

Challenges in Conservation and Preservation of Albay, Bicol, Philippines' Historic Sites and Structures

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Abstract: Historic sites and structures are tangible representations of the cultural heritage of a certain group of people that passed the tests of times. They may be valuable historical assets but could be threatened by modernization and economic progress hence, eventually demolished. The paper identified the issues and challenges experienced by the owners and or the Local Government Units on the conservation and preservation of the recognized historic sites and structures by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. The locale of the study is the province of Albay, Bicol Region in the Philippines. The descriptive qualitative was used as research design with the following data collection techniques: on-site field visits, Key Informant Interviews, and, content analysis. The “*NHCP Standards and Guidelines in Maintaining Historic Sites and Structures*” was used as basis for the identification of challenges in conservation and preservation. Results revealed that the 14 historic sites and structures are challenged by the vulnerability of the historic structures to natural calamities, costly maintenance to keep the structures in good physical condition, demands for economic development in the locale and the limited local laws enacted as the basis of government policies in the local government units to have them preserved and conserved. The recognized historic sites and structures exemplify the religiosity, bravery, and creativity of the people of the province.

Keywords: Historic Sites, Historic Structures, Preservation, Conservation

1. Introduction

Climate change, economic development, modernization in technology, and changing government policies are some factors that challenge the preservation and conservation of historic sites and structures [1-3]. These are due to the fast deterioration and worsening condition of the physical structures due to the wear and tear of the materials aggravated by climate change, the bias towards economic gains over the preservation of heritage, changing technological practices due to industrial modernization and government policies influenced by foreign relations and changing political climate.

In 1972, the World Heritage Convention, or “The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage”, took the initial steps in the preservation and conservation of heritage sites. Yet, 50 years after, the challenges faced by member countries continues,

which include poor management in terms of enactment of laws or, if ever, there are, the consistency in the implementation, issues on proper land use issues to mention a few [4].

One of the many challenges in the conservation and preservation of historic sites and structures- the climate change. It has affected many facets of life, including the difficulties it brought along management and protection of the historic structures. Adaptation was identified to be the most urgent measure in order to soften its impact. Certain strategies have been identified like measuring the extent of its impact, using spatial analysis for the assessment of risk and vulnerability among the historic structures to lessen the risk, including the identification of opportunities amidst the difficulties [5, 6].

The impact of climate change on the preservation and conservation of historic structures similarly overlaps with

several aspects like cultural significance, the potential use of the historic structures in the present context with reference to the rapid modernization in technology and demands in economic development, maintenance costs hence, owners and government agencies in-charge often opt to trade-offs [7, 8].

Aside from the rapid deterioration of the physical structures due to the exposure to changing climate and natural calamities, the lure to sacrifice them in lieu of economic development is likewise an issue. Maintenance of these historic structures proved to be costly; hence, some of the owners converted them into something which would generate income and transform them into active economic value in the end losing their historical and cultural significance [9, 10].

In some Western and Southeast Asian countries, the demand for economic development as a challenge to the preservation of historic sites and structures was converted into an opportunity. The carefully crafted preservation programs and projects were matched with culturally significant economic development policies and strategies as exemplified by heritage tourism [11-14].

With heritage tourism as a strategy for the preservation and conservation of historic sites and structures without economic development taking the back seat- cultural heritage has become the framework of sustainable development [15, 16].

The cultural heritage as a framework for economic

development highlights the importance of having policies to continuously protect historic sites and structures. The first step, therefore, necessitates the promotion of understanding of their significance for better appreciation thus, enacting laws in order to protect them [17-20].

While heritage tourism may address the issue of economic development as perceived threat in the preservation and conservation of historic sites and structures, converting it into an opportunity yet, it needs clarity in terms of defining the role between heritage tourism, and the local community. Interdependencies interplay among these multiple factors, such as the roles of stakeholders has a significant effect [21, 22].

