

Reisebericht

PHILIPPINEN 2026



KAPINTIG
LERNEINSATZ 2026

15. JULI BIS 12. AUGUST 2026

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Vorstellung



Wir, das sind Hermann, unser Teamleader, Dominik, Greta, Karin, Lisa, Markus und Stefanie, erzählen in dem folgenden Bericht von unserem Lerneinsatz auf den Philippinen im Juli und August 2026. Die folgenden Beiträge wurden tagesaktuell vor Ort von uns verfasst. Es handelt sich dabei um subjektive Momentaufnahmen, die unsere individuellen Sichtweisen widerspiegeln.

Da wir auch in Kleingruppen unterwegs waren, konnten nicht immer alle Erfahrungen und Wahrnehmungen gleichermaßen erfasst werden. Der Bericht versteht sich somit nicht als vollständige Darstellung, sondern als Sammlung persönlicher Eindrücke. Uns ist es wichtig zu betonen, dass wir von den Erlebnissen berichten wollen, aber gleichzeitig vor einer einseitigen „Single Story“-Perspektive warnen.

Wir hoffen, den Leserinnen und Lesern damit einen Einblick in unsere Reise und unsere Erfahrungen zu geben.

Wir wünschen viel Spaß beim Lesen.

We, Hermann, our team leader, Dominik, Greta, Karin, Lisa, Markus, and Stefanie, report in the following account on our learning assignment in the Philippines in July and August 2026. The following entries were written by us daily on-site. They represent subjective snapshots that reflect our individual perspectives.

Since we also traveled in small groups, it was not always possible for everyone to capture all experiences and perceptions equally. This report is therefore not meant to be a complete representation, but rather a collection of personal impressions. It is important to us to emphasize that while we want to share these experiences, we also want to warn against a one-sided "single story" perspective. We hope to give readers an insight into our journey and our experiences. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Vorstellung - Introduction

Name: Hermann

Filipino name: Erming

Age: 49 years

About me: I studied history and social works. I am a civic educator working in a NGO and I am a professional writer of poems as well.

I joined the Lerneinsatz 2026 because: the DKA asked me to act as a group guide for the third time, but it was the first time as a guide on the Philippines

I really learned from this experience: How good it is to come back and have a family in the Philippines.



Name: Dominik

Filipino name: Domeng

Age: 29 years

About me: I worked as a mechanical engineer for ten years before changing my career to become a social pedagogue, which I started studying in September 2025 and expect to complete in June 2027.

I joined the Lerneinsatz 2026 because: I joined the program to gain practical experience, learn from different perspectives, and develop my personal and professional skills for my future career in this field.

I really learned from this experience: how important it is to support people according to their individual needs and abilities, empower them to take small steps themselves, and was impressed by how open and welcoming they were despite difficult financial situations.



Name: Greta

Filipino name: Gigi

Age: 25 years

About me: Always up for an adventure, good vibes, and collecting memories rather than things.

I joined the Lerneinsatz 2026 because: I wanted to dive into the real Philippines, step out of my bubble, and meet amazing souls along the way.

I really learned from this experience: That true wealth is all about warmth, community, and having a good laugh together, no matter what.



Name: Karin

Filipino name: Kakai

Age: 61 years

About me: Since I am now retired, I have plenty of time for my interests. I love hiking or mountaineering, usually every weekend. Travelling is always a very enriching experience for me to broaden my horizons.

I joined the Lerneinsatz 2026 because: I wanted to learn more about this part of the world and about Philippines life.

I really learned from this experience: : How friendly the people in the Philippines are, despite their poverty and the wealth they are constantly exposed to.



Name: Lisa

Filipino name: Ising

Age: 25 years

About me: I work for the Diocese of Linz in a Catholic Youth Organization. In my free time, I enjoy travelling, making music and going to concerts.

I joined the Lerneinsatz 2026 because: I wanted to understand more about everyday life in the Philippines, hear people's stories, and learn how they deal with social and political challenges.

I really learned from this experience: I learned how complex problems are and how strongly political structures, history and colonialism still shape people's lives in the Philippines.



Name: Markus

Filipino name: MakMak

Age: 21 years

About me: I currently work as a bartender and will start my journalism studies in October.

I joined the Lerneinsatz 2026 because: I decided to join the Lerneinsatz, because I wanted to see how charity organizations of the Dreikönigsaktion works and in which fields it operates.

I really learned from this experience: My most precious memory of the trip is the time we spent in the Agta village during our Indigenous People Immersion in the rainforest. It was amazing to see how different these people's lives are compared to ours, yet it seemed that overall there were more similarities than differences.



Name: Stefanie

Filipino name: Pane

Age: 32 years

About me: I work in a Kindergarten with children between 3 and 6 years. I like nature and sports like hiking mountaineering and cycling. I play the flute in an orchestra in my town.

I also like reading a book, meet friends and travelling.

I joined the Lerneinsatz 2026 because:

I wanted to do something new, to broaden my horizons, to live/stay at hostfamilies and to get to know the culture and the people better than when you are a tourist.

I really learned from this experience: :

Despite their situation, poverty, natural disasters, low income, worse health care etc. Filipinos are always friendly and laughing. We should appreciate the little things more and be glad that we are doing so well.



Reisebericht

Wednesday, July 15 - Arrival in Manila – first steps in an unfamiliar Environment

Our Lerneinsatz began immediately upon touching down in Manila: Mark and Rica from the local partner organization IPDI warmly welcomed us at the airport. Navigating the dense evening traffic on the way to our accommodation, the St. Camillus Pastoral Center, offered an immediate glimpse into the vast scale of this metropolis. Sharing dinner later that evening allowed us to catch our breath after the long journey, process our initial impressions, and settle in as a travel group.

Thursday July 16: Orientation, Filipino Nicknames, and Welcome Celebration

Following our first night, the morning was dedicated to recovering from jet lag. Before gathering for lunch, we convened for an internal reflection session to align expectations and prepare mentally for the upcoming weeks.

In the evening, we attended an official welcome gathering where we met the Kapintig facilitation team alongside representatives from various local partner organizations whom we would visit throughout the remainder of our stay. The initial round of introductions quickly evolved into a lively exchange: we were presented with traditional welcoming gifts, introduced to our designated local buddies, and each given an individual Filipino nickname—a subtle yet meaningful gesture that immediately fostered a sense of community and belonging.



Friday, July 17 - Culture 101, Urban Mobility, and Launch of the Contrast Tour

The morning centered on intercultural exchange (Culture 101). As we practiced our first basic phrases in Tagalog, we taught our Filipino peers elementary German expressions in return, complemented by group discussions examining everyday realities, social norms, and cultural differences between Austria and the Philippines.

Following lunch, we launched the practical phase of the Contrast Tour. Tasked with navigating the city on a deliberately tight allowance of 400 PHP (approximately 6.25 EUR), we set out in the afternoon alongside our local peers to explore neighborhoods beyond standard tourist routes. Moving through dense traffic corridors, we navigated public transit systems by riding local tricycles and jeepneys and traversed bustling street markets until nightfall. The day concluded with a dinner at a traditional restaurant, where meals were served on large communal platters at the center of the table and shared according to local dining customs.

Saturday, July 18 - Contrast Tour part 2 – urban heritage, sacred spaces and minimum-wage realities

The second leg of the tour immersed us directly in the capital's stark socioeconomic disparities. The objective for the day was to cover all transit, meals, and admission fees using a single daily budget of 750 PHP per person—a figure reflective of ongoing policy debates surrounding an adequate living wage. Working in small groups, we combined journeys via the elevated railway system (LRT/MRT), tricycles, and extended walks through the city.

Our itinerary encompassed key historical and spiritual landmarks: the Minor Basilica in Quiapo housing the Black Nazarene, the vibrant Masjid Al-Dahab (Golden Mosque), and historic Binondo (Chinatown). After visiting Manila Cathedral and Plaza de Roma, we explored Fort Santiago along with the National Museum of Fine Arts and the National Museum of History. These exhibitions offered vital context regarding the country's colonial legacy and modern sociopolitical trajectory. Following a walk through the expansive grounds of Rizal Park (Luneta) and dinner en route, we returned to St. Camillus late in the evening with numerous critical observations to digest.

