



The Grand Canal of Pasig

Growth of a city, death of a river

Across the world, cities are found along rivers. In the Philippines, the most progressive city of Metropolitan Manila is found on the 27-kilometer Pasig River. For thousands of years, the river had been used for navigation, settlement, as a source of food and water, and a source of inspiration for ancient folklorists and present-day artists. In the years prior to large-scale development of Metropolitan Manila, the Pasig River was compared to the Grand Canal of Venice in terms of topography.

When Spain came to the Philippines during the 16th century, it emphasized growth of communities along the Pasig River. With urbanization came the establishment of the earliest infrastructure systems in Manila—telecommunications and public utilities.

During the American period, the early stages of industrialization took place along the banks of the Pasig River. The river became an ideal site for expansion of industrial and commercial activities due to ease of transport of raw materials and finished products, as well as accessibility to the ports of Manila Bay.

At that time, the Pasig River had assumed an entirely different role. Aside from providing access to various industries located along its banks, the river also received the dirty water and solid waste coming out of these factories.

Deterioration of the Pasig River became noticeable during the 1930s when fish migration from Laguna de Bay started to diminish. Between 1950 and 1960, people's bathing and washing activities in the Pasig River obviously dropped. During this time, ferry boat transport also began to decline. By the 1970s, the river had begun to smell bad and, in the 1980s, all fishing activities stopped.

During the 1990s, the Pasig River was characterized by dark, murky waters; islands of floating garbage; sunken abandoned boats; colonies of makeshift shanties; a proliferation of factories and commercial establishments discharging untreated wastewater; and frequent flooding. The Pasig River then was considered biologically inactive and a source of disease.



PASIG RIVER REHABILITATION COMMISSION

Sta. Ana Ferry Station - the most popular station among riders, is funded by ADB.

Breathing life back into the river

Attempts to rehabilitate the Pasig River in the past were mostly short-lived. Nearly all failed because those who wanted to clean the river concentrated only on the river and not on the combination of factors in the urban environment that had degraded and misused the river.

Serious rehabilitation of the Pasig River began in 1991 with the help of the Danish International Development Agency (Danida). In 1999, the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission was created to consolidate all efforts to rehabilitate the Pasig River into a single body.



In July 2000, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a \$176 million loan and financial assistance for the cleanup of the Pasig River. Under ADB's Pasig River Environmental Management and Rehabilitation Sector Development Program (PAREMAR-SDP) loan, the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission implemented various projects, which included

- The provision of additional sanitation services through procurement of 20 vacuum trucks for septic tank-emptying services in the cities of Makati, Mandaluyong, Pateros, San Juan, and Taguig.
- Quarterly water quality monitoring in nine monitoring stations along the Pasig, San Juan, and Marikina rivers.
- Installation of boom traps with a conveyor at the E. Rodriguez Bridge in Quezon City to trap and collect floating debris in the San Juan River.
- Procurement of a deck crane and barge for desilting works at the Pasig River.
- Establishment of environmental preservation areas (EPAs) through the relocation of about 10,000 informal-settler families residing along the 3- to 10-meter bank easement of the Pasig River to subdivisions outside Metro Manila that were complete with community facilities.
- The EPA project also included the construction of parks, walkways, and greenbelts. A total of 24.63 kilometers of linear parks have been completed in the cities of Manila, Makati, Mandaluyong, Pasig, and Taguig.
- Together with these projects came the revival of the Pasig River Ferry Service as an alternative mode of transportation for Metro Manila commuters. The ferry service was inaugurated in February 2007 and started commercial operation the following month. Today, a total of 11 ferry stations have been completed and are now operational.



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- Another development project is the establishment of urban renewal areas (URAs) that aim to upgrade infrastructure in blighted communities, provide security of tenure to residents, and improve living conditions and quality of life for occupants. A total of 4.91 hectares (or four URAs) have been completed. These are BASECO URA in Manila, Pineda URA in Pasig City, and Joris Abella and San Miguel URAs in Mandaluyong City.
- Public awareness campaigns.

At present, the commission is preparing for the second phase of the project. Following successful implementation of riverbanks development projects under ADB's PAREMAR, the commission is now proposing various projects that would directly improve the water quality of the Pasig River and its tributaries.