked restorer” had set off angry calls for an investigation to find the culprit, information that surfaced later both complicated the whodunit and emphasized just how long these errant interventions had been plaguing the country.

A local resident, looking through an aging book about the churches of the region, noticed an image that showed the same seam of cement over the archway at least as early as 1999, when

the survey had been published. With the crime apparently at least two decades old, it seemed there might be no finding out who did it.

Sitting in his office, Seoane, the mayor, said he regretted if his words had made people think there would be a manhunt for the culprit. But the fact that no one had noticed the cement had been there all those years was telling, too, he said.

And it wasn't just the mishandled cement repair job that was now causing people to do a double take. Who had installed the alarm system that seemed drilled into the ancient stone? Or the bulky electrical conduit that jutted out of one of the ancient windows? It appeared to have been there for years, mostly unnoticed. — © 2022 The New York Times

BPOs seen to drive office space demand

By Keren Concepcion G. Valmonte Reporter

OUTSOURCING FIRMS, e-commerce companies and data centers are expected to fuel demand for office spaces in the Philippines this year.

“The office market is projected to be in full recovery mode by the second half of 2022,” JLL Philippines Vice-Chairman Joey M. Radovan told *BusinessWorld* via e-mail on Dec. 7.

“The IT-BPO (information technology-business process outsourcing) industry will remain resilient and will continue to pave the way for long-term office space demand across the country being driven by the countries attractive labor demographics,” he added.

Santos Knight Frank Occupier Services Senior Director Morgan McGilvray said the office market will see “reliable demand” from the BPO sector.

“Probably not as much demand as was seen in the post-global financial crisis period in 2011 to 2012, but I'd expect more demand in 2022 than we've seen in 2020 or 2021,” Mr. McGilvray said in an e-mail on Dec. 15.

David T. Leechiu, president and chief executive officer at Leechiu Property Consultants (LPC), said in a virtual call on Dec. 15 that firms abroad “cannot wait to enforce these new cost-cutting measures,” which already includes offshoring jobs to the Philippines.

E-COMMERCE

Meanwhile, e-commerce companies and data centers are expected to take up more office space as their operations expand.

“They are a welcome relief because outside of the BPO sector, nobody really is taking large chunks of space,” Mr. Leechiu said.

KMC Savills said 62% of inquiries on spaces for warehousing came from data center providers. Based on the inquiries, companies were looking into renting spacing across Metro Manila and “growth areas in provinces.”

“The rise of digitalization, 5G mobile service, presence of fiber connectivity, and innovation and technology adoption make the country an attractive location for data center investments,” KMC Savills Co-Founder and Managing Partner Michael McCullough said in an e-mail on Dec. 15.

VACANCY

Meanwhile, Mr. McCullough said the office market's rebound will happen at a slow pace with vacancy rates projected to rise to 21%, up from the 19% vacancy rate logged in 2021.

“On the bright side, the rate difference could be lower from the 10% jump in 2020-2021,” he said.

More organizations are also expected to continue implementing a hybrid work model as the pandemic drags on.

Property consultants said this is now a “good time” to get prime office spaces due to the cheaper rental rates.

“They're cheap. For example, Ortigas rents have come down significantly and Ortigas is also home to some of the nicest buildings in the market,” Mr. Leechiu said, adding that this would benefit retail firms that are looking to expand amid the health crisis.

Landlords are offering “better leasing concessions” to entice locators.

“Capital costs remains a barrier if budgets can be approved—that is why some landlords have structured deals where they can offer concession to address this,” JLL Philippines' Mr. Radovan said.

The exit of Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGO) has also contributed to the increased vacancies, which pushed rents lower.

In a report on Dec. 15, Leechiu Property Consultants said rental rates in so-called “POGO hotspots” Bay Area and Quezon City have seen a downturn. Rates in Makati, Bonifacio Global City, and Filinvest City in Alabang, on the other hand, are “holding up” due to the presence of IT-BPM firms and other multinational companies.

Companies are also expected to continue taking up spaces outside Metro Manila, such as in the cities of Cebu and Iloilo.

JLL Philippines' Mr. Radovan said they are “looking North,” where new developments are being built in the Northern Luzon corridor alongside government's infrastructure developments.

SUSTAINABILITY

Property consultants also expect greater demand for properties with sustainability features.

“The increased interest on green buildings is mainly driven by the fact that the spread of COVID-19 may be mitigated through effective ventilation and air filtration in enclosed spaces,” Santos Knight Frank said in an e-mail on Dec. 15.

Sustainable or green features include curtain wall systems with thermal insulation, touchless access in elevators, vertical gardens, UV disinfection lifts, and filtered air circulation systems.

“From 2021 to 2023, about 40% of the new supply will be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) or WELL-certified buildings,” Colliers Philippines said in a Dec. 20 report.