Sunday, July 19 - Synthesis, Budget Analysis, and the "Church of the Poor"

The fourth day was dedicated to systematic debriefing and consolidation. At the St. Camillus Pastoral Center, we joined Mark, Rica, and the Kapintig team to unpack the sensory and analytical impressions gathered during the Contrast Tour. Auditing our tour expenses brought home the acute precariousness of living on such restrictive budgets: while sufficient to sustain an individual for a single day, attempting to feed and maintain an entire household on an equivalent sum poses severe, daily challenges.



Monday, July 20 – Off to Marinduque

At 4:00 AM, our journey began as we were driven to the bus terminal. We boarded a bus that took us to the harbor on Luzon, where we caught the ferry over to the beautiful island of Marinduque. Upon our arrival, a warm welcome awaited us. A bus and a traditional Jeepney brought us straight to the Pastoral Center in Boac.

We started our stay with a wonderful welcome lunch. After a brief break to settle into our rooms and unpack, we had the distinct honor of being officially greeted by the Bishop of Marinduque. Later that evening, a vibrant welcome festival was held, followed by a delicious dinner. We wrapped up our first day with a briefing to discuss the exciting program ahead of us.



Tuesday, July 21 – A grand welcome in Punong

We enjoyed a relaxed breakfast from 7:00 AM to 8:00 AM before setting off for Punong. The hospitality here was incredible—we were greeted by a massive, lively parade! Traditional dances followed, and it didn't take long before we were happily pulled in to join the dancing. Afterward, we treated ourselves to a fantastic, authentic Philippine lunch.

In the afternoon, we were introduced to our host families. Our new home was located very close to the MACEC (Marinduque Council for Environmental Concerns) organization, which we also got to visit. We listened to an educational lecture about environmental protection and local disaster risk management. Following a quick snack, we toured several spots to see the diverse local fruits growing on the island—and naturally, we took plenty of photos! Once darkness fell, we were driven back to our host families for another great dinner, before ending the night watching an energetic local basketball game.



Wednesday, July 22 – The sea is a absolute dream

After breakfast, we were picked up and driven to Balanacan, where the community welcomed us with the vibrant sounds of drums and a glockenspiel. We walked down to the shore to watch local fishermen carefully sorting fresh seaweed from their boats onto large trays. We even got to taste the seaweed ourselves! Next, we took part in planting mangroves. It was fascinating to learn how quickly they grow here reaching about one meter in height in just a single month.

We then boarded a narrow outrigger boat and cruised over to Maniwaya Island (Makupan). We spent a perfect day on the beach, surrounded by warm, crystal-blue water. The locals served us a lavish lunch and even took us out fishing. Around 4:00 PM, we sailed back to the main island and were driven home to our host families. The day ended with a beautiful surprise at 8:00 PM: the men of the community gathered to serenade Stefanie and Karin, singing for them for a wonderful hour.



Thursday, July 23 – Farming in Marinduque

Our day started at 9:00 am with a unique cultural insight as we observed the traditional butchering of a pig. Just like back home, a local butcher and a veterinarian were on-site to inspect the meat and ensure its quality.

Now we also had the chance to visit a local school, where we were able to assist with the food distribution.

Afterward, we moved on to harvest coconuts. We learned how to husk and split them, tasting fresh coconut water and meat right on the spot, while the locals explained the traditional process of making coconut oil. This was followed by a scenic walk where we explored various plants, fruits, vegetables, and small fish ponds.



We also helped harvest fresh bananas and coconuts to prepare a traditional sweet delicacy for the upcoming festival. Together, we mixed bananas, coconut, sugar, and margarine to create a delicious dessert, topped off with pine nuts. Later in the afternoon, we were invited to a small local chapel to join in a heartfelt "Hail Mary" prayer. We had a lovely dinner with our host families before heading to the ultimate highlight of the day: the lively Solidarity Night Festival.

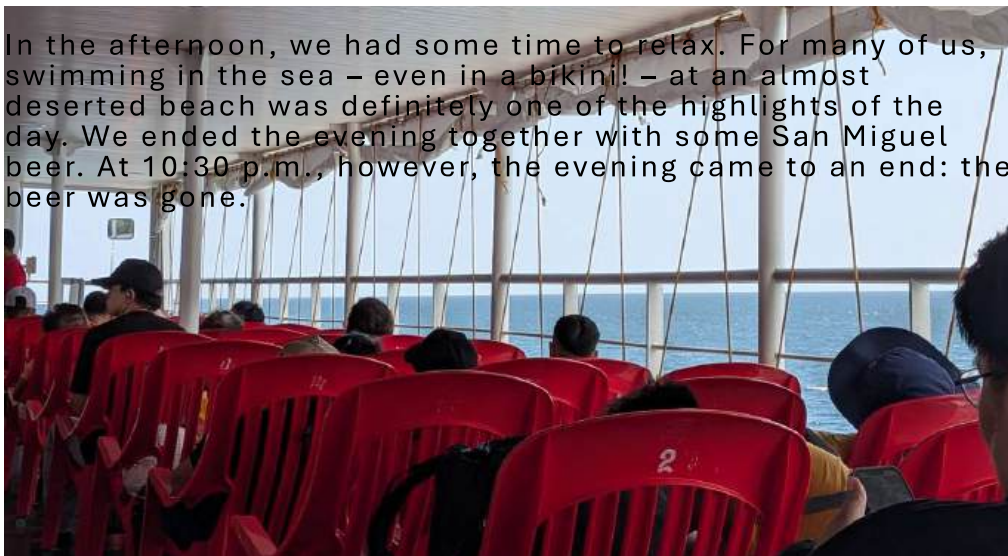


Friday, July 24 – Saying Goodbye to Marinduque

Our last day on Marinduque began with many emotional goodbyes to our host families. We gave them our gifts, visited the schoolchildren one more time, and thanked everyone for their warm hospitality. A few additional stops – including a visit to a birthday celebration and a church – extended our farewell even further.

Once we arrived at the beach resort, the BEC and MACEC groups finally came back together. For the first time, we were able to exchange our experiences with the other group. After lunch, we reflected together on the past four days and shared what we had experienced. During our time on Marinduque, we had learned a lot about the challenges faced by people living in rural communities. The effects of mining, climate change, and the difficulties with electricity supply had particularly stayed with us.

In the afternoon, we had some time to relax. For many of us, swimming in the sea – even in a bikini! – at an almost deserted beach was definitely one of the highlights of the day. We ended the evening together with some San Miguel beer. At 10:30 p.m., however, the evening came to an end: the beer was gone.



Saturday, July 25. – Beach, Boac and Solidarity Night

The morning was free once again. Some of us explored the small town, while others enjoyed the beach. After lunch, we checked out of the resort and continued to the Pastoral Center in Boac.

Once again, the bus ride itself became an experience. The BEC sisters brought out the karaoke machine and provided a loud and cheerful musical soundtrack for the journey. After arriving, we Austrians took some time to reflect on our experiences and the challenges we had encountered during the past days.

In the afternoon, we explored a little bit of Boac. Greta, Stefanie and Lisa came across a Zumba group at the town square and spontaneously joined in – much to the distraction of the actual Zumba dancers. As we had become accustomed to by now, the encounter ended with a group photo. We thanked everyone and said goodbye before heading back to prepare for the Solidarity Night.

In the evening, we celebrated the Solidarity Night together. Our hosts had prepared dances and challenges for us Kapintigs to complete. We Austrians performed “Once an Austrian Went Yodeling” once again. There was singing, dancing, laughter and plenty of fun. Markus also gave a speech, before we eventually said goodbye to our hosts. With that, our shared time on Marinduque came to an end.



