

LOSS OF LOBOC'S CULTURAL HERITAGE SITE: IMPACT AND SUPPORT ASSESSMENT

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-Abstract-

On October 15, 2013 a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck the Province of Bohol, damaging more than 73,000 structures. Among the damaged structures was church and bell tower located in the Municipality of Loboc, Bohol, both of which are declared cultural heritage sites. The buildings are privately owned properties of the Roman Catholic Church, but as declared Heritage Sites, they are also under the supervision of the National Historical Commission. This study sought to determine the measures undertaken by the tripartite stakeholders and agencies (LGU, Church and National Historical Commission) in the rebuilding and conservation of the damaged historical sites. It also intends to infer the impact of the damage to the municipality and its citizens. Lastly, it aims to formulate recommendations regarding the preservation or possible restoration of the damaged sites. The study revealed that at the forefront at the efforts to conserve the site is the National Historical Commission, with the help of parishioners who headed sectoral groups exerting considerable effort in raising funds. Tourism stagnated in the first few months after the incident, but reverted to normal levels when the ruins were turned into new tourism opportunities. Negative impact to tourism and economy is minimal.

The parishioners are eager to restore the old church at any cost, but the NHC has indicated that it will be more practical to rebuild the old church rather than restore it due to safety and cost concerns. The loss of the sites were especially demoralizing and dispiriting to the inhabitants of Loboc. The study also revealed a gap in cooperation from the Local Government Unit with the other concerned stakeholders and support rendered by said institution was minimal at best.

Keywords: Heritage, History, Tourism, Earthquake, Qualitative Analysis

JEL Classification: Z00

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

On October 15, 2013 a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck the Province of Bohol, damaging more than 73,000 structures. Among the damaged structures were Bohol's National Cultural Treasures, as declared by the National Museum of the Philippines. Specifically these National Cultural Treasures include the church of Loboc. This church has been declared a National Historical Landmark by the National Historical Commission. A year and eight months later, this site have remained as it looked after the earthquake – damaged and in rubbles.

Sections 14, 15, 16, and 17 under Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution sets forth that the State shall foster the preservation, enrichment, and dynamic evolution of a Filipino culture based on the principle of unity in diversity in a climate of free artistic and intellectual expression. The Constitution likewise mandates the State to conserve, develop, promote and popularize the nation's historical and cultural heritage and resources, as well as artistic creations. It further provides that, all the country's artistic and historic wealth constitutes the cultural treasure of the nation and shall be under the protection of the State, which may regulate its disposition.

The National Heritage Act of 2009 mandates the government to prioritize National Cultural Treasures and National Historical Landmarks during any occurrence of natural disasters.

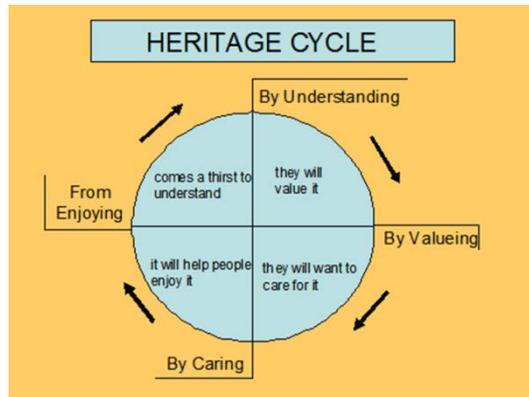
At times of crisis access to and proper aid and care for the cultural heritage sites may help vulnerable people recover a sense of continuity, dignity and empowerment. In post-conflict situations, the acknowledgment and safeguarding of the cultural heritage, may help foster understanding among different communities, which is essential for a society's peaceful development.

The researchers are driven to focus on this topic for such reasons and aim to examine and assess the rehabilitation plans of the Local Government Unit of Loboc in cooperation with the National Historical Commission and the Diocese of Tagbilaran for this specific damaged cultural site. It also aims to provide an assessment of the parishioners of Loboc church's perception of the rehabilitation effort. This study further aims to send a message to the national and local government to invest and reexamine their efforts in the conservation and protection our cultural heritage sites.

1.2 Theoretical Background

This study is primarily anchored on Thurley's (2005) theoretical diagram which explains the importance of Cultural Heritage in the people's everyday lives. In this, it can be inferred that Cultural Heritage Site play in an important role in the appreciation of History and Cultural Identity. However, if one part is removed, then the cycle will be broken. This is exactly the case with the churches of Loon, Maribojoc and Loboc, all of which suffered Large Scale Damage. With the loss of these Cultural Heritage Sites future generations would be unable to understand a part of their heritage and thus won't value it. The researchers aim to study the effect of losing the ability of being able to enjoy these cultural heritage sites and how it has affected the parishioners in the short-term.

