

Paco Market rehab preserves RP culture, saves Pasig River



WHERE THERE'S A WILL ... For the longest time, the Estero de Paco, a tributary of Pasig River, was choked with all shapes and forms of garbage.

By Sunshine Lichauco de Leon
Contributor

BUILT IN 1911, PACO MARKET in Manila is one of the oldest market structures in the country. But it is also a primary pollutant of the Estero de Paco, which flows into the Pasig River.

Paco Market's redevelopment is in the works although the plan is to do more than fix a century-old structure. It's a pioneering idea with the goal of preserving Philippine history and culture and, at the same time, encouraging commercial sustainability and cleaning the Pasig River.

Imagine Paco Market thus—an environment where commerce, community and culture thrive.

Project designer Maja Olivares-Co explains her personal motivation for the renovation: "I love markets. I believe that when I travel, going to a market

PACO MARKET/ A8



... THERE'S A WAY With the trash cleared and the first of many more steps to save the Pasig River having been achieved, the redevelopment of the close-to-a-century-old Paco Market is under way.

Paco Market development preserves culture, saves Pasig River

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in whatever country I am in, whether a *souk* in Morocco or the Tsukiji fish market in Japan, [will show] me the depth of that country's culture.

"We have nothing that has that. I feel sad that my children

experience that kind of energy outside, but not in their own country."

Celebration

Last Feb. 22, Paco Market vendors and representatives of the national and local governments, Metropolitan Manila De-

velopment Authority (MMDA), the military, and Kapit Bisig Para Sa Ilog Pasig (KBPIP) gathered at the market bridge.

The gathering was in celebration of the fact that the river waters flowing beneath them had been rid of garbage.

The first of many steps in the seven-year plan to save the Pasig River has been achieved—1,000 families moved to a resettlement area in Calauan, Laguna, their shanties dismantled, and a major source of waste polluting the Estero de Paco removed.

As these groups stood side by side handing symbolic stones to one another, they showed the extent to which their teamwork had brought them, as well as the strength with which they embarked on the second step to keep the estero clean—the redevelopment of Paco Market.

According to KBPIP managing director Gina Lopez, the market and the estero are inextricably linked.

"You can't have a good market without a good estero, and vice versa. We will rehabilitate the market, educate stall holders and vendors, and implement stricter market management so the wastes won't flow into the Pasig River anymore," she says.

Lopez stresses that this project should be viewed as a first step toward a larger objective: "There are 400 other markets in the country, most of which drain into creeks. If we can get this done, it will show the possibilities."

Bomb waiting to explode

While the redevelopment of Paco Market is only a small part of the KBPIP's Pasig River Rehabilitation project, it has a direct impact on the sustainability of the overall cleanup.

Describing the market's current state, Olivares-Co says it's "a bomb waiting to explode."

"Structurally, not all parts are sound. It floods. The drains are clogged, so the sewage is hosed into the river," she says.

Olivares-Co has worked on many exciting projects—including the Hermes shop and the trendy Masseto wine bar in Makati City—yet none has inspired her as this one:

"The excitement I [feel] is unique because it shifts between that of a designer and a mother. Right now, so many children are limited to a 10-mile radius of Rockwell, Glorietta and Greenbelt [in Makati], and it's sad.

"If we can redevelop this project into something that will cater to [classes] A to D because it's clean and safe, we would have made a positive contribution for generations of Filipino children."

Old and new

The historic structure will be restored as close as possible to its original condition, but will include the best of "green" architecture.

Natural and artificial lighting, cross ventilation, proper water and waste management, and the use of architectural materials made from waste collected from the estero will be integral parts of the design plan.

And to encourage discipline and healthy competition, stall size will be standardized and products will be classified.

Once the structure has been renovated and extended to its 3,000-square-meter size, the next challenge will be a "rehabilitation" of the mindset of the market's vendors and customers.

