

## 2. Naga City

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# 2

## Naga City

This chapter describes the historical, geographical, and socioeconomic background of Naga City. The Bicol Region, which is in the southern most part of Luzon Island, is composed of six provinces. Naga City is located in the province of Camarines Sur. It is about 337 kilometers away from Metro Manila, and it takes around forty-five minutes to get there by airplane. As the plane approaches, 1,976-meter Mt. Isarog can be seen at the east end of the city, and the Naga River can be seen flowing through the city. Three plazas, Plaza Rizal, Plaza Quezon, and Plaza Quince Martirez, are set in the center of the city. People come to watch TV programs on a big screen, which is set up in one of the plazas, and older men gather in the shade of the plazas to talk. From dancing contests to political debates during elections, these plazas provide an arena for citizen activities. They are literally the center of the city. The biggest public market in the whole of southern Luzon stands nearby, and the plazas are surrounded by retail stores large and small, restaurants, and fast-food shops.

A considerable number of churches and schools also catch the eyes of tourists in the city. These indicate that Naga City has been the center of religion and education in the Bicol Region. Metropolitan Cathedral, the center of the Catholic Archdiocese of Caceres, is located in the city. Holy Rosary Minor Seminary was founded in the city in 1783. The largest religious festival in the region, the Peñafrancia fiesta, attracts many tourists every September. The city also has about seventeen college-level educational institutions in-

cluding old schools like Ateneo de Naga, the University of Nueva Caceres, and Colegio de Sta. Isabel.<sup>1</sup>

## History

Naga City is one of the oldest cities in the Philippines, having been founded in the early years of Spanish rule in the country. This rule began with the arrival in Cebu of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in 1565. The Naga area was occupied by Spaniards in 1576, a mere eleven years after Legazpi's arrival. Naga was renamed Nueva Caceres and became the center of administration and religion in the Bicol Region.<sup>2</sup>

What Norman G. Owen (1984) describes as “prosperity without progress,” the Bicol Region once enjoyed prosperity from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century because of the growth of the abaca industry. However, abaca production in the region had declined by the 1930s, and the Bicol Region became and continues to be one of the economically depressed areas of the Philippines. Nueva Caceres used to be one of the few centers of urbanization in the region, and this urbanization was basically promoted by two factors: the increasing number of Chinese merchants and the presence of the colonial bureaucracy. Owen writes,

In the middle years of the nineteenth century more merchants arrived in Kabikolan . . . The Chinese, too, whose presence in the region had been insignificant earlier, began to increase in number and importance. Camarines Sur counted just three Chinese in 1831, but ninety-five in 1863, by which time they had become the major shopkeepers in Nueva Caceres . . . Over the period 1870–1940, however, no commercial development in Kabikolan compared in significance with the rise of the Chinese in retail trade and produce-buying. (Owen 1984, pp. 184–85)

He also said,

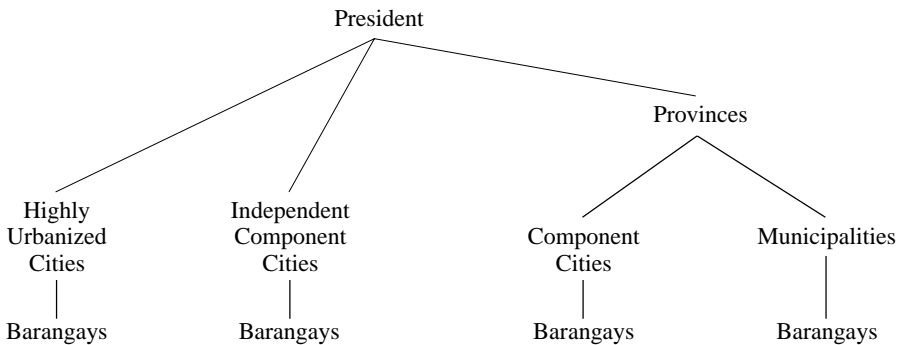
There were in the region only two candidates for the title “city”—Nueva Caceres and the multi-nuclear cluster centered on Legazpi. At the turn of the twentieth century Nueva Caceres had more than 10,000 inhabitants in its *poblacion* and nearly 8,000 more in nearby barrios. It was both the provincial capital and the seat of the Roman Catholic bishop; it housed government buildings, the cathedral and the bishop's place, a hospital, a seminary and secondary school for boys, and the region's only secondary school for girls, as well as a disproportionate share of the expanding colonial bureaucracy. The list of nineteenth-century alumni of the Seminario-Colegio reads like a veritable Who's Who of Bikol Church and State, suggesting the importance of Nueva Caceres as the educational center of the region. (Owen 1984, pp. 204–5)

Administratively, Nueva Caceres remained the provincial capital of Camarines Province although the province went through a number of divisions and integrations. When the Province of Ambos Camarines was split into the two provinces of Camarines Norte and Camarines Sur in 1919 under American colonial administration, the name Naga was restored, and the city became the capital of Camarines Sur. But it was downgraded to a municipality.

