

## Filipin@ Communities in Austria: Barrio Fiesta sa Vienna 2013

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On July 22, 2013, the Austrian-based Filipin@<sup>4</sup> communities got together on ATV Liesing Sportplatz in order to celebrate the annual Barrio Fiesta in Vienna. In the Philippines, the term *barrio* describes all rural sub-units of municipalities that lie outside the *poblacion* (municipal center) as well as any sub-units of some smaller cities (Romani, 1956). As Ramon Reyes, a Philippine native, described during the event, *barrio fiesta* could be translated as ‘neighborhood party’:

*In the Philippines, people love to gather together to enjoy these festivals that celebrate anything from weddings to holidays. No matter who you are or where you come from, everyone is welcome as a guest and active participant. (Ramon Reyes quoted in “Barrio Fiesta in Vienna”, 2011)*

As mentioned in this quote, there are various occasions for such get-togethers. In the case of the Viennese Barrio Fiesta, it is to commemorate the Philippine Independence from Spain in 1898. According to the Council of Filipino Associations in Austria, which organizes the event in cooperation with the Philippine Embassy, the Fiesta in the Austrian capital is supposed to be the biggest one outside the Philippines. With approximately 100 participating organizations and almost 6,000 participants from all over Austria, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic, Germany, and Italy, this seems likely.

The Filipin@’s account for 12,025 registered persons in Austria, representing the biggest group of South-East Asian migrants. Official data of *Statistik Austria* (2011a) shows that in 2011, 7,522 persons who held an Austrian citizenship but were born

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3 Picture 1, 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10 in the series of fotos at the end of the article were taken by Christian Namiss, who is a core team member and the webmaster of the „Zentrum für österreichische und philippinische Kultur und Sprache“ (<http://www.zentrum-oep.at/>). All other pictures were taken by the authors.

4 The term Filipin@ refers to male and female persons of Philippine origin.

in the Philippines (2,160 male and 5,326 female) and 4,506 (1,895 male and 2,611 female) Philippine citizens were registered in Austria (second-generation not included). The strong presence of female migrants is related to the international migration of (mainly female) Philippine nursing staff to Austria since the 1960s. Later on, family reunification as well as marriage-related migration had an impact. With 8,517 persons, the majority of the 12,025 so-called *Pinoy*s<sup>5</sup> are living in Vienna (Statistik Austria, 2011b). For most of the Philippine migrants, social ties and networks play a vital role in their occupational and private life, which is also reflected in the high number of Philippine associations and organizations. The strong organization in associations is a quite specific criterion of Filipin@ migrants compared with other South-East Asian communities in Austria. While some of the organizations stand for regions of origin of their members (e.g. Igorot-Cordillera Austria) or target areas (e.g. Philippine Association in Niederösterreich [Lower Austria]), others represent interest groups (e.g. Filipino Basketball in Wien [Vienna]; Philippine Nurses Association-Austria) or religious organizations (e.g. Vienna Christian Center – Filipino Fellowship). According to an information website for Filipino Overseas Workers (OFW), there are

*more than fifty (50) organizations, clubs and associations of Filipinos or Filipino-Austrians – organized along either regional, ethnic, professional or religious lines, many of which maintain excellent cooperative and consultative ties with the Embassy and are actively supporting the Embassy in projecting a positive image of the Philippines through regular activities and projects. (Pinoy OFW, 2011)*

Hector Pascua (2012) summarizes the essential function of these various groups and the Barrio Fiesta in particular as follows:

*These wonderful occasions bring us together. We need to set aside our differences and think as one people, one nation! This sense of unity, of having common heritage should continue to keep Filipinos in Austria together. It is this sense of community that will allow us to face the tremendous challenges confronting our lives as Filipinos living in a foreign land.*