Figure 1. Thurley's Heritage Cycle



Article XIV, Section 16 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states that 'All the country's artistic and historic wealth constitutes the cultural treasure of the nation and shall be under the protection of the State which may regulate its disposition.'

This was further elucidated in Republic Act No. 10066, also known as the 'National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009'. In it, the term 'National Cultural Treasure' (NCT) was defined:

"National cultural treasure" shall refer to a unique cultural property found locally, possessing outstanding historical, cultural, artistic and/or scientific value which is highly significant and important to the country and nation, and officially declared as such by pertinent cultural agency."

Furthermore, in Article IV, Section 15, it explains the role of pertinent government agencies in the conservation and preservation of Cultural Heritage Sites:

"All intervention works and measures on conservation of national cultural treasures, important cultural property, as well as national historical landmarks, sites or monuments and structures previously marked by the National Museum and/or the National Historical Institute before the implementation of this Act, shall be undertaken through the appropriate cultural agency which shall supervise the same.

The appropriate cultural agency shall approve only those methods and materials that strictly adhere to the accepted international standards of conservation."

Finally, in Article VII, Section 26 in provides the pertinent government agency, (in the case of this study, the National Museum through the Bohol Heritage Task force) the power to issue compulsory repairs for damaged Heritage Sites:

"When a privately-owned heritage site cannot be maintained by the owner or has fallen into disrepair through neglect to such an extent that it will lose its potential for conservation, the appropriate cultural agency may serve on the owner or occupant of such property an order to repair or maintain such site. If the owner fails to comply with the said order within thirty (30) to forty-five (45) days, repairs may be undertaken by the appropriate cultural agency funded by the Commission for the account of the owner."

The church of Loboc has been declared as a National Cultural Treasure by the National Museum. However, according to Mr. Charlemaine Tantengco, an officer at the National Museum and a member of the Bohol Heritage Task force, these churches are still classified as 'Private Property' since they are owned by the Diocese of Tagbilaran and the Parishioners of their respective municipalities and not by the Local Government Units.

Thus, the society is faced with an interesting dynamic considering the state of ownership and the level and amount of repairs needed to be done to these Cultural Heritage Sites. The researchers assume that in order for the NCTs to be properly conversed and preserved, there must be a healthy level of collaboration and effort between the parties and stakeholders involved.

Feather (2006) says that the driving force for the definition of all cultural heritage is 'it is a human creation intended to form'. Schofield (2008) 'Heritage as a concept is closely related to that of inheritance.' To elaborate, as part of human activity Cultural Heritage produces tangible representations of the value systems, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. As an essential part of culture as a whole, Cultural Heritage, contains these visible and tangible traces from antiquity to the recent past

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This research aims to assess the short-term impact to the parishioners and concerned agencies of the destruction of the Cultural Heritage Site, specifically the church and bell tower in the town of Loboc and their corresponding assessment to the support given by their Local Government.

Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the measures undertaken by the tripartite stakeholders and agencies in the rebuilding and conservation of Cultural Heritage Sites?
2. What is the short-term impact of the loss of said heritage sites to the parishioners of said municipality?
3. What are the recommendations that can be made with regards to the preservation of Cultural Heritage despite the loss of this site?

1.4 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method and was conducted in the municipality of Loboc. This is to obtain answers to questions cannot be provided by a quantitative method of research and to generate words rather than numbers, as data for analysis. The Qualitative research approach made use of Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion. The purpose of the Key Informant Interview is to collect information from a wide range of people-including community leaders, professionals, or residents- who have firsthand

knowledge about the community. These community experts, with their particular knowledge and understanding, can provide insight on the nature of problems and give recommendations or solutions. For the study, the researchers interviewed three key informants: (1) from the Local Government Unit, (1) from the lead agency for cultural preservation- the National Museum and (1) from the Loboc parish. The representative from the Local Government Unit is the Mayor of the Municipality of Loboc, from the National Museum is the head officer of the National Museum- Bohol Division, and from the parish through its parish priest of St. Peter Apostle of the Loboc parish.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the measures that the secular group had undergone in order to aid the loss of the Cultural Heritage Site in their parish is the Earthquake Rehabilitation Program initiated by the Diocese of Tagbilaran. This was acted upon by the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC) immediately convened to establish the PDRRMC Command Center. The PDRRMC immediately responded to concerns of Communications, Search and Rescue, and Emergency Response.