After Japanese occupation and independence from American rule, the Philippine Congress passed the Naga City Charter (Republic Act 305) and Naga was upgraded to a city in 1948. In 1955 Naga became independent of Camarines Sur. The mayor of the city remained a presidential appointee until 1959 when the first city mayoral election was held. Following enactment of the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act 7160), Naga City retained its status as an independent component city (Figure 2-1).<sup>3</sup>

In the national House of Representatives, Naga City shares a congressional district with other neighboring municipalities. Naga used to be a part of the first district of Camarines Sur (single seat) until the declaration of the martial law in 1972. Until then, Camarines Sur contained only two districts with one seat each. But during the period of the Interim Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly, 1978–84) under Marcos's martial law regime, the entire Bicol Region was integrated into a single district containing twelve seats. Afterwards, the whole of Camarines Sur was made into one district with four seats since congressional districts were established based on provinces during the time of the regular Batasang Pambansa (1984–86). With the 1987 congressional elections, Naga became part of the second district of Camarines Sur

Fig. 2-1. Local Government in the Philippines



Note: This chart excludes the National Capital Region and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

(single seat) with nine neighboring municipalities.<sup>4</sup> Following the end of the Marcos regime, Camarines Sur's congressional districts were redrawn into four.

### **Geography, Economy, and Society**

Naga City is spread over an area of 7,748 hectares of which 75.1 per cent was classified in 1995 as agricultural land and 24.9 per cent as residential and commercial land.<sup>5</sup> Although most of the city's area is classified as agricultural, 90 per cent of its household population of 126, 115 (23, 632 households) resides in the commercial and residential areas of the city (NSO 1995a). Naga City has twenty-seven barangays, of which only five are regarded as "upper barangay" meaning agricultural barangay. The other twenty-two barangays are located in the city center which occupies only 24.9 per cent of the entire area of the city<sup>6</sup> (Table 2-1).

In terms of population, Naga City is not among the biggest cities in the Philippines. As of 1995, Quezon City, the largest city in the Philippines, had a population of 1,989,419 and the City of Manila had 1,654,761 (NSO 1995b). This made Naga City a tenth their size. The city has not even reached the minimum required population of 200,000 to be classified as a highly urbanized city.<sup>7</sup> However, within the Bicol Region, Naga is the second biggest city after Legazpi City (NSO 1995a).

The main industry in Naga is commerce, especially wholesale and retail trading. Naga is the trade center not only for Camarines Sur but also for the entire Bicol Region. As of 1993 there were 3,408 establishments in wholesale and retail trading, of which 2,279 (66.9 per cent of total) were small scale with less than ten employees. The remaining 1,129 were larger scale with more than ten employees each. Ethnic Chinese dominate this sector as they do in other cities in the Philippines. They also have their Naga City Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The city's financial sector has also expanded in recent years. In 1988 there were 18 banks and 22 other financial institutions; by 1996 these had increased to 33 and 65 respectively (Naga 1997a).

Compared with commerce and finance, the city's manufacturing sector is not so prominent. Although there are three big drink-processing factories like Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, and San Miguel Beer, most of the sector is small-scale food processing, metalworking, furniture manufacturing, and autobody shops. There were only 378 establishments belonging to the manufacturing sector as of 1993.

Naga is also a media center. It has eighteen radio stations, split evenly

TABLE 2-1  
BARANGAYS OF NAGA CITY AS OF 1995

	Total Population	Household Population	Number of Households
Abella	5,740	5,740	1,043
Bagumbayan Norte	1,952	1,952	425
Bagumbayan Sur	5,544	5,531	1,071
Balatas	5,719	5,683	1,014
Calauag	6,707	6,686	1,209
Cararayan*	5,469	5,449	1,024
Carolina*	3,330	3,303	597
Conception Grande	7,598	7,597	1,432
Conception Pequeña	15,615	15,276	2,832
Dayandang	5,216	5,216	936
Del Rosario	5,021	5,021	1,005
Dinaga	741	741	146
Igualdad Interior	2,620	2,620	519
Lerma	2,363	2,363	411
Liboton	3,269	3,269	659
Mabolo	5,751	5,751	972
Pacol*	3,146	3,146	630
Panicuason*	1,366	1,153	214
Peñafrancia	5,644	5,631	1,024
Sabang	6,179	6,179	1,080
San Felipe	3,977	3,977	809
San Francisco ( <i>poblacion</i> )	1,483	1,478	318
San Isidro*	1,698	1,698	306
Santa Cruz	6,135	5,966	1,186
Tabuco	4,392	4,392	826
Tinago	3,721	3,721	738
Trianglo	6,576	6,576	1,206
Naga City total	126,972	126,115	23,632

Source: NSO (1995a, p. 39).

\* Upper barangays.

between nine AM and nine PM stations. There are seven television stations. And the city has around twelve local weekly newspapers, although the number increases rapidly during election campaigning and decreases sharply after elections since most of the media depend on the financing of politicians.