Sunday, July 26 – Saying goodbye and travelling on

We started our journey back to Quezon City at around 7 a.m. A two-hour ferry ride was followed by around five hours on the bus. It was a long but peaceful travel day, giving us some time to look back on the experiences of the past days. When we finally arrived at St. Camillus, we were exhausted, but some of us still had enough energy to go out for pizza and later visit a local pub.

A local rock band was playing that evening – and, of course, we once again failed to remain unnoticed. Markus and Dominik were invited onto the stage to sing a Filipino song, while Greta and Lisa were asked to dance. Afterwards, we got into conversation with the band's singer. Once again, the evening reminded us that cultural exchange does not only happen during official programme activities. Sometimes it happens on a small stage in a local Filipino pub.

With this day, our rural experience on Marinduque officially came to an end.



Monday, July 27 – Human Rights Talk

After a free morning, our third part of the journey began in the afternoon: the Urban Community Experience. During the Human Rights Talk, representatives from civil society and the Church gave us insights into human rights work and the broader social challenges facing the Philippines.

After the talks, we watched the film “Maria”, produced by Sheryl Rose Andes. The documentary explores the devastating impact of the brutal “War on Drugs” under former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and tells the stories of three women named Maria whose lives were destroyed by police violence and killings.

The film affected many of us deeply. But the story became even more immediate when, during the Q&A, the producer introduced us to a woman who was herself one of the Marias – a victim of the regime who continues to fight for justice. We were speechless. Tears flowed. One question stayed with us: Where do we find hope in the face of such injustice?

The question of hope and justice continued to accompany us long after the evening was over. It was one of the most emotionally challenging days of our journey – but also an important starting point for our Urban Community Experience.

Tuesday, July 28 - Arriving in Valenzuela City

Our first stop on this day was the Mapulang Lupa Barangay Hall in Valenzuela City, where we were greeted by AKKMA (Aktibong Kababaihanng Komunidad sa Mapulang Lupa) representatives and informed about the struggles of the urban poor and what AKKMA is doing to help. Next, we had a tour through the squatter's area. In these areas, Filipinos illegally live on empty, vast properties of companies or the state. Flood control in these overcrowded areas is virtually non-existent, and fires often occur due to poor electricity cable handling.

After arriving at the AKKMA office, we could try and produce our own peanut butter. This product is one of the organisation's initiatives to emancipate housewives by giving them a stable source of income.

Next up was the Meet and Greet with our host families in a state-owned housing facility. The families, composed of mostly ex-squatters, greeted us with open arms and hearts. After delicious dinners, we spent the night at our host families, talking, laughing and sharing stories up until late in the night.



Wednesday, July 29 - AKKMA

Initially, we thought we'd wake up early to participate in a Zumba course, but due to the rainy weather, we stayed inside with our families until it was time to say goodbye. We were really lucky, because it was Dominik's birthday the next day, and Greta had her birthday earlier in July, so AKKMA decided to buy a cake as a farewell gift. Then, we looked at the community garden nearby and were invited to have lunch at a beautiful restaurant while waiting for the rain to stop. After a brief visit to the Lingunan Barangay Hall, we began our long journey to St. Camillus.

After dinner, we decided to go out to celebrate Dominik's special day. The Pop Up Katipunan was the perfect place for that, and we stayed up very late.



Thursday, July 30 - ECPAT/EYCA

The day after Dominik's party, our tiredness didn't stop us from journeying to the ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) headquarters. We had a quick tour of the surrounding area, led by a lively group of senior citizens of the IMPRUB (Integrated Movement for Progress and Unity Building) movement, and before we had lunch, it was time for some dancing.

Then followed the highlight of the day, the EYCA (ECPAT Youth and Children Action) awareness afternoon. Many children of the area joined the fun program, and we were excited to try some of the Filipino games, as well as show off Austrian ones. After playing for the whole afternoon, we went to St. Camillus, and after another cake in honour of Dominik's birthday, we went to bed early.



Friday July 31 - KARITON

The KARITON Organization emancipates trash collecting homeless people. The namesake is the wooden cart of these unfortunate families, which can hold great amounts of plastic bottles, carton and metal waste. From early morning until noon we participated in the dumpster diving, listening to the harsh life stories of the individuals we accompanied. They told us how they became homeless, what their life is like at the moment and what dreams they have for their future. It was shocking to see how their realities differed so much from other people's, and how little they earned for a hard day's work.

This was by far the most immersive experience we had during our stay on the Philippines. However, it is important to remind ourselves that we were trash collectors only for a couple of hours, the Kariton families are doing this all day, every day, no Sundays, no holidays.



Saturday, August 1 - Reflection, Preparing for the stay in Infanta, Freetime

After a little breakfast with pancakes and the trip to the laundry, we started our reflecting of the very intense week—which that really made us think and raised a number of questions, as well as feelings of hopelessness. Mark had prepared questions for us to answer on our own and afterward, everyone had the chance to share their feelings, concerns, questions,... We were deeply affected by the topics such as poverty, hopelessness, the film of human rights und that the government does nothing.

Following this intense and moving reflection session, we fortified ourselves with spring rolls.

Next, we received information about the coming days, where we stay at the Agtas in Infanta (an indigenous community). We were very curious about what life among the indigenous people would be like and were looking forward to it. Once all outstanding questions had been answered, we went to lunch.

We had some free time in the afternoon and wanted to get out of Quezon City and see something different. Hermann suggested taking the train to visit the statue of the Virgin Mary. We liked the idea and set off, even though the weather wasn't on our side; the sky was heavy with dark clouds, and it looked like a downpour could start at any moment. Sure enough, it started raining after just a short walk, so we made a quick stop at Starbucks to enjoy some real coffee and cake. When the rain let up, we continued on our way to the statue of the Virgin Mary, a memorial to remember the EDSA-Revolution 40 years ago.

When we returned, a delicious dinner awaited us and then we packed our things for the stay in Infanta. We went to bed early then we had to wake up early.



Sunday August 2 - The journey to Infanta

The day started very early. At 5 a.m. it was time to check out and depart for Infanta. During the long drive, we stopped at a café. We enjoyed the coffee and tea, as well as the beautiful view of the surrounding countryside. Then, we continued our journey through the lovely landscape. Some of us dozed off for a quick power nap along the way, while others ate the breakfast we had brought with us.

Upon arriving in Infanta, we waited for Nehma from the TCD organization. While waiting, we looked around a bit; a mess was taking place, children were playing handball, and there were small stalls selling delicious food and little shops where we could buy clothes and other things.

Then we went to the "Feel Fiesta" restaurant. After the lunch we continued our journey in a jeepney that took us to the Agta Community. The road to our accommodation was rough, taking us over uneven terrain and even across a river. Along the way, we made occasional stops to load or unload food. After a bumpy ride through beautiful scenery—surrounded by trees, plants, and rice fields—the journey ended at a small building in the middle of the forest. It was a school, which would serve as our accommodation for the next three days. The students had no classes at that time because they were celebrating a festival. We inspected the building. On the one hand, we found the idea of sleeping in the middle of the forest exciting and cool, but on the other, we wondered about things like venomous animals or snakes, what it would be like sleeping on the floor, and whether there would be many mosquitos.

Hermann's friend Marvin arrived and led us to the sea. Unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate, so we couldn't go swimming. After returning, we were introduced to the organization and had the chance to ask the community leader questions.

Following the session, we ate the dinner that had been prepared over a fire pit. After we enjoyed the food and the evening we went to bed.



Monday, August 3 - Visit of indigenous students and their parents, catch shrimps and Solidarity Night

After breakfast, indigenous students and their parents visited us; they performed two dances in their traditional clothing, and we had the chance to ask them questions. Afterward, we went into the forest to search for leaves that indicated the presence of a tuber. We were lucky and discovered a huge one. It had to be washed, sliced, and soaked in water overnight.

