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**THE CONVERSION OF RURAL LANDS TO URBAN USES ALONG THE LAGUNA  
BAY LITTORALS: A GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE.**

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**Abstract:**

Conversion of land from agricultural to urban uses is an inherent prerogative of landowners, tenants, and those who possess any appropriate rights over a land. This right is guaranteed by applicable laws including the constitution to enable everyone the broad range of amenities that a land can offer to everyone. The burdens, however, in the application of this prerogative on the physical extent, pattern, and distribution of conversion to urban uses vis-à-vis prime agricultural lands preservation is almost an inevitable, much less a systematic process.

This process is patently detrimental to the rural landscape and economy, especially to urban fringes which are often caught off-guard from the excesses of urban growth. Externalities which cause undue pressures on the fringes and the hinterlands have been the demands for building lands. On the basis of this demand, a legislative response emerged through the creation of planning and regulatory agencies mandated to substantially safeguard the total physical environment. The Ministry of the Agriculture and Food, for example, with its crops' zoning, guaranteed prices, grants and extensions have made farmers and owners aware of the importance of lands which are primed for greater agricultural productivity. The Human Settlements Regulatory Commission has formulated and implemented guidelines, standards and planning procedures which are geared towards influencing the shape of both rural and urban landscapes. Forestry agencies have also adopted persuasive and legal means of achieving reforestation objectives by providing advice, grants, and seedlings to private persons, concessionaires, and even mandated every citizen to actively participate in planting trees for a specific period (PD 1153).

All these and other public programs are designed to protect and preserve land resources including changes in land utilization especially for urban uses. Yet, quite a number of lands are still subjected to conversion for urban development. The major contribution of this research is basically addressed to both the regulatory and planning agencies and people in general by providing them with an in-depth perspective of the extent, pattern, and distribution of land changes in areas where protective legislation and planning have been amply focused. In attaining this objective, a research methodology was designed utilizing various techniques like direct data transfer, index mapping, topographic map analysis, projection and decision mapping. The methodology of the study is, therefore, essentially empirical. Adherence to the historical approach further reinforced the descriptive crystallization of results by the use of the techniques cited above, and in showing the significant changes in land use at different time frames.

For purposes of illustrating changes in land utilization through time, three periods were identified 1946, 1977, and 1984 based on the availability of data. In the analysis of the data in the said periods, the extent, pattern, and distribution of land conversions were brought out. Once these features are properly established, the rational basis for rendering decisions on land that would not be prejudicial to its use was identified. The actual identification of the said features were, however, synthesized from the littoral areas of Laguna de Bay as gleaned from the empirical data supplied by various agencies such as NHA, HSRC, BL, BCGS, and MAR.

The study could also provide generalized concepts on how to minimize land conversion with the introduction of a new concept called Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). The significant aspect involving the operation of TDR is the subsequent reduction in the frequency of conversion of lands, lesser agro-land disputes, protection and maintenance of tenants' income and rights, optimization of development controls, conservation of prime agricultural lands and the protection of the environment.