The Province of Albay, Bicol Region, Philippines, has its share of historic sites and structures. They serve as reminders of the beliefs, courage, and creativity of its people. The 14 historic sites and structures recognized by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) represent the churches built as early as the 1500s, the centennial Catholic school established and managed by the Benedictine nuns, and the monuments glorifying the courage exhibited by the people resisting the colonization and monuments highlighting the creativity of the people including the monument symbolizing the artistry and love for the music of the people.

Albay as a province is divided into 3 districts where the 14 NHCP recognized historic sites and structures are located. The map shows their locations:



Source: www.google.com (modified with the inclusion of the actual locations of the identified historic sites and structures).

Figure 1. Map showing the locations of the NHCP recognized historic sites and structures.

Table 1. Outlines the significance of the NHCP recognized and structures.

Historic Sites and Structures	Historical Significance	Pictures
Parish of San Juan de Bautista	Established in 1604 during the Spanish colonization. Recognized by the NHCP in 2012 and by the National Museum in 2001.	
Angela Manalang Gloria House and Smith Bell and Company	Established in 1900 and became the residence of the first Filipino poet who wrote literary pieces in English. Office of the Smith Bell and Company during the American era. Recognized by the NHCP in 2007.	
Potenciano Gregorio Monument	Built-in 2005 and recognized by the NHCP on the same year in honor of the Bicolano musician who wrote " <i>Sarung Bangui</i> " (One Night). Built more than 60 years after his death.	
Legazpi-Albay Gulf Landing Monument	Recognized the success of the combined Filipino-American troops in liberating Albay from the Japanese troops. Built and recognized by the NHCP in 1998 to mark the 50th year after the landing of the American troops.	
Battle of Legazpi Monument	In recognition of the battle signifying the last stand of the people of Legazpi against the Americans and considered to be the bloodiest at that time. Built and given recognition as a historic site in 1965.	
Parish of St. Raphael the Arcangel	Constructed in 1834 during the Spanish era and exist until at present. Recognized as a historic structure in 1940.	
St. Agnes' Academy	The first Catholic school in Albay was established in 1912. Recognized by NHCP in 2012 during its centennial founding anniversary celebration.	
Parish of St. Gregory the Great	Built-in 1587 during the Spanish era. Recognized as historic structure in 2018.	

Historic Sites and Structures	Historical Significance	Pictures
Bicol Regional Training and Teaching Hospital	Built-in 1917 as a military reserve hospital, converted into a provincial hospital and now a regional training and teaching hospital. Recognized as historic structure in 1995.	
Parish of Our Lady of the Gate	Built-in 1773 during the Spanish era and recognized as a historic structure in 2008.	
Cagsawa Ruins	A Catholic church was destroyed during the 1814 Mt Mayon eruption but constructed in 1724. Recognized as a historic site in 2015.	
Parish of St. John the Baptist	Constructed in 1837 during the Spanish era. Recognized by NHCP in 2014 and by the National Museum in 2016.	
Gen. Simeon Ola Monument	Built-in 2003 in recognition of the bravery of the last general to surrender to the Americans.	
Parish of St. Michael the Arcangel	Constructed in 1649 during Spanish era. Recognized in 1950 by the Philippine Historical Committee.	

Considering the importance of these sites and structures in the culture and heritage of the people of Albay and Bicol in particular and the Filipinos in general, this paper identified the issues and challenges experienced by the owners and/or the Local Government Units (LGUs) on the conservation and preservation of the identified historic sites and structures with the “*NHCP Standards and Guidelines in Maintaining Historic Sites and Structures*” as basis. The issues and challenges identified may serve as the basis for the formulation of policies by the concern government agencies and the local government units.