Olivares-Co explains the strategy which she believes will work: "Constant education, reminders and constant policing will be needed in the beginning. You know—if you see a candy wrapper, pick it up. Because if you start picking things up, you will not throw things that you will need to pick up later, right?"

The P50-million redevelopment is expected to take six months and will be implemented in phases as the funds are raised to cover the costs.

The first phase will be funded by a P5-million donation of the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. to Paco Market and President Macapagal-Arroyo's earmarking of P30 million from her Social Fund.

The money will go toward helping the Pasig River Rehabilitation Project as a whole; P15 million will go to Paco Market, P5 million to the estero cleanup, and P10 million to the resettlement site.

Partnership

Ms Arroyo attended the unveiling of the scale model of the redeveloped market, and toured the area to see first-hand what the KBPIP and its dedicated partners have accomplished so far.

Soldiers, for example, have played a crucial role in cleaning up the Estero de Paco—providing manpower for the ripraping projects, disposing of the

debris gathered from the river, and educating the residents on how to preserve and protect their environment.

Maj. Gen. Renaldo Mabagu, chief of the National Capital Region Command, says his men are happy to know that they are making a difference in the lives of the Paco residents.

"Most of the people here throw their garbage [anywhere]; they don't understand the larger impact. We tell them this is for their own good: If their environment is clean, they become healthy and [as a result] more productive," he says.

Mabagu says the spirit of working together is "very contagious."

"The work in this area shows that Filipinos can do anything as long as they are united in attaining a particular goal. The problems in this estero are a microcosm of what is happening in the country," he says.

The MMDA, too, has provided the heavy equipment needed to move both earth and people, and handled the difficult task of dismantling illegal structures on the waterway.

MMDA general manager Robert Nacienceno says it is the KBPIP that has linked the different "specialists" together: "The presence of [this nongovernment organization] is very important because it is apolitical. It [does away with] political differences and makes people understand things from a common point of view, a common mission."

Activity center

The future Paco Market will have an activity center for the community to enjoy.

With the help of foundations and NGOs, small workshops for acting, reading, music and alternative healthcare (including *hilot*), will be conducted daily.

For an authentic eating experience, there will be a "palutuan" where one can bring freshly bought produce and have it cooked the way one wants.

A special zone will be put up for the sale of products—from handbags to furniture—made from waste and recycled materials by the families relocated to Calauan.

Some of them lived along the estero for 40 years, and this will allow them to maintain their links with Paco even if they have moved away.

The market will be jointly managed by the KBPIP and the

City of Manila, with Gina Lopez as project manager.

Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim, who is wholeheartedly backing the project, believes that the positive effect of a renovated market will extend beyond the structure itself.

"Other residents will, on their own, be tempted to clean up their surroundings so as to conform with the beautiful things going on," he says.

Domino effect

The vendors were initially apprehensive of the redevelopment plan, but only because they thought the market would be privatized and they would be charged higher rental fees.

When they learned that they would be given a beautiful, clean space at no extra cost, they threw their complete support behind the project.

Says Rene Gonio, whose family has been selling chicken in the market since the 1950s: "Because vendors spend between 4 a.m. and 7 p.m. here daily, this is their second home. But the situation has deteriorated so much. There are illegal residents, there's so much crime and filth, that it's such a hard place to earn a living."

He airs the hope of many that a clean market will produce a domino effect: "If the environment is good, many customers will come, maybe even from other cities... With more customers, the income of vendors will increase and they can improve their lives. They will also have more money to spend in the community, so the city income will go up!"


Some vendors have shown support for the project with actions that speak louder than words.

Benemy, 32, is one of many ambulant vendors operating without a permit. He lives in the market with family members, all of whom have volunteered to help clean the area daily.

"I want to help the market and to help the other 'ambulants.' When the market is improved, I may have a chance to own a stall, which will be better for business and for my family," he says.

Paradigm shift

A time capsule was planted during the unveiling of the scale model of the new Paco Market. In it are letters written by community members expressing their hopes and dreams.


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