



Navotas: Sharing their Fishing Culture

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Abstract: Navotas City has been known as the Fishing Capital of the Philippines with its population deriving their livelihood directly and indirectly from fishing and its related industries like fish trading, fish net mending, and processed fish. It is also famous for fish sauce and shrimp paste. We see this as potential hub for tourism and research. But first, it is important to understand the fishing culture of the fishermen in this community. This study aims to explore the culture of fishing in Navotas as additional knowledge for indigenous culture of Filipinos. This study also emphasizes the direct interaction of fishermen with the sea. It attempts to expose the close relationship between the fishermen with their environment. This study uses ethno-history and ethnographic parallels to understand the social behavior of the fishermen. Fishermen harvest fishes at midnight. Their harvest often depends on the weather as well as on the size of the moon. Fishermen are often working for fish companies who often trade with agents of fish processing companies such as sardines. The fishing culture in Navotas has greatly been influenced by modern industries but a lot of environmental factors still need to be enhanced in their culture such as coastal shore sanitation, worker's welfare and enhancement of their facilities. Local tourism and research can help them improve their condition.

Key Words: livelihood; potential; culture; environment; sanitation

1. Etymology of Navotas

Navotas was originally a contiguous part of Malabon and was not separated from it by a body of water. However, sometime in the past, the turbulent waters of Manila Bay gradually eroded a weak strip of land between this town and the district of Tondo in Manila until an opening was breached. Seawater continued to flow in through this opening particularly during high tide eventually carving out the Navotas River in the process. (Government of Navotas, 2015)

The channel created eventually developed into a regular waterway that has come to be known as the Navotas River. This natural phenomenon seemed to be the origin of the name that today is associated with this area, continually referred to as "nabutas" which over the time gradually evolved into "Navotas", literally meaning "pierced through" in English. The original name bestowed to the place in its early history when it was still part of Malabon was San Jose de Navotas, in honor of its patron saint, San Jose. (Government of Navotas, 2015)

In 1827, the principales of San Jose de Navotas and Bangkulasi petitioned the Spanish government for the consolidation and separation of their barrios from Malabon to form a new town. This action was precipitated by the difficulty encountered by the townsfolk of these two barrios in transacting business and attending the church due to the physical separation brought by the Navotas River. (Government of Navotas, 2015)

The petition did not meet with success until three decades later when in February 16, 1859 as evidence by existing documents, the barrios of San Jose de Navotas and Bangkulasi was separated from Malabon. (Government of Navotas, 2015)

Eventually the Royal Audiencia promulgated the "Superior" on June 11, 1859 which provided for the establishment of a new parish with a church and parochial school for the benefit of the town of Navotas and its barrios, which at that time were San Jose, Tangos, Bangkulasi and Tanza. Navotas was incorporated into the newly created Province of Rizal on June 11, 1901 through the enactment of Philippine Commission Act No. 137. However, pursuant to its policy of economy and

centralization, the Philippine Commission again merged Malabon and Navotas through Act No. 942 designating the seat of government to Malabon until it was established and independent as city on June 24, 2007. (Government of Navotas, 2015)

2. Navotas Fishing Culture: In Focus

The Philippine Government Development policy aims to increase productivity, profitability and income, and to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Philippine people. The Department of Agriculture pursues the following objectives in fisheries development: improved income and standard of living for rural fishing families; self-sufficiency in fisheries; improved utilization and productive capacity of fisheries and other aquatic resources, and increased exports of fish and fishery products. (Dickson, 1989)

The Philippine Government has implemented several action programmes and development activities in artisanal fisheries which include sectoral fishing technology development, credit schemes, support to cooperative/fishermen's organizations, construction of infrastructure (ports, marketing and fish landing/distribution centers), training and extension, fisheries resources management, conservation, protection and utilization, and the Fisheries Integrated Community Development Project. (Dickson, 1989)