2. Methods

The paper is descriptive qualitative with the purpose of documenting the issues and challenges in the conservation of historic structures in Albay, Bicol, Philippines as experienced by the owners and the local government units in-charge of the upkeep. It utilized on-site field visits, Key Informant Interviews, and content analysis as data collection techniques. Guided by the “*Standards and Guidelines in Maintaining Historic Sites and Structures*” of the National Historical Commission of the Philippines, issues, and challenges in the conservation of historic structures were identified. A total of 42 on-site field visits or 3 visits per historic site and structure were done in the span of 12 months or 1 year for the monitoring of the compliance to the

mandated maintenance works such as (a) inspection and documentation, (b) cleaning and housekeeping jobs, (c) repair and replacement, (d) removal of vegetal and weedy growths, (e) re-painting, (f) re-plastering, (g) repair and re-finishing, (h) preservative treatment, (i) pest control treatment, (j) waterproofing and ventilating, (k) corrective measures, and (l) building code requirements was done. Fourteen key informants were likewise interviewed, they represented either the owner, person in-charge of the maintenance and/or representatives of the concerned local government unit. Content Analysis was also done on the examination of the relevant documents.

3. Results

Issues and challenges identified as experienced by the owners and LGUs on the conservation and preservation of the identified historic sites and structures.

As specified in the “*Standards and Guidelines in Maintaining Historic Sites and Structures*” issued by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines, the mandated activities for the preservation and conservation of historic sites and structures are (a) inspection and documentation, (b) cleaning and housekeeping jobs, (c) repair and replacement, (d) removal of vegetal and weedy growths, (e) re-painting, (f) re-plastering, (g) repair and re-finishing, (h) preservative treatment, (i) pest control

treatment, (j) waterproofing and ventilating, (k) corrective measures, and (l) building code requirements was done.

The 14 identified historic sites and structures can be grouped into 3- the (a) churches, (b) monuments, (c) other historic buildings (residence, school, hospital and ruins). The churches include the Parish of San Juan de Bautista, St. Raphael the Arcangel, Parish, Parish of St. Gregory the Great, Our Lady of the Gate Parish, Parish of St. John the Baptist and Parish of St. Michael the Arcangel. Meanwhile, the monuments are the Monument of Potenciano Gregorio,

Legazpi-Albay Gulf Landing Monument, Monument of the Battle of Legazpi, and Monument of Gen. Simeon Ola, Angela and for residence, the Manalang-Gloria house/Smith Bell and Company, for the school St. Agnes' Academy, for the hospital the Bicol Regional Teaching and Training Hospital and for the ruins- the Cagsua Ruins.

Table 2 summarizes the compliance of the NHCP identified historic sites and structures on the mandated maintenance works based on the standards and guidelines set.

Table 2. Historic sites and structures compliance to the NHCP mandated maintenance works.

Mandated maintenance work	Churches	Monuments	Others (residence, school, hospital and ruins)
inspection and documentation	compliant	Compliant but not done on regular basis	*built when building code was not a requirement yet.
cleaning and housekeeping jobs	compliant	compliant	Compliant
repair and replacement	compliant	Not applicable	Compliant
removal of vegetal and weedy growths	compliant	compliant	Compliant
re-painting	compliant	Not applicable	Compliant
re-plastering	compliant	Not applicable	Compliant
repair and re-finishing	compliant	Not applicable	Compliant
preservative treatment	compliant	Not applicable	Compliant
pest control treatment	compliant	Not applicable	Compliant
waterproofing and ventilating	compliant	Not applicable	Compliant
corrective measures	compliant	Not applicable	**applicable for the residence, school and hospital but not for the ruins
building code requirements	*built when building code was not a requirement yet.	Not applicable	Compliant

Data show, generally, the NHCP identified historic sites and structures are compliant to the mandated maintenance works. Among the 3 groups, the churches are the most compliant even though they need the most maintenance work since among the criteria in the standards and guidelines set by the NHCP, they are all applicable to keep the churches well maintained.

Meanwhile, the monuments require the least maintenance work. Among the 12 required maintenance works, only 3 of them are applicable for the monuments. For example, re-painting will only be applicable on the base where the monument is built and on the surrounding concrete which is part of the landscape. Other required maintenance works which are not applicable to the monuments are re-plastering, repair and re-finishing, preservative treatment, pest control treatment, waterproofing and ventilating, corrective measures and building code requirements are non-applicable maintenance works for the monuments.