Naga has yet to reach the stage of full economic growth, although economic activity has expanded rapidly in recent years, and the city has done much better than other municipalities in the region. In terms of household income, the Bicol Region is a relatively less developed area of the Philippines. In 1991 the average urban household income in the region was 10,393 pesos, which was slightly below the national average (combined urban and rural) of

TABLE 2-2

TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES AND TOTAL AND AVERAGE PER CAPITA INCOME AND EXPENDITURE OF THE PHILIPPINES, BICOL REGION, AND CAMARINES SUR PROVINCE, 1991

	Total Number of Families	Income		Expenditure	
		Total (P1,000)	Ave. Per Capita (Peso)	Total (P1,000)	Ave. Per Capita (Peso)
Philippines	11,975,400	780,632,471	13,788	622,616,202	10,945
Urban	5,938,500	531,919,567	18,843	418,971,428	14,793
Rural	6,036,900	248,712,904	8,815	203,644,774	7,159
Bicol Region	823,709	32,802,650	8,115	27,932,440	6,860
Urban	250,200	12,815,888	10,393	10,800,756	8,755
Rural	573,500	19,986,762	7,121	17,131,684	6,033
Camarines Sur*	257,216	11,726,722	9,361	9,992,933	7,878

Source: NSCB (1995, Table 2.10A and Table 2.10B).

\* Combined urban and rural.

13,788 pesos and well below the national urban average of 18, 843 pesos (NSCB 1995, Table 2.10). Data for Naga alone is not available, but it is assumed to be rather better than the urban average for the Bicol Region, although it is not certain if it would reach the national urban average (Table 2-2).

Like other cities in the Philippines, Naga has a large number of urban poor. The total population of the city's urban poor in 1989 was around 5,500 households, which was 25 per cent of the entire population (Naga 1997a). But according to another assessment, the number of families who needed assistance from city government programs stood at 11,000 in 1995, which was more than 40 per cent of the entire population.<sup>8</sup> Many of these urban poor are immigrants from neighboring municipalities or provinces who are seeking jobs. As of 1990, 9 per cent of the entire population of Naga had come from other locales within the past five years and accounted for 1.5 per cent of the annual inflow of the population.

Turner (1982) studied the socioeconomic classes in urban areas of the Ilocos Region. He divided the classes into five strata: (1) landlords and property owners, (2) urban capitalists or businessmen, (3) marginal businessmen, (4) white-collar workers, and (5) manual workers. Naga's socioeconomy exhibits the same five levels of stratification. In terms of income, landlords, property owners, and urban capitalists belong to the rich class; white-collar workers and medium and small-scale businessmen form the middle class; and marginal businessmen and manual workers make up the lower-income class.

It is estimated that there are about twenty rich families in Naga who are big property owners in the city and neighboring municipalities or who are urban capitalists engaged in various kinds of business. The landlords and property owners are classified into two categories: owners of agricultural land and owners of commercial land and buildings. The most prominent are the owners of commercial land and buildings. Their properties are the most lucrative, especially those located around the plazas in the center of the city and they collect rents from the business establishments. Some property owners even manage universities on the land they own.

The urban capitalists for the most part engage in large-scale wholesale and retail trade. They also run hotels, restaurants, and movie theaters. Below them are the medium and small-scale businessmen who by and large are of Chinese descent.

The city's white-collar ranks are made up of medical doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers as well as teachers, government employees, and private sector employees who are commonly found in the urban areas of the Philippines. With its forty-two primary schools and thirteen secondary schools in addition to its seventeen college-level institutions, Naga supports a large number of teachers and a significant number of students (NSCB 1995, Table 9.1).

At the lower end of the economic ranks are the marginal businessmen and manual workers. They make up the market and street vendors, small-scale eatery owners, sari-sari store owners, watch and shoe repairers, drivers, construction laborers, and other kind of laborers.

Naga City, as indicated above, has a long history, a commerce-based economy, and typical Philippine urban social stratification. It is a very representative provincial Philippine city. The next chapter will discuss how this provincial city experienced change in political power.

## Notes

- 1 As of 1993. See NSCB (1995, Table 9.1).
- 2 For the history of Naga, see Abella (1954), O'Brien (1966), General et al. (1972), Realubit (1983), Gerona (1988), aside from Owen (1974, 1984, 1999).
- 3 The Local Government Code of 1991 classifies cities into two categories, i.e., a component city and a highly urbanized city. The first category consists of component cities and independent component cities. Independent component cities are those component cities which are independent of the province and whose charters prohibit their voters from voting for provincial elective officials (Sec. 451). Naga



is classified in an independent component city and has the same privileges as a highly urbanized city.

- 4 The other municipalities were Bombon, Calabanga, Camaligan, Canaman, Gainza, Magarao, Milaor, Ocampo, and Pili.
- 5 Geographical and socioeconomic data on Naga is from Naga (1999).
- 6 For histories of the barangays in Naga City, see Malanyaon (1997).
- 7 Local Government Code of 1991, Sec. 452 (a).
- 8 Data from the Urban Poor Affairs Office. Urban poor here means those who live in slum areas without any proper land title and need assistance from the city government. It does not mean those who belong to income groups under the poverty threshold.