One of the priority action programmes was the Small-Scale Fisheries Credit Assistance Component. Although the government intensified the implementation of this nationwide fisheries credit assistance programme known as *Biyayang Dagat Program (BDP)* from the late 1970s, an evaluation of inter-agency efforts of banks, development agencies, cooperatives and fisheries administrations showed that only 65 per cent of the initial target group had actually been reached by the programme between 1980 and 1984. From 1978 to 1983, P 168.81 (\$8.44) million worth of credit had been earmarked for the artisanal fisheries sector, of which p 106.2 million or 63 per cent had been disbursed to 8 482 fisher folk by August 1986. Due to poor loan repayments - in August 1986 the overall repayment rate was only 35 per cent - the credit programme was suspended. (Dickson, 1989)

2.1. Navotas Rich Resources of Fishes

The following fishes were documented as visual ethnography taken by the researcher on September 2014.

2.1. Milkfish (*Bangus*) - The milkfish is an important seafood in Southeast Asia and some Pacific Islands. Because milkfish is notorious for being

much bonier than other food fish, deboned milkfish, called "boneless *bangús*" in the Philippines, has become popular in stores and markets.

- 2.2. *Tilapia* is the common name for nearly a hundred species of cichlid fish from the *tilapiine* cichlid tribe. *Tilapia* are mainly freshwater fish inhabiting shallow streams, ponds, rivers and lakes and less commonly found living in brackish water.
- 2.3. Sardines are commonly consumed by human beings. Fresh sardines are often grilled, pickled or smoked, or preserved in cans.
- 2.4. Bighead Carp (*Imelda Fish*) is a freshwater fish, one of several Asian carps. It has a large, scale less head, a large mouth, and eyes located very low on the head.
- 2.5. Ponyfishes (*Sapsap*) inhabit marine and brackish waters in the Indian and West Pacific Oceans. They can be used in the preparation of *bagoong*. Ponyfishes are small and laterally compressed in shape, with a bland, silvery colouration.
- 2.6. Shrimp are widespread and abundant. They can be found feeding near the seafloor on most coasts and estuaries, as well as in rivers and lakes.
- 2.7. Mussel (*Tahong*) is also used for many freshwater bivalves, including the freshwater pearl mussels. Freshwater mussel species inhabit lakes, ponds, rivers, creeks, canals, and they are classified in a different subclass of bivalves, despite some very superficial similarities in appearance.
- 2.8. Squid (*Pusit*) are cephalopods of the order *Teuthida*, which comprises around 300 species. Like all other cephalopods, squid have a distinct head, bilateral symmetry, a mantle, and arms. Squid, like cuttlefish, have eight arms arranged in pairs and two, usually longer, tentacles. Squid are strong swimmers and certain species can "fly" for short distances out of the water.
- 2.9. *Tuma* is a saltwater finfish that belongs to the tribe *Thunnini*, a sub-grouping of the mackerel family (*Scombridae*) - which together with the tunas also includes the *bonitos*, mackerels, and Spanish mackerels.

2.3 Fishing as Livelihood

Fishing is primary living in Navotas City. This is where they get their food for everyday living and especially for their daily expense. Aside from fishing, they have an alternative income which is well known in their place; Fish Sauce "Patis" and Shrimp Paste "Bagoong". Even though that their



income is not enough for their primary living, they still oblige to have an alternative income to meet their family needs every day.

Fishes are often processed as sardines by some sardines company in Navotas. People who work in the sardine companies are working on contractual basis. These fishes are also processed at home by some small scales business such as fish balls or dried fish. Some residents directly buy fishes from the port and sell them in the market.

Most fishermen that we interviewed from the port were working for a fishing company and they usually ride a vessel with their nets and hoping for a big catch.

2.1 Navotas as Fishing Capital of the Philippines; Navotas as one of the poor society in Metro Manila

The City of Navotas is a 1st class city in Metro Manila, Philippines. The city occupies a narrow strip of land along the eastern shores of Manila Bay. Navotas is directly north of Manila, west of Malabon City, and south of Obando, Bulacan (DOT, 2015).