Dominik and Hermann tried “Mama”—the practice of chewing betel nuts is a deeply rooted tradition and part of everyday life. The others helped prepare dinner or chatted with the indigenous locals. After lunch some of us went to catch shrimp while others took a power nap. Lisa worried us with a reddish rash that looked like an allergic reaction. We built a dam in the river to make it easier to catch the shrimp. As Lisa’s rash worsened, she returned to the accommodation. We didn’t catch much shrimps. After this some went swimming in the sea, while others rested or searched the forest for honey.

When we all gathered again, everyone shared their experiences. We heard how the indigenous people collect honey. We were relieved to see that Lisa’s rash had cleared up and she was feeling better. Greta excitedly recounted her experience with a shrimp in her trousers: upon waking from her nap, she had discovered a shrimp inside her trousers and was very surprised and scared. She wondered how it had gotten there. Eventually, it turned out that one of the Filipinos had placed the captured shrimp inside her trousers. In the evening, we were invited to a "Solidarity Night," where we heard traditional songs and saw dances performed by the community and enjoyed a delicious, authentic meal featuring indigenous cuisine, as well as “Lambanog” (a local spirit).



Tuesday, August 4 - boat trip to the cave and the fiesta, Freetime, Karaoke

The day started very early because the "Tulaog-Fiesta" was taking place. We took a boat to the beach where the cave—the starting point of the festival—was located. We entered the cave through a narrow opening, where a special ritual was being performed. Back on the beach, there was a mass. Every community had a tent and there are also stalls with offering games and food. After lunch, we were surprised by a small band and a dance performance, followed by a wrestling match. Dominik, Markus, and Greta bravely stepped up to compete against the indigenous locals.

Afterward, we returned to our accommodation and had the rest of the afternoon to ourselves. The guys played basketball while we went swimming into the river. The locals invited us to join them for Karaoke; we happily accepted the invitation, and it turned into a wonderful, fun-filled evening.



Wednesday, August 5 – Back to Infanta

After breakfast, we packed our things and set off on foot to the nearby houses. Marvin showed us how the tribe lives and took us to a small family garden. These gardens are deliberately kept small to minimise interference with nature, as the community mainly relies on whatever the forest has to offer at the time. We also had the opportunity to see how traditional bags are made from palm leaves.

We then continued our journey to Infanta by jeepney. Along the way, we visited the students school. The 35 students follow their own curriculum, which teaches not only academic subjects but also important skills for living in the community and in harmony with nature – from hunting and gathering to using the forest's resources sustainably.

When we arrived in Infanta, Mark and Rica from IPDI were already waiting for us. After having lunch together, we reflected on the experiences of the past few days before finally heading to our hotel. After the previous days, a shower with running water and a proper bed felt like a real luxury. In the evening, we took some particularly colourful tricycles to a restaurant built among the mangroves, where we ended the day with good food and Karaoke.



Thursday, August 6 - The Kaliwa Dam

After a short but restful night, we left at 6 a.m. for Brgy. Daraitan in Tanay. We had originally planned to explore the area, but heavy rain and strong winds forced us to cancel the tour. Instead, we used the time to talk about the challenges and realities of life in the community.

Indigenous people and Filipinos live together in this community. The indigenous residents told us that they repeatedly experience discrimination because of their appearance and their close connection to nature. One of the biggest challenges they are facing is the planned construction of the Kaliwa Dam. The project would have a major impact on the natural environment and could force several Indigenous communities to leave their ancestral lands.

One of the most adventurous parts of the day was crossing the river on a small ferry, which was guided to the other side by four men using long poles.

Afterwards, we travelled back to St. Camillus, moved back into our room and spent the rest of the evening resting.



Friday, August 7 – Subic

We spent the night at St. Camillus, but by 10 a.m. we were already on our way to Subic. The journey took around three hours and led us through a beautiful landscape, with small mountains in the distance and countless rice fields along the way.

After arriving at the hotel, we had lunch before taking part in a group reflection. We looked back on the past few weeks, shared our experiences and discussed what we had learned during our time in the Philippines.

Nothing else was planned for the rest of the day. Despite the heavy rain, we decided to take a short walk around Subic and explore the area. We quickly encountered children who approached us asking for food. At the same time, we noticed the big contrast within the city: modern and sometimes luxurious hotels and restaurants stand directly alongside communities where people live under much more modest conditions.

The city's history is still very much present today. For decades, Subic was home to one of the most important U.S. naval bases overseas. Although the base was closed in 1992, American influence and parts of the infrastructure associated with it can still be seen throughout the region. The nightlife is also influenced by this past. During the period of the American military presence, a significant sex tourism industry developed around the former base, traces of which can still be seen in parts of Subic today.

Once again, the day showed us a very different side of the Philippines – shaped by tourism, poverty and the visible traces of its American past.



Saturday, August 8 - Ocean Adventure World

Due to the bad weather, our planned beach day and diving trip unfortunately had to be cancelled. As an alternative, we visited Ocean Adventure World. There, we watched a dolphin and sea lion show as well as a wildlife show featuring various animals. According to the operators, all of the animals had been rescued and were taken in by the facility.

The effects of the heavy rainfall were already clearly visible on our way there and back. Roads were flooded, soil had been washed away from the hills, and we saw several small landslides. The sea had also turned noticeably brown due to the large amounts of mud.

On the way back, we made a short stop at a shopping mall to pick up a few things. Although it was actually considered a relatively small mall by local standards, it already seemed quite large to us compared to those in Austria. For many locals, shopping malls are also popular places to spend their free time – to cool down, have something to eat or simply spend time with family and friends. There were also arcade games and rides for children.

We also found the security checks at the entrance interesting. Visitors usually have to walk through a metal detector. Even when it goes off, however, there is often no further inspection.

Back at the resort, we had some time to relax before ending the day with dinner together at a burger restaurant.



Sunday, August 9 – Leaving the Subic Bay area - back to Quezon City

The day begins—how could it be otherwise—with rain. Check-out is until noon. We get up for breakfast—a mushroom omelet—then rest a bit more in bed, since swimming isn't an option and we had spent the previous evening out late at the bars in Subic Bay. Budz and I—the two Kapintig guides—are sharing a room for the first time at the end of the trip. I stand on the covered terrace, watching the wild sea being pelted by raindrops, as if the ocean were being nailed down to the planet.

After the meal, we split up into two vans again; just before leaving the Subic Bay area, we hear a loud crack and see a blue flash that blinds us in the rearview mirror. A blowout, I think—but in reality, it was a discharge from a power line hanging down in the rain. It had come loose from the power grid—that tangled mess, that ball of yarn made of cables overhead—and was dangling above the road, having chosen our second van to trigger a flash of electricity.

On the drive back to Quezon City, we see entire rice fields submerged in water. The monsoon is claiming lives in northern Luzon, too, through heavy rains and landslides. We are getting to know a country that faces many natural challenges: volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, typhoons, and heavy rains that lead to widespread flooding.

Back at St. Camillus, we decide to have Korean food—an unique kind of fast food. We buy instant noodles on-site, choose our toppings, and cook the meals ourselves using automated equipment. We do all the work and pay for the privilege. Those who followed the instructions correctly enjoyed their dishes. A highlight: a cockatoo lands on our shoulders inside the restaurant and snuggles up to us.



Monday, August 10 – Final reflection, barbecue, Korean-style, bear

Final reflection. We draw our symbol for the journey: a colorful jeepney. For the group, it signifies that none of us knows how the journey will end for each individual. We do know that four of us are flying home in two days, two are traveling on to Indonesia, and one is staying in the Philippines for another week. Yet, we do not know where or how our experiences in the Philippines will weave into our lives back in Austria.

In the afternoon, we buy extra suitcases for our souvenirs at the Araneta Center. It is not merely a shopping mall but a city of mega-malls where finding one's way around is no easy task. We had already been confronted with this contrast—between a capitalism that offers everything and the poverty of the streets that offers nothing—at the very start of the trip during the "Contrast Tour."