Republic of the Philippines
ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION
Pasig City

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION FOR AUTHORITY TO RETIRE THE BINONDO SUBSTATION LOCATED AT BARANGAY 282, SAN NICOLAS, CITY OF MANILA, METRO MANILA AND TO WITHDRAW FROM SERVICE CERTAIN EQUIPMENT AND MACHINERY INSTALLED IN SAID SUBSTATION, WITH PRAYER FOR PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY

ERC CASE NO. 2021-085 RC

MANILA ELECTRIC COMPANY (MERALCO),
Applicant.

Promulgated:
November 09, 2021

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NOTICE OF VIRTUAL HEARING

TO ALL INTERESTED PARTIES:

Notice is hereby given that on 22 October 2021, Manila Electric Company (MERALCO) filed an *Application* dated 27 September 2021, seeking the Commission's approval for the authority to retire the Binondo Substation located at Barangay 282, San Nicolas, City of Manila and to withdraw from service certain equipment and machinery installed in said substation, with prayer for provisional authority.

The pertinent allegations in the said *Application* are hereunder quoted as follows:

- Applicant is a private corporation duly organized and existing under the laws of the Republic of the Philippines, with principal office located at Lopez Building, Ortigas Avenue, Pasig City. It may be served with notices and other processes of this Honorable Commission through its undersigned counsel at the address indicated herein.
- Applicant has a legislative franchise to construct, operate and maintain an electric power distribution system for the conveyance of electric power to the end-users in the cities and municipalities of Metro Manila, Bulacan, Cavite and Rizal, and certain cities/municipalities/barangays in Batangas, Laguna, Quezon and Pampanga, pursuant to Republic Act No. 9209.
- Applicant is filing the instant application to seek authority to retire the Binondo Substation and withdraw certain equipment and machineries in said substation.
- The instant Application is filed pursuant to the Section 1.7.1 of the Distribution Services and Open Access Rules (DSOAR), as amended.¹

BACKGROUND

- The Binondo Substation is located at Barangay 282, San Nicolas, City of Manila, Metro Manila. The substation has two (2) 12.5 MVA, 34.5 kV – 6.24 kV power transformer banks. The substation is installed on a leased lot.
- The Binondo Substation is one of the older MERALCO odd voltage substations (with voltage other than 34.5 kV) and has been in service for more than fifty-nine (59) years.
- Applicant has programmed the gradual conversion of odd-voltage systems (distribution system with voltages other than 34.5 kV) to the ultimate standardized 20 kV/35.5 kV (line-to-neutral/line to line) distribution voltage system within its franchise area. The voltage standardization will reduce technical system loss, improve flexibility and reliability of electric service by phasing out isolated odd voltage systems and minimize equipment inventory types. Applicant continuously implements the Odd-Voltage Conversion Program with the aim of having standard voltage systems for its entire franchise area.
- Hence, Applicant seeks authority from the Honorable Commission to retire the Binondo Substation and withdraw from service the equipment and machinery installed therein in line with the said program.
- It must be stressed that the retirement of the said substation will have no impact to customers currently being served by the Binondo Substation as the loads of its 6.24 kV circuit may readily be transferred to the 34.5 kV circuits of Tutuban 46VT and North Port 51H. Moreover, the transfer of said loads will eliminate the redundant 34.5 kV – 6.24 kV step-down.
- In addition, an approximate of 255,883 KWHR annually will be reduced from the overall technical system loss upon the retirement of the Binondo substation's power transformer banks and complete conversion of 6.24 kV circuits to 34.5 kV.
- Currently, the various equipment in Binondo Substation forms part of Applicant's Regulatory Asset Base (RAB). Upon its retirement, some of the equipment and machinery will be reused for distribution services, while others will be withdrawn from service. The total amount for equipment and machinery that will be withdrawn from service is Four Million, One Hundred Fifty-One Thousand, Four Hundred Forty-Eight Pesos and Seventy-Seven Centavos (PhP4,151,448.77).
- In further support of the Application, attached hereto are the following documents:
 - Annex “A” – Schematic Diagram showing the exact location of Binondo Substation and pictures thereof;
 - Annex “B” – Detailed List of Equipment and Machinery to be re-used and/or retired in Binondo Substation, with corresponding specifications and values; and

¹ The second paragraph of Section 1.7.1 of the amended DSOAR provides:

“1.7.1 AUTHORIZED EQUIPMENT

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The DU may increase, substitute or withdraw from service its authorized equipment and machinery in accordance with the Rules for Approval of Regulated Entities' Capital Expenditure Projects, RDWR and other ERC Rules. If such undertaking is not covered by the RDWR or other rules, authorization shall be secured from the ERC in accordance with pertinent provision of the Rules for Approval of Regulated Entities' Capital Expenditure Projects.”

c. Annex “C” – Load Flow Simulation/study conducted on the effect of withdrawal from service of said equipment and machinery.