Dubbed as the “Fishing Capital of the Philippines,” Navotas is considered to be a very important fishing community, with 70% of its population deriving their livelihood directly or indirectly from fishing and its related industries like fish trading, fish net mending, and fish producing, have marginal percentage of inter-island fish producers. Navotas occupies in the west with shoreline of Manila Bay, which is strategic coastal front and suitable for all kinds of vessels (DOT, 2015)

Navotas is part of the informal sub-region of Metro Manila called CAMANAVA. This sub-region aside from Navotas, includes the cities of Caloocan, Malabon, and Valenzuela. Navotas is perceived to be prone to flood especially during the rainy season and during high tide, but the national and local government is trying to alleviate the problem. Pollution and overpopulation are other problems that the government is trying to solve. Navotas is famous for fish sauce and shrimp paste (patis and bagoong in Tagalog, respectively) (DOT, 2015)

However, there are a total of 41,717 households with an estimated 15,904 of these belonging to the urban poor (Quintile 1). The average family income per year is P60 000 for a family size of 4.65 with the income per capita of P12,903.22. Based on the 2007 Population Census, Navotas has 15% of poverty incidence. Despite being considered as the “Fish Capital of the Philippines” it is only a fish trading city and not a fish from elsewhere

(Carandang et. al., 2014)

2.2 Rich in Fish Resources: So why are they poor?

In a research conducted by Smith, Puzon and Vidal-Libunao (1980), the contribution of municipal fisheries to annual fish production in the Philippines is significant. While maintaining an approximate 55-60% share of total catch over the past two decades, municipal fisheries production has quadrupled from 218,983 mt in 1955 to 874,934 mt in 1977. Of this 1977 amount, approximately 81% or 712,014 mt was caught by marine municipal fishermen, and approximately 19% or 162,420 mt was caught by inland municipal fishermen. Per capita consumption of marine products of the Philippines was 24.2 kg in 1972 (FAO, 1973), representing approximately 54% of animal protein intake. Thus, municipal fisheries highly contribute to meet the nutritional needs of the average Filipino.

2.3 Navotas Fishermen: Passing the Culture

One of the fishermen we interviewed shared that his job as fisherman was inherited from his father through collaboration with his father and by observing what his father was doing. After his teenage years, he replaced his father from his work.

One fisherman related that Sardines Company as well as the government should sponsor more training for fishermen.

We observed the poor sanitation along the coastal shore. The drainage system is filled with garbage and dirty water.

Most fishermen also shared that they do not have SSS and Philhealth. They do not wear any gloves to protect them from ice. The Fish Port lacks maintenance.

2.4 Occupational Pride, Tenacity and Cultural Identity

At 8 o'clock in the morning, the bargain price of fish is located at the Market Hall 1 to Market Hall 5 or so called the Black Market. According to the fish vendor, the Black Market refers to the bargain price that pertains to the retail price of a product or their price is lower than market; e.g. A 1kg of Mussel in the Fish Market costs P45 which when sold by them is only P15 per kilo.

The fishermen have a usual routine of resting in the morning and working at night. They usually sail all throughout the evening until dawn. Once they dock on the Fish Port Complex, they begin to segregate the different kinds of fishes. After the



segregation, the buckets of fishes are piled on the delivery van of the dealers for delivery while the fishermen are ready to go home and rest. The second batches of fishermen ride on the vessel and take their shift.

During segregation, it is like a festival of fishes, you will see the different varieties of fishes and all the fishermen are smiling while doing their tasks.

We also observed the fishermen who were pulling the fishnet with sequences, and with their strength and might, their movement is like a rhythm of a dance which shows unity and solidarity while other fishermen are segregating fishes per bucket. It is like a Dance Festival when you watch them working.

Unlike what we see on TV, these fishermen are not skinny and dark, instead their bodies are heavily built, lighter in complexion and sturdier. They are proud of their job.

In fact, when they saw us, they started singing and most of them are eager to be interviewed. Although we noticed that most of the fishermen are males, they said that females are not prohibited from fishing. When we asked them, where are their wives, they said that their wives are working with Sardines Companies, while pointing their finger at the nearby Sardines Company.

Navotas Fishing Culture as a Challenge for Tourism

The government must take action on the improvement of the Navotas Fish Port Complex because the other countries included in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are improving their Fish Port just to sustain their country's needs.

Tourism can help by increasing fish festival and research cooperative in Navotas.

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