After all threats to life and property have been addressed, a Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis (DANA) was carried out by the Provincial Government of Bohol (PGBh) in coordination with the Municipal Local Government Units (MLGUs) as a basis for an informed approach to the drafting of the plan for restoration. From the DANA, the early recovery plan was conceived and this rehabilitation plan was formulated.

Based on the rehabilitation and recovery plan submitted by Bohol government, the province needs P1.598 billion to rebuild/repair houses; P4.988 billion for roads, bridges and water system; P1.183 billion for schools; P680 million for medical facilities and birthing center; P834.77 million for municipal halls, gymnasiums, barangay (village) halls, daycare centers, parks and plazas; P181.16 million for tourism facilities; P864.03 million for ports; P32.88 million for police stations; P7.54 million for women's desk and other facilities; and P94.62 million for fish ports and support facilities.

On the part of the National Museum, since they are the very organization looked upon by the parishioners and Local Government when it comes to the reorganization of the physical structure of the church, have to initiate first. They have three phases in the entire process: (1) Emergency Clearing, wherein they would have to recover what is left and find a suitable alternative place for the

parishioners to hold their Holy Mass since the church was clearly inoperable. Under this phase, 3D Scanning and Documentation is included. (2) Restoration Process, which is reliant on the results of the third phase which is (3) Detailed Engineering Studies (DES). In the third phase, there is extensive study on the ground, soil and total feasibility of the restoration. Mr. Tantengco said that the results have just recently come out during the last week of September 2015 in Manila. He also said that the results were “alarming”. In the DES results, it was found that there were many sinkholes in the province.

In the Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) and the Boring Test done by them, and covered in the DES, they would have to “examine the capability of the ground” whether restoration is fit to be done or not. In effect, they are currently formulating a Structural Plan wherein they would have to design the foundations of the damaged Cultural Sites considering the many sinkholes found underlying the province’s cavity.

While awaiting for the Structural Plan to be done and eventually carried out by the National Museum, the parishioners of Loboc did their part in making sure that they still have an alternative place to conduct their Sunday Eucharist and continue their religious activities.

“In the first months, the tourists coming in were only little. There were people from other towns who came to Loboc in order to give their help and offer assistance,” the parish priest of Loboc commented when asked about the short-term impact of the loss of the San Pedro Apostol Church to the tourism and economy of Loboc. The number of tourists evidently declined due to the calamity and there was a time when they were not expecting tourists to visit Loboc, but aide instead, to help them up and brush off the dust of misfortune.

While the earthquake resulted to a temporary setback in Bohol’s tourism sector and has somehow been “shaken” by the tragedy, it has proven to become a blessing in disguise, where ruins from old churches are turned as new tourism opportunities and new destinations emerged as a result of the tourism evaluation in Loboc and even in the most affected areas of Bohol.

The parish priest remarked that the moves toward restoration by the parishioners and the non-government organizations on the San Pedro Apostol Church can only be done through a prior “propelling by the National Museum” – the reason why they have been tentative in making any concrete changes to the physical structure of the church. The church, he added, has to be restored in order to restore its reputation as a National Cultural Heritage Site and because the “Lobocanons”, the

people of Loboc, insist that the church be restored “at any cost” because of the grown attachments that they have of it. Not only does this church hold sentimental value towards them but it also is important in their religion and faith sharing.

Mr. Tantengco, of the National Museum, said that the best course of action is to rebuild the San Pedro Apostol Church instead of restoring it because considering the state that the church is in, it would be more practicable and safe to remove the old rundowns and build anew.

The wall housing the church's pipe organ is in a "seriously unstable" state. Though it is standing, the wall has buckled inward such that the buttress which once held the wall up is now pushing the wall inward. If the wall moves or collapses, the pipe organ gallery will go down with it.

One representative of a religious organization said that the best thing would be to claim the San Pedro Apostol Church as ruins seeing the state that it is in now, presently. One also added that they are beginning to grow comfortable with the new location of the alternative church, which is, as claimed, ninety percent (90%) done.

Nonetheless, they also expressed their sentiments and prayers towards the restoration and possible reconstruction of the church that had stood the test of time for over four hundred long years.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The damage to the church was immensely dispiriting to the inhabitants of Loboc