Allegations in Support of the Prayer for Provisional Authority and/or Interim Relief

- The issuance of Provisional Authority and/or Interim Relief is warranted under the circumstances considering that there is no reason to continue energizing the Binondo Substation as the loads thereof may be transferred to adjacent source circuits. More importantly, the conversion of the loads of Binondo Substation to 34.5 kV will result in the reduction of technical system loss and improvement of the electric service by phasing out isolated odd-voltage system.
- In further support of the Application and prayer for issuance of provisional authority, attached as Annex “D” is the Judicial Affidavit of Engr. Roberto D. Isip, Jr., Assistant Vice President and Manager of Applicant's Network Asset Planning Office.

PRAYER

WHEREFORE, it is respectfully prayed to this Honorable Commission that: (1) the Application for Retirement of the Binondo Substation and withdrawal from service of equipment and machinery installed in said substation be APPROVED; and (2) Applicant be ALLOWED to re-use equipment in said substation that will not be retired.

Pending the hearing on the merits of the case, a Provisional Authority be issued to Applicant.

Other relief just and equitable under the premises are likewise prayed for.

The Commission has set the instant *Application* for determination of compliance with the jurisdictional requirements, expository presentation, Pre-trial Conference, and presentation of evidence on the following dates and online platform for the conduct thereof, pursuant to Resolution No. 09, Series of 2020² dated 24 September 2020 and Resolution No. 01, Series of 2021, dated 17 December 2020 (ERC Revised Rules of Practice and Procedure)³:

| Date | Platform | Activity |
|---|------------------------|--|
| 14 January 2022 (Friday) at nine o'clock in the morning (9:00 AM) | Microsoft Teams | Determination of compliance with the jurisdictional requirements and expository presentation |
| 21 January 2022 (Friday) at nine o'clock in the morning (9:00 AM) | Microsoft Teams | Pre-trial Conference and presentation of evidence |

Any interested stakeholder may submit its comments and/or clarifications at least one (1) calendar day prior to the scheduled initial virtual hearing, via electronic mail (e-mail) at doCKET@erc.ph, copy furnish the Legal Service through legal@erc.ph. The Commission shall give priority to the stakeholders who have duly submitted their respective comments and/or clarifications, to discuss the same and propound questions during the course of the expository presentation.

Moreover, any persons who have an interest in the subject matter of the instant case may become a party by filing with the Commission via e-mail at doCKET@erc.ph, copy furnish the Legal Service through legal@erc.ph, a verified Petition to Intervene at least five (5) calendar days prior to the date of the initial virtual hearing and subject to the requirements under Rule 9 of the ERC Revised Rules of Practice and Procedure, indicating therein the docket number and title of the case and stating the following:

- The petitioner's name, mailing address, and e-mail address;
- The nature of petitioner's interest in the subject matter of the proceeding and the way and manner in which such interest is affected by the issues involved in the proceeding; and
- A statement of the relief desired.


Likewise, all other persons who may want their views known to the Commission with respect to the subject matter of the case may file through e-mail at doCKET@erc.ph, copy furnish the Legal Service through legal@erc.ph, their Opposition or Comment thereon at least five (5) calendar days prior to the initial virtual hearing and subject to the requirements under Rule 9 of the ERC Revised Rules of Practice and Procedure. No particular form of Opposition or Comment is required, but the document, letter, or writing should contain the following:


- The name, mailing address, and e-mail address of such person;
- A concise statement of the Opposition or Comment; and
- The grounds relied upon.

Any of the persons mentioned in the preceding paragraphs may access the copy of the *Application* on the Commission's official website at www.erc.gov.ph.

Finally, all interested persons may be allowed to join the scheduled initial virtual hearings by providing the Commission, thru legal.virtualhearings@erc.ph, with their respective e-mail addresses and indicating therein the case number of the instant *Application*. The Commission will send the access link/s to the aforementioned hearing platform within five (5) working days prior to the scheduled hearings.

WITNESS, the Honorable Commissioners **ALEXIS M. LUMBATAN, CATHERINE P. MACEDA, FLORESINDA G. BALDO-DIGAL** and **MARKO ROMEO L. FUENTES**, Energy Regulatory Commission, this 2nd day of November 2021 in Pasig City.


AGNES VST DEVANADERA
Chairperson and CEO

ERC
Office of the Chairperson


LS: MVM/LSP/MCCG

² A Resolution Adopting the Guidelines Governing Electronic Applications, Filings and Virtual Hearings Before the Energy Regulatory Commission.

³ A Resolution Adopting the Revised Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Energy Regulatory Commission.