After buying the suitcases, we head to the Siligan Café, only to find it closed. We had first heard about this café on Human Rights Day; it supports the surviving families of sons killed during former President Duterte's so-called "War on Drugs." His term in office left a tragic toll of 30,000 dead.

Eventually, hunger set in, and we opted for meat—barbecue, Korean-style, where we cook the food ourselves. Again. A hotplate sits in the center of the table, and the staff keeps bringing out more meat. And the expectation is that it all gets eaten. For me, there were two moments during the trip that made me consider becoming a vegetarian: the all-too-human eyes of Capitans pig on Marinduque, and the feeling of an indigestible animal graveyard in my stomach that evening.

On the way home, four of us decided to stop by the pop-up bar—a covered complex filled with various places to drink and eat. We still had to celebrate saying goodbye to Dominik, as he had to set off early the next morning for the port of Batangas to catch a ferry to the island of Mindoro.

On the way back to our accommodation, I wondered how Stefanie was doing. I was worried that the return flight would be too much for her; she was weak and couldn't keep anything down. If she didn't improve by that evening, we would have to go to the hospital to get her stabilized for the flight.



Tuesday, August 11 - hospital - Solidarity Night - Dance

By morning, it was clear: we needed to go to the hospital. Budz kindly accompanied us. We didn't go to a public hospital—we had been advised against it, not necessarily because of the doctors' qualifications, but due to a lack of resources and excessive wait times. Stefanie was placed in a bed separated from the others by curtains. Everyone took the time to thoroughly assess her condition. Once she received an IV drip, the color and a smile returned to her face almost immediately. I was relieved too—especially when, after some additional waiting, we had gathered all the necessary paperwork for our Austrian insurance to get the costs reimbursed.

We made it back in time for the "Solidarity Night," our farewell party, where we were able to meet up once more with many of the people we had gotten to know through the various organizations. But it wasn't just our host families who surprised us with their presence; we also received video messages from our families back home—something we hadn't expected at all. There was even a short film from the DKA learning group in Ghana!

After images, plenty of photos, dances, songs, and even more photos, we wrapped up the evening—how could it be otherwise?—with karaoke; I'm going to miss singing with such passion for a long time to come.



Wednesday, August 12 - Goodbye Philippines

Dominik has already been gone for a long time by the time I get up. Budz took him to the right bus station at 5 a.m.; the bus took him to the ferry, and the ferry to the right island—Mindoro. I am glad to have the morning to pack and securely stow away all the souvenirs. The drive to the airport marks the beginning of a farewell to a special country, an incredible city, and people who shared so much with us. I am grateful for this and feel truly enriched, yet I also look forward to my everyday life in Vienna and to my children, whom I can tell all about this journey.

Visited Organizations

IPDI The Integrated Pastoral Development Initiative INC

is an Philippine faith-based training and consultancy organisation that focus on partnership building for development and pastoral cooperation. We envision a country of vibrant, empowered, and sustainable villages; sharing in Faith, living the abundance of life, and solidarity, as profoundly committed nurtures of resources and of the totality of Creation.

As an independent training and consultancy organisation, it anchored its mission on providing more relevant and meaningful accompaniment services in partnership building between and among donor communities, partner communities, faith-based groups and civil society organisations. It strives to provide support to household and community-based development and pastoral initiatives aimed at poverty eradication, restoration of the integrity of the environment and its conservation, equal access and a more egalitarian control of resources, and overcoming all forms of dehumanizing marginalisation.

BEC The Commission on Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Diocese of Boac

The BEC Commission is the community organisation arm of the Diocese of Boac. Its major program is the Basic Christian Communities, which started in 1982. Since then, it has formed many units with numerous members. Community Organizing Volunteers have been trained and these are also full-time Community Organizers who are fielded to different areas of the province covering 218 barangays (villages). The objective is to build Christian communities that are self-reliant in all aspects.

MACEC Marinduque Council for Environmental Concerns

MACEC is a church-based multi-sectoral organisation established under the auspices of the Diocese of Boac. Actions include the protection of resources as well as the victims of a series of mining disasters that immensely affected the poor. More recently, MACEC is engaged in its campaign for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.

AKKMA Aktibong Kababaihan ng Komunidad sa Mapulang Lupa

AKKMA is a grassroots women's organization in Mapulang Lupa and aims to holistically improve the living conditions of families in the project area focussing on Childcare; Health; Women's Rights; Income Projects; Children and Youth Program.

ECPAT End Children Prostitution, Children Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes

ECPAT Philippines aims to build a vibrant web of structures and mechanisms for enhancing programs and services for the promotion, protection, and fulfillment of children's rights. One of its main objectives is to generate public awareness of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and encourage the local citizenry to become responsive and proactive participants in its prevention and elimination. ECPAT Philippines has initiated training on child-friendly tourism, capacity building, and staff development and provided further training for law enforcement personnel and prosecutors. The group has also opened a temporary shelter for girl victims of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

KEC Kariton Empowerment Center

is an NGO named after a wooden cart that street families push around by day to gather recyclable waste and by night to serve as shelter. Referring to Mk. 7:28 and Mt. 15:27, "kariton" also means for the "crumbs" people are willing to share together with partners and beneficiaries, the street families of Metro Manila. KEC aims at the rehabilitation and empowerment of these street families by helping them organize into a self-help group (cooperative livelihood), and enable them to address more creatively and responsibly their situation.

TCD The Tribal Center for Development Foundation

is an Infanta-based NGO working with the IPs and other civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Philippines in protecting their rights, supporting their sustainable livelihood practices, and implementing the IP education. TCD is in partnership with the Samahan ng mga Katatubong Agta/Dumagat na Ipinagtatangol at Binabka ang Lupaing Ninuno (SAGIBIN-LN), a broad federation of Agta communities in Quezon province which is in the forefront of securing the Agta's ancestral domain claims.

Research Question

Research Question - Dominik Hammerl

Kaliwa Dam and indigenous rights: What could the project mean for the Dumagat-Remontado, and what alternative does the Japanese project offer?

The water supply of Metro Manila has been a major challenge for the Philippine government for many years. The Kaliwa Dam is planned as an additional source of water for the fast-growing metropolitan area. From the government's point of view, the project is an important step to secure the water supply for the future. However, for the indigenous population, a different question arises: **How much should the development of a city cost if it puts the homes and lives of other people at risk?**

The Kaliwa Dam is located in the Sierra Madre in Quezon Province. The area is important for nature and is also home to indigenous communities. For these communities, the forest is much more than just nature. It is an important part of their daily lives. It provides food, water, medicinal plants, and other resources. The land is also closely connected to their history, traditions, and cultural identity. Because of this, the Kaliwa Dam is not seen by the affected people as just an infrastructure project. For them, it is about whether they will still be able to live on their land and continue their traditional way of life. In our conversations with members of the indigenous communities, it became clear that they are not generally against development or progress. They understand that Metro Manila needs a reliable water supply and why the government is looking for a solution. At the same time, they told us that they are not willing to give up their home, their livelihood, and their living environment for this project.

For many of them, the important question is therefore not whether development should happen, **but how it should happen**. They want to know if there is another solution that can provide enough water for Metro Manila while also protecting their homeland.

The perspective of the indigenous population

This point is important because the opposition to the Kaliwa Dam could easily be seen as a general rejection of development. However, our conversations with members of the communities showed a different picture. The people understand that Metro Manila needs water and that a reliable water supply is important for millions of people. Their opposition is not against development itself. Instead, they are against a solution where they would have to carry a large part of the negative consequences. For the affected communities, these consequences could include the loss of land, their living environment, and places that are important to their culture. They see the landscape as part of their identity and as something that should be protected for future generations.

Another important issue is the process used to get the communities' approval for the project. Under Philippine law, indigenous communities must be informed about projects on their ancestral land and must give their **Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)**. However, critics of the Kaliwa Dam have raised concerns about this process. Representatives of the Dumagat-Remontado reported that they did not receive enough information and that there was pressure on some members of the communities. There were also reports of possible payments or bribery.