In terms of residence, which refers to the Angela Manalang-Gloria house, which at the same time is the Smith Bell and Company office during the American era, it registered the most issues on the compliance. It has also the costliest maintenance with 9 out of 12 required maintenance works applicable. These are inspection and documentation, cleaning and housekeeping jobs, repair and replacement, repair and re-finishing, preservative treatment, pest control treatment, waterproofing and ventilating, and building code requirements. It is important to note however since this was built in the 1900s, building code requirement was not established yet.

For St. Agnes' Academy recorded as the oldest Catholic

school in the province having been built in 1912 shares the same issue with the Angela Manalang-Gloria/Smith Bell and Company on the required building code. Other required maintenance works based on the standards and guidelines which the Benedictine Sisters complied with are inspection and documentation, cleaning and housekeeping jobs, repair and replacement of damaged parts, re-painting of roofs and walls, repair of the worn-out parts, preservative treatment of walls and floors, pest control treatment especially for the termites, and corrective measures of either the roof, walls or floors based on the original design.

In the case of the Bicol Regional Teaching and Training Hospital, it is also compliant in all of the required maintenance works. But similarly, the requirement on building code is an issue having built in 1917. Having been recognized by the NHCP it complied with the mandatory inspection and documentation, cleaning and housekeeping jobs, repair and replacement, re-painting, re-plastering of the roof and walls, repairs of the worn-out parts, preservative treatment of walls and floors, pest control treatment specially for the termites, and corrective measures either of roof, walls and floors.

The Cagsua Ruins, on the other hand needs the least required maintenance work. Among the 12 only 4 required maintenance works are applicable. These are inspection and documentation, cleaning and housekeeping jobs, removal of vegetal and weedy growths, and preservative treatment.

On the other hand, data revealed in Table 3 is the summary of the issues and challenges identified by the owners and by the Local Government Units in-charged in the conservation

and preservation of the NHCP recognized historic sites and structures based on their experiences.

Table 3. Issues and challenges on conservation and preservation of historic sites and structures.

Historic Sites and Structures	Vulnerability to natural calamities	Maintenance costs	Demands for economic development in the locale	Existing government policies in the LGU level
Parish of San Juan de Bautista	Heavily damaged by the typhoon that hit the locale in December 2019; repairs and restoration is still in progress	Received subsidy from the LGU yet inadequate to cover the costs as it was heavily damaged by the typhoon that hit the locale in December 2019	Demands for economic development is not an issue since it is a place for worship.	Managed and maintained by the parish
Angela Manalang Gloria Smith Bell and Company	Heavily damaged by the typhoon that hit the locale in December 2019; repairs and restoration are yet to start due to financial constraints since it is privately owned.	Costly maintenance assumed by the family, the descendants of Angela Manalang-Gloria.	Lower portion of the building was opened into a "lotto outlet" (tickets for lottery are sold). Thus, affects the cultural importance of the historic structure.	Negotiations between the LGU of Tabaco City and the descendants of Angela Manalang-Gloria on the possibility of having it converted into historic destination as part of developing heritage tourism. Ordinance on the application to the National Historical Commission of the Philippines for its recognition as historic site and structure.
Monument of Potenciano Gregorio	Exposed to all elements but aside from the fading paint, typhoons are not considered threats. Strong earthquake may likely cause damage.	Maintenance costs are minimal.	Located near the Office of the Municipal Mayor.	Ordinance on the application to the National Historical Commission of the Philippines for its recognition as historic site and structure.
Legazpi-Albay Gulf Landing	Exposed to all elements but aside from the fading paint, typhoons are not considered as threats. Strong earthquake may likely cause damage.	Maintenance costs are minimal.	Demands for economic development is not an issue yet considering the location of the site. However, the surroundings are poorly maintained not befitting the stature of historic site.	Ordinance on the application to the National Historical Commission of the Philippines for its recognition as historic site and structure.
Parish of St. Raphael the Arcangel	Strong typhoons and earthquakes could damage the physical structure as it did previously.	Maintenance costs are intense due to the wear and tear of the roof, ceiling, floor and other parts of the building not to mention the damages caused by calamities.	Demands for economic development is not an issue since it is a place for worship.	Managed and maintained by the parish.
Battle of Legazpi Monument	Exposed to all elements but aside from the fading paint, typhoons are not considered as threats. Strong earthquake may likely cause damage.	Maintenance costs are minimal.	Located at the center of the business area, surrounded by malls and other business establishments.	Ordinance on the application to the National Historical Commission of the Philippines for its recognition as historic site and structure.
St. Agnes' Academy	Strong typhoons and earthquakes could damage the physical structure as it did previously.	Maintenance costs are intense due to the wear and tear of the roof, ceiling, floor and other parts of the building not to mention the damages caused by calamities.	Only the main building was originally preserved. The surrounding buildings are not as old as the main.	None. Wholly owned, maintained and managed by the Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing.
Parish of St. Gregory the Great	Strong typhoons and earthquakes could damage the physical structure as it did previously.	Maintenance costs are intense due to the wear and tear of the roof, ceiling, floor and other parts of the building not to mention the damages caused by calamities.	Demands for economic development is not an issue since it is a place for worship.	Managed and maintained by the parish.
Bicol Regional Teaching and Training Hospital	Strong typhoons and earthquakes could damage the physical structure as it did previously.	Maintenance costs are intense due to the wear and tear of the roof, ceiling, floor and other parts of the building not to mention the damages caused by calamities.	Only the main building was originally preserved. The surrounding buildings are not as old as the main.	Being supported by the LGU of Daraga, Albay and by the Office of the Governor of Albay and the Office of the Second District Representative of Albay