Considering the importance of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, it is hardly surprising that the event started with a field mess celebrated by a Philippine priest and accompanied by a church choir. Subsequently, a big parade took place where every participating organization presented itself as eye-catching as possible, since the best parade performance was awarded. Moreover, there were competitions honoring the best booths, the best regional ethnic costume, and the best dance performance. One

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<sup>5</sup> *Pinoy* is a commonly used word in Philippine language for Filipin@s outside and inside the Philippines. It is a term with a normally positive connotation.

of the fiesta's attractions was the food bazar where Philippine specialties such as pork barbecue, *halo-halo* (desert consisting of shaped-ice, evaporated milk, and sweet fruit and beans), or *balut* (duck embryo boiled in an eggshell) were served.

The large number of stalls with commercial interest, who expected to reach their target at the event, was especially astonishing. There were companies represented that directly support migrants' networks to their places of origin and families left-behind as money remittance services, tour and travel agencies as well as cargo-forwarding businesses. Filipin@ migrants play a vital role for the Philippine economy. Their money transfers from abroad – remittances – accounted for approximately 10 percent of the country's GDP in 2011 (World Bank, 2013). In 2009, the Austrian branch of the Philippine Metrobank had 7,000 registered clients, of which at least 90 percent were ethnic Filipin@s. Through this bank branch alone<sup>6</sup>, EUR 14.5 million were sent to the Philippines in 2008 in the course of 32,000 transactions.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, real investment firms and organizations that support development projects in the Philippines approached the migrants in their role as investors at the Barrio Fiesta. The Barrio Fiesta featuring such various attractions as traditional, contemporary, and – in Austria – rarely known Filipino cultural performances, information stands about 'transnational' commercial opportunities, and diverse palettes of food has become a highlight in the event calendar of the Filipin@ communities in Vienna and beyond. In addition to its original goals, which focused on showcasing Philippine culture and lifestyle, nowadays economic aspects play an important role as well. Stalls operated by mobile communication providers, travel and airline companies, money transaction services, or real estate companies are prominent features of Barrio Fiesta. Due to the joint efforts of the Council of Filipino Associations in Austria, the Embassy, and the involvement of many Filipin@ organizations, the festival has become a regular event, growing bigger year by year.

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6 There are two more Philippine banks operating in Vienna: PBC International Money Transfer (a subsidiary company of Philippine National Bank) and iRemit.

7 Data was obtained in an interview with the head of the Metrobank branch in the course of a field study (dealing with remittances of Filipin@ migrants in Vienna) by Bianca Gantner and Philip Weninger in May 2009.



The opening Catholic Mass of Barrio Fiesta celebrated by Fr. Mars Sahulga and a Filipino church choir is well attended although it starts at 11 a.m



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Thanks to the fine weather a huge crowd is enjoying Barrio Fiesta 2013.



Igorot Cordillera Austria: Winner of the best booth 2013. The Igorot are an indigenous community who have their origin in the mountainous regions on the islands of Luzon. The Igorot Cordillera Austria's aim is to practice and promote their cultural heritage, to serve as a forum for the Igorot community in Austria, to establish bonds to other Filipin@ organizations as well as to support Igorots in their home region ([www.igorot.at](http://www.igorot.at)).



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The food stalls offered Filipino specialties like pork barbecue as well as Austrian-Filipino 'fusion food' like Apfelstrudel-Malagkit (sticky rice apple pie).



The pupils of the "Paaralan sa Pasuguan - Schule in der Botschaft 2013" organized by the Philippine Embassy and the "Sentro ng Kultura at Wika ng Austria at Pilipinas - Zentrum für österreichische und philippinische Kultur und Sprache" are presenting a traditional folk dance.





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Less traditional - more commercial are the aims of stalls as shown above. Migrants should invest for their future return to the Philippines.

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There are cheap flights to the Philippines or travel agency vouchers offered.



Some organizations are fund raising for the less privileged on the Philippines. They are organizing projects in their home provinces. Babaylan Austria has donated a classroom in Batad Elementary School for example.

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