Another point of conflict is the question of whether all affected communities actually agreed to the project. Government representatives stated that all six affected groups had given their consent. However, representatives of the indigenous population reported that at an earlier FPIC meeting, five of the six communities had voted against the construction of the dam. This situation has also caused conflicts within the Dumagat-Remontado communities. The disagreement is not only about the dam but has also created divisions between people who belong to the same communities. For the indigenous population, this is especially painful because not only their land and way of life are at risk, but also the unity of their communities.

Is there an alternative?

The discussion about the Kaliwa Dam is especially interesting because another solution has already been proposed. The Japanese company Global Utility Development Corporation (GUDC) first presented a proposal for a **Kaliwa Intake Weir** in 2009 and brought it up again in 2019. Unlike the Kaliwa Dam, the Intake Weir would not be a large dam with a large reservoir. It would be a much smaller structure that would take water from the river. The proposal includes a weir about seven metres high, a 16-kilometre tunnel, and a water treatment plant. The planned capacity is around **550 million litres of water per day**.

For the Dumagat-Remontado, this alternative is interesting because it could improve the water supply of Metro Manila while having a smaller impact on their land. During our conversations, members of the communities told us that they would be more willing to accept a water supply project if it protected their homeland and livelihoods. The discussion should therefore not only be about the question: **“Kaliwa Dam – yes or no?”** Instead, we should ask whether Metro Manila’s water supply can be secured in another way that also respects the rights and way of life of the indigenous population.

Conclusion

From the perspective of the Dumagat-Remontado, the Kaliwa Dam is not only about water. It is also about their land, their livelihood, and their cultural identity. The people are not generally against development. They want a solution that provides better protection for their home and their rights. They are especially concerned about the FPIC process and the divisions that it has caused within their communities. The Japanese proposal for a Kaliwa Intake Weir could offer a smaller and less harmful alternative.

In the end, the Kaliwa Dam is not only about how Metro Manila can get enough water. It is also about **who has to pay the price for this water supply and who has the right to decide what happens to the affected land**.

Research Question - Greta Maria Gunsch

Survival strategy versus plastic deluge: Why vulnerable households rely on the Tingi culture of Sari-Sari stores and Its resulting ecological consequences in urban spaces

During our four-week exposure programme (Lern-Einsatz) in the Philippines in 2026—specifically during the Metro Manila Experience and the Contrast Tour—the social and infrastructural fault lines of the urban environment became distinctly visible. Both in densely populated settlements such as Caloocan City and across rural communities in Quezon Province, so-called sari-sari stores characterize the local cityscape. These family-run micro-retail outlets constitute the economic backbone of an entrenched consumption pattern: the tingi culture, referring to the retail distribution of commodities in fractional, unit-level quantities.

When severe typhoons triggered widespread flash floods across metropolitan Manila during our stay, the remarkable community solidarity was shadowed by an acute ecological bottleneck: municipal drainage corridors were extensively obstructed by buoyant accumulations of single-use, multilayer composite packaging (sachets), paralyzing standard stormwater drainage. This divergence prompted the central inquiry of this paper: *Which socioeconomic constraints perpetuate reliance on the tingi culture among low-income households, and what systemic ecological externalities emerge within urban environments as a result?*

The Tingi culture as a rational coping mechanism

Participant observation with host families illuminated the underlying microeconomic rationale of this procurement behavior. Forward-looking household provisioning through bulk purchasing in formal supermarkets proves unfeasible within the parameters of the informal sector. While the statutory minimum wage across Metro Manila remains largely restricted to formal contractual labor, informal day labor is defined by volatile, insecure earnings. The indigenous Filipino adage “isang kahig, isang tuka” (literally: “one scratch, one peck”—living hand-to-mouth) encapsulates this direct dependence of consumption on immediate cash flow. After deducting fixed daily overheads, households retain marginal cash balances, necessitating a strictly demand-oriented procurement restricted to provisions essential for the impending meal or day.

The product portfolios of sari-sari stores correspond precisely to these liquidity constraints. Basic consumer goods are dominated by sachet packaging:

- Single-serve instant coffee preparations (3-in-1 formulations),
- Minimal quantities of cooking oil packaged for single culinary preparations,
- 10 ml sachets of shampoo and hair conditioners,
- Pre-portioned allotments of powdered detergents, condiments, and single cigarettes.

The procurement of these micro-volumes reflects a rational survival calculus rather than an absence of environmental consciousness. Upfront capital constraints preclude bulk acquisitions, even if larger quantities offer lower unit costs. Furthermore, these kiosks serve an indispensable social stabilization function: through the informal listahan ledger, predominantly female proprietors extend uncollateralized, interest-free credit rooted in communal trust. This tangible manifestation of reciprocal assistance (bayanihan) mitigates acute economic distress where institutional safety nets remain absent.

Ecological Disparities and Waste Management Bottlenecks

The structural crisis of this model stems from the material transition of consumer packaging. Whereas historical tingi exchanges utilized bulk dispensers, reusable vessels or biodegradable materials,

contemporary sachets consist of multilayer laminates composed of bonded polymers and aluminum foils.

Within dense urban spaces, this material profile encounters critical structural barriers:

- **Technical and economic Non-Recyclability:** Separating bonded polymer-aluminum composite layers is economically unviable and technically prohibitive under existing municipal recycling regimes.
- **Exclusion from informal recovery value chains:** Informal waste reclaimers (waste pickers), who depend on tradeable commodities like PET plastics or scrap metals, derive no economic value from damaged sachets, leaving them discarded in the environment.
- **Infrastructural deficits:** Irregular, highly concentrated informal settlements prevent municipal waste collection vehicles from providing regular localized services.

Consequently, non-biodegradable laminates steadily accumulate across the urban landscape. During tropical storm surges, clogged drainage infrastructure prompts swift effluent backflows into residential areas. This exposure significantly amplifies public health vulnerabilities, notably waterborne infectious pathogens such as leptospirosis.

The Poverty Penalty Paradox and Conclusion

From a developmental perspective, the sachet economy illustrates the structural mechanism of the poverty penalty: evaluated on an equivalent volume or weight basis, marginalized households pay disproportionately higher unit prices for micro-packaged commodities compared to affluent consumers purchasing bulk goods in supermarket chains. While multinational fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) corporations extract substantial profit margins from this high-volume micro-retail segment, downstream externalities—encompassing collection liabilities, environmental degradation, and public health costs—are transferred onto underfunded local government units and marginalized populations.

The *tingi* culture and sari-sari stores demonstrate the remarkable adaptability and communal solidarity of the Filipino population. Concurrently, the operational model encounters rigid planetary and spatial boundaries. Sustainable remediation cannot rely on moralizing appeals for individual abstention targeted at vulnerable populations. Structural interventions are required: living wages, the systemic integration of informal neighborhoods into municipal solid waste master plans, and enforceable Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation to mandate affordable, standardized reuse and refill infrastructure at the community level.

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Research Question - DI Karin Svozil

The vegetation of the Philippines

The vegetation of the Philippines is among the most biodiverse and diverse in the world. This is primarily due to the tropical climate, the numerous islands, and the varying altitudes—ranging from coastal plains to mountain ranges.

General characteristics

The Philippines are located in the tropics and have a year-round warm, humid climate. As a result, the vegetation grows lush and evergreen. Many plants are endemic, meaning they occur only there. Strong solar radiation and frequent rainfall promote dense plant growth.

Tropical rainforests

A large part of the natural vegetation consists of tropical rainforests. These forests have a multi-layered structure and are characterized by tall trees (15–80m) such as Eucalyptus, Norfolk Island pine, American mahogany, evergreen conifers, etc., as well as lianas and epiphytes.



multi-layered structure



Typical tree species are dipterocarps, which can grow especially tall. In these forests, you can also find many ferns, orchids, and palms.. Biodiversity is huge, both plants and animals



Coasts: These special plants are adapted to salty water and protect the coastlines from erosion and storm surges. Mangroves are also important habitats for fish, crabs and many bird species.