Historic Sites and Structures	Vulnerability to natural calamities	Maintenance costs	Demands for economic development in the locale	Existing government policies in the LGU level
Our Lady of the Gate Parish	Strong typhoons and earthquakes could damage the physical structure as it did previously.	Maintenance costs are intense due to the wear and tear of the roof, ceiling, floor and other parts of the building not to mention the damages caused by calamities.	Demands for economic development is not an issue since it is a place for worship.	Managed and maintained by the parish.
Cagsua Ruins	Exposure to all types of elements may continuously weaken the physical structure.	Maintenance costs are minimal.	Stores selling food/snacks and souvenir items surround the historic site and structure.	Ordinance on the application to the National Historical Commission of the Philippines for its recognition as historic site and structure.
Parish of St. John the Baptist	Strong typhoons and earthquakes could damage the physical structure as it did previously.	Maintenance costs are intense due to the wear and tear of the roof, ceiling, floor and other parts of the building not to mention the damages caused by calamities.	Demands for economic development is not an issue since it is a place for worship.	Managed and maintained by the parish.
Monument of Gen. Simeon Ola	Exposed to all elements but aside from the fading paint, typhoons are not considered as threats. Strong earthquake may likely cause damage.	Maintenance costs are minimal.	Located in front of the Office of the Municipal Mayor, the seat of local political power.	Ordinance on the application to the National Historical Commission of the Philippines for its recognition as historic site and structure.
Parish of St. Michael the Arcangel	Strong typhoons and earthquakes could damage the physical structure as it did previously.	Maintenance costs are intense due to the wear and tear of the roof, ceiling, floor and other parts of the building not to mention the damages caused by calamities.	Demands for economic development is not an issue since it is a place for worship.	Managed and maintained by the parish.

Four issues which at the same time considered as challenges are identified in terms of the maintenance of the historic sites and structures. These are vulnerability to natural calamities specially the earthquakes and typhoons, maintenance costs, possible demands to economic development and policies in the form of ordinances passed by the Local Government Units.