- ☐ Mangrove forests grow along the Savannas and Grasslands
- ☐ In some drier regions, there are **grasslands and savannas**. These are often created by human activities like slash-and-burn farming or agriculture. Here, grasses and scattered trees or shrubs dominate.



Mountain Vegetation

In higher altitudes, the vegetation changes significantly. There are so-called cloud forests, where it is cooler and wetter. Mosses, ferns, and smaller trees characterize these landscapes. As the altitude increases, the trees get shorter, and the vegetation becomes lower and denser.

Human Impact

The original vegetation of the Philippines has been heavily changed by humans. Deforestation, agriculture, and urbanization have destroyed large parts of the rainforests. Today, many forests only exist in protected areas. At the same time, programs for reforestation and nature conservation are being carried out.

Medicinal Plants of the Philippines:

The Philippines are rich in traditional plant medicine (the "Herbolaryo" tradition). Many plants have been used there for centuries, and some are even officially recognized by the Department of Health. Many of these plants are part of the officially recognized "DOH 10 Medicinal Plants" (recommended by the Philippine Department of Health). They are used traditionally and are increasingly being studied by scientists. <https://www.rnpedia.com/nursing-notes/community-health-nursing-notes/herbal-medicine-plants-approved-doh/>

I was looking to expand my research on medicinal plants in the Philippines, but then we were showed to Linggwehi, which I choose now as my topic.

LINGGWEHI

leaves from the forest as a form of
communication: Marvin C. Astroveza
OCSEAN PHILIPPINES



Deciphering:

In ancient times, our ancestors used leaves from their ancestral lands as a means of communication. This tradition is known as Linggwehi. Each leaf was assigned a specific meaning, and different combinations of leaves and branches conveyed various messages. A pictorial dictionary exists for this purpose.

The Agta are descendants of the Negrito population that migrated between 35,000 and 60,000 years ago. They are hunter-gatherers and lived in harmony with nature. The Sierra Madre is home to 16 Agta groups, stretching from north to south through eastern Luzon. They call themselves "Agta," which means "human" in their native language.



Deciphering (Examples):

- Narra leaf (Asana) – “Sana ang” – “I hope that you...” (Pronoun)
- Fern leaf (Pako) – “Pangako mo ngayong” – “Promise me that this...” (Determiner)
- Gabi leaf (Gabi ayiyong) – “...night you will...” (Pronoun/Auxiliary verb)
- Tipyedin leaf (Tupadin) – “Keep your word...” (Pronoun/Noun)

The Tus served to point out the correct path during hunting trips and travels in the mountains.

It was also used as a warning for others entering a territory or a specific area. Further more, it serves a vital function within Linggwehi: through the Tus, the reader can determine the sender's direction, whether they are nearby or far away, and—should they have departed—when they intend to return. Mama (betel nut) symbolizes love and peace. If the reader does not chew the Mama or Nganga, it means they do not accept the offer contained in the sender's message.

The knotted rope serves to indicate the sender's return to the reader. Five knots mean that the sender will return to the community on the fifth day.

The stone prevents the leaves from falling apart or being blown away by the wind. If the stone is missing, there is a risk of confusion for the reader.

There are many other meanings and warnings, but this will be to much for this topic at the moment.



Conclusion

The vegetation of the Philippines is extremely diverse and ecologically significant. From dense rainforests and mangroves to mountain forests, the country offers a wide range of habitats. Despite heavy human impact, protecting this unique plant life remains an important task.

Research Question - Lisa Weingartsberger

Special interest: Political dissatisfaction and political dynasties in the Philippines

How can we explain why political dynasties and established elites in the Philippines continue to hold significant power despite political dissatisfaction?

During our Kapintig, I became increasingly interested in how people in the Philippines view politics and government. In conversations with the local Kapintigs, socially engaged people and other people living in the Philippines I often encountered a clear sense of dissatisfaction with both the current and previous governments. Corruption and the power of political families were particularly criticized. At the same time, these very families have been shaping the political landscape for decades.

The Philippines is formally a democratic presidential republic with a directly elected president, a bicameral parliament and a separation of powers. In practice, however, political power is highly concentrated in the hands of certain families and elites. Political dynasties can hold positions at local, regional and national levels across several generations. The 2022 elections particularly highlighted this dynamic: Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, became president, while Sara Duterte, daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, known for his “War on Drugs”, became vice president.

And this is exactly what made me wonder: If people are dissatisfied with the political system and those in government, why do they continue to elect the same families and political elites?

Why do political elites remain in power?

In many conversations with socially engaged people involved in the projects, our local Kapintig colleagues and the IPDI coordinators, I was looking for answers. Of course, this is a complex question that is also relevant to political science and sociology. The following is a summary of some of the explanations that emerged from these conversations.

One possible explanation is a certain degree of **resignation**. If people feel that “they are all the same anyway”, elections are not necessarily perceived as a choice between genuinely different political alternatives. In that case, it becomes less about who has the best political programme and more about who people feel they can live with or rely on.

Political decisions are also not always based solely on political beliefs. Especially for people with little financial security, **concrete and immediate benefits** can play an important role. Support in difficult situations, financial assistance, employment opportunities or other forms of help can have a much more immediate impact on everyday life than a long-term political programme. If people also feel that all politicians are corrupt or primarily interested in themselves anyway, it may seem understandable to at least accept whatever immediate benefit is available.

Another factor is that political dynasties have an enormous **structural advantage**. Someone who comes from a well-known political family already has a name, contacts, financial resources, political experience and an established network. The family may have been well known in a particular community or region for decades. New candidates have to build this recognition and these relationships from scratch. This makes political competition unequal from the very beginning.

Personal and family relationships also play a role. Political families are not necessarily perceived as one single unit. Younger family members in particular may be seen as individuals in their own right, even though they come from a well-known political family. As a result, someone may genuinely support an individual member of a political dynasty without automatically agreeing with the family’s entire political history or legacy.

There is also a kind of cycle: those who already hold political power have greater access to resources and networks. These resources can then be used to secure further support. This makes it even more difficult for other candidates to establish a realistic alternative in the first place.

“Toxic Resilience”

One term we heard from our Kapintigs and the IPDI coordinators that has stayed with me in this context was **“toxic resilience.”** It referred to the observation that people can become accustomed to difficult or unjust conditions and learn to live with them rather than continuing to believe that they can fundamentally change.

I would by no means apply this idea to “Filipinos” in general. On the contrary, we also experienced a great deal of political engagement, criticism and solidarity. Nevertheless, the idea that resilience can also have a downside. When corruption, inequality or the concentration of political power persist over a long period of time, they can become somewhat normalized: people know that something is not right, but they may no longer expect it to change.

A personal experience that challenged me

This contradiction became particularly clear to me through one family we met. The family was socially engaged and actively supported other people. At the same time, they supported Duterte and his political family.

I found this combination difficult to understand. Duterte represents a form of politics associated with serious human rights violations and his so-called “War on Drugs”. At the same time, some of the people we spoke to perceived his prosecution as unjust. One argument was essentially: “Everyone is bad – so why is he the only one being prosecuted?”

For me, this reflected less a straightforward approval of violence or corruption and more a deep distrust of political and international institutions. If people feel that the political system is fundamentally unfair and that some elites always get away with things, the prosecution of one particular political figure can also be perceived as selective and unjust.

What do I take away from this?

The more I thought about it, the less convincing I found the simple explanation that “people vote for these families because they support them.” Political decisions are obviously shaped by many more factors.

They are influenced by personal relationships and loyalties, but also by financial dependencies, concrete support in everyday life, familiar names and established networks. Resignation and the feeling that there is no genuinely better alternative also play a role. At the same time, established political families have a structural advantage because of the resources they possess, allowing them to reproduce their political power over and over again.