The location of the Province of Albay, Bicol, Philippines is vulnerable to typhoons. In the 1980s almost 18 typhoons in a year hit the province from the average of 20 typhoons a year which hit the country (About Albay, 2022). These typhoons threatened the destruction of historic structures especially those constructed in the 1500s. Also, the exposure of these historic structures to elements contributed to the rapid deterioration of the structures causing serious wear and tear.

Among the natural calamities, the typhoon is the most identified threat among the churches, residence, school, and hospital. The roofs are the most vulnerable among the parts of the buildings. These are the ones often damaged by strong typhoon. Next to the roof, the walls are made of wood, and windows where in materials are made of *Capiz* (sea shells) shells. Although, the locale had been struck by earthquake in several occasions, but compared to typhoon, the latter is considered more often as threat.

Maintenance costs is another issue identified by the owners and the representatives of the local government units. Since Tabaco City was badly hit by typhoon in December

2019, both the San Juan de Bautista Parish and the Angela Manalang Gloria house/Smith Bell and Company were badly damaged. The parish has started the needed repair and renovation however, the costs proved challenging. Hence, still far from being completed. Meanwhile, the Angela Manalang Gloria house/Smith Bell and Company is still waiting to be repaired and renovated. This is due to the expenses the works will incur which will be borne by the family, the descendants of Angela Manalang-Gloria.

The buildings even though recognized by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines are not receiving regular financial support for the maintenance. The San Juan de Bautista Parish since was damaged by the typhoon in 2019 was given financial assistance for the repairs and renovation needed. Yet, the financial assistance is not enough to cover the entire maintenance costs.

4. Discussion

Generally, interventions as preservation measures are needed for the historic sites and structures to withstand the numerous trials these sites and structures are exposed to in order to lengthen their lifespan and maintain their cultural value for the benefit of the generations in the future [23, 24].

Among the 3 groups identified, the churches have the most applicable criteria based on the standards and guidelines set by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines.

They are also compliant in these criteria with the mandated maintenance work done regularly. This is a commitment to having been recognized by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines and in the case of the 2 churches, the Parish of San Juan de Bautista and the Parish of St. John the Baptist. Also given recognition by the National Museum. This implies the importance of national laws and local ordinances for having these historical sites and structures conserved and preserved [25-27].

These churches though may need the approval of ordinances in the level of the local government units in support of the national laws which governed their conservation and preservation. The existing laws however may not be sufficient at some point as it may lead to alterations of some parts of the structures as well as the surrounding areas, which technically need to be included in the preservation [28-30].

Meanwhile, maintenance as preservation and conservation measures remain more of a theory rather than in practice. Practical implementation and application are unfortunately rarely observed [31]. The monuments as historic structures may have been identified to have the least demands in terms of compliance to the standards and guidelines set by the NHCP yet, would still need innovative approaches to preserve their historical value [32, 33].

Maintenance costs or the economic aspect certainly remains to be a challenge as well in terms of preservation and conservation of historic sites and structures. Sustainability remains to be an issue thus, the debate on preservation of historic structures versus new construction [34].

The challenges are mainly on the economic/financial aspects of the expenses which go along with the required maintenance works for the conservation and preservation. The gap includes that in spite of being recognized by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines and by the National Museum for some yet, the concern government agency does not extend financial assistance or in some instances, very minimal thus, insufficient. Along with the recognition of their contributions to historical heritage, a financial assistance is needed in order to maintain their historic stature.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Historic sites and structures represent the cultural heritage of a certain group of people. The 14 historic sites and structures in Albay, Bicol, Philippines epitomize the religiosity, bravery, and creativity of the people of the province yet, are challenged by the vulnerability of the historic structures to natural calamities, costly maintenance to keep the structures in good physical condition, demands for economic development in the locale and the limited ordinances as the basis of government policies in the local government units to have them preserved and conserved. Based on the results of the study, it is recommended for the local government units to partner with the academe, professional organizations, and civil society organizations to

develop and strengthen awareness on their preservations, develop policies for sustainable preservations, tap appropriate entities to augment costs for preservations and tap organizations for the careful selection of materials for sustainability.

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