Perhaps this was exactly the contradiction that occupied me most during my time in the Philippines: People can be highly critical of the political system while at the same time remaining part of the structures they criticize. Not necessarily because they fail to recognize these contradictions, but because they may lose hope that things can actually change. When people experience over a long period of time that little changes in their living conditions despite elections, new governments and political promises, they may eventually develop the feeling that it does not really make a difference who they vote for.

For me, this leaves one question above all: How can political change emerge when people are dissatisfied but at the same time feel that there is no real alternative?

Belief on the Philippines

Firstly I want to state that this essay only reflects my very narrow slice of perception during my time on the, in themselves very diverse, Philippines, and is therefore subject to only first-hand encounters I have had with individuals.

Given that belief is something very personal and differs from person to person, there is simply no way of generalizing this topic. This essay is to be viewed as a collection of all sorts of individual beliefs which differ from Austrian beliefs or mannerisms thereof, no matter how widely spread they actually are on the Philippines.

Metro Manila/Tagalog People

Prayer plays an important role in daily life. Before breakfast, lunch and dinner, one person is selected to thank God in the name of the whole group for the food which they are about to receive.

Rosaries are widespread in all forms of transportation, and more than one driver is seen to touch their rosary before an intersection or at the beginning of a long trip. On Marinduque Island, we also witnessed our fellow travellers praying the rosary for a safe journey.

In some churches there are statues that one can touch in the hopes of a blessing, miracle or cure of illness. The most impressive of these statues is the Black Nazarene in Quiapo Church, where due to the high quantity of believers it is necessary to get in line in order to touch the feet of this pitchblack-skinned Jesus Christ.

The Filipinos we encountered were all very open to originally non-Christian, supernatural beliefs. Zodiac signs and Astrology are very popular among the young Filipinos. I myself brought with me the mythical belief of reading the "Runes", signs engraved into wooden sticks originating in northern Europe before Christianity became the main religion there. With much interest, a Kapintig member read his runes, staying open minded.

The Agta Tribe

Due to their differing way of life, the Agta People, an indigenous group of the Sierra Madre coastal region, have their own set of beliefs, even though most of the people of the particular tribe we were guests at were Christians. It is believed that spirits exist on a different plain of existence, a world of opposites, coming out at night and living in the trees, the rocks and the rivers.

It is very important for the reader of this essay to understand that these entities are not something the tribespeople "believe" in, as one does in zodiac signs, but that they are a very rare, yet real encounter for them, with stories being told how grandparents witnessed these spirits, and some Agta people even telling us they met the spirits themselves.

Spirits are believed to be invisible, though, right before falling asleep, one might see or hear the spirits. Very rarely, they can be encountered when awake, usually during night time, although this will for the most part not happen more often than once in a person's lifetime. Some spirits are regarded as being malicious, creating the illusion of pathways into the forests for wanderers to get lost in the dark. Treating the spirits with respect will prevent such occurrences from happening. One such way of showing respect is through excusing oneself when leaving the house at night, warning the spirits that a human is about to step into their domain.

Conclusion and Thoughts

What I found to be particularly interesting were the similarities of European folklore to the spiritual beliefs of the Agta people. Both on this part of the Philippines and, for example, old German mythology, there is a set of specific rules that apply when meeting the spirits, for example, not eating any of the food the spirits offer. The amazing part is- these sets of rules, from different continents, different environments, even different time periods, are virtually the same.

So before rolling our eyes at superstitions*, we need to take a look at what we have done to our own spirits. If they exist, (or have existed at some point, which countless folklore tales suggest) they are creatures thriving inside of intact ecosystems, which are becoming smaller and scarcer by the day in Austria and also, as a matter of fact, on the Philippines.

But who knows? Maybe someday, when ecosystems are restored, nature is being protected and humans are finally living as one with all of creation, the spirits will come back. It would surely not kill us to try.

*Note: in German, the word for superstition and misbelief are the same, "Aberglaube", meaning that no superstition ever can be true.

Research Question - Stefanie Erkner

Research question: How do Filipinos manage to be happy despite difficult circumstances, and what lessons can we apply to Austria?

When we think of the Philippines, we picture white beaches, numerous islands with crystal-clear water, warm tropical weather, exotic fruits, rice fields, palm trees with coconuts, jungles, mountains, and volcanoes.

But this is only one side of the Philippines. On the other hand, there is heavy traffic, resulting in significant exhaust emissions. Some people wear masks to avoid inhaling these harmful fumes. These emissions not only harm the health of Filipinos but also cause air pollution, which in turn has a negative impact on nature and the environment. Furthermore, the vast amount of waste—combined with a lack of knowledge regarding waste separation and environmental conservation—poses another problem. The organization MACEP advocates for nature and environmental protection and works to educate the Filipino people. We visited the organization, learned about their conservation efforts, and had the opportunity to plant mangroves. Social inequality is stark in the Philippines, a reality clearly visible in Manila. On one side, there are massive shopping malls; on the other, there are people living and sleeping on the streets, struggling with food scarcity, surviving by collecting trash, or living in cramped, tiny apartments. Organizations exist to support these people. We spent a morning assisting one such organization, helping people collect trash and visiting slum areas where people live on the streets. We spent one night with a host family that had little food and lived in extremely cramped quarters. A visit to an indigenous community gave us insight into their simple way of life and daily routine; they build their shelters using forest materials and live off what nature provides, with just enough space inside to sleep. Cooking is done over the fire, and "showering" takes place in the river.

Those who have the opportunity go abroad to work in order to earn more money and improve their standard of living. Higher wages allow them to provide financial support to their families back in the Philippines. The money is used to purchase food and larger homes, and to provide their children with better education and medical care. The greatest challenge involved is family separation, as family holds immense importance for Filipinos. They often experience loneliness or homesickness, and working abroad can mean that families do not see each other for years. This alters daily life and the way children are raised. Working abroad involves learning a new language, customs, ways of life, and culture—factors that can influence the family's lifestyle.

The Philippines is located in a region particularly prone to natural disasters. Typhoons frequently sweep across the country, bringing strong winds and torrential rain that cause flooding and landslides. These events destroy houses, roads, and sometimes entire villages, forcing people to abandon their homes and relocate to other areas. Rising sea temperatures and ecosystem changes make fishing more difficult, impacting the diet and income of coastal communities. Droughts, heavy rainfall, and higher

temperatures can destroy crops, driving up food prices and causing farmers to lose their livelihoods. Due to its tectonic location and proximity to the Pacific Ring of Fire, the country frequently experiences earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis. Many people lose their possessions—as well as family members, friends, and acquaintances—to these natural disasters.

Despite these challenging living conditions, Filipinos remain smiling, helpful, hospitable, and optimistic, and they love living in the Philippines.

This is reflected in the mottos by which Filipinos live.

„Never give up – never surrender“

„Time is gold – Time is very important“

„Believe in yourself and always pray and never give up“

„In everything you do put God first“

„Live life to the fullest“

„Live simple and serve much for the poor people“

„You have to go to the storm to get a rainbow in the end“

„You only live once, but when you live it right one is enough“

„To seize the day“

My interviews and conversations with Filipinos revealed that faith, religion, and family are of great importance to them, providing support during difficult times. Despite the challenging conditions in the Philippines, most of the people I met and spoke with enjoy living there. They said they love living there because the people are hospitable, wonderful, and always wear a smile. Furthermore, their families are there; they were born and raised there, and thus remain connected to their roots. Filipinos love their homeland and culture, as well as the natural landscape and the food.

We can learn from this that we should spend more time with our families. Through a sense of cohesion and community—within our neighborhoods and among friends and acquaintances—we can reduce the prevalence of mental health issues such as loneliness, depression, and burnout. Less selfishness and more kindness and openness would improve social coexistence in Austria. Instead of focusing on stinginess and prestige, we should once again appreciate the little things in life. After all, despite our prosperity and having everything we need, many Austrians remain dissatisfied. It is therefore crucial that we recognize how fortunate we are, appreciate our standard of living, and take good care of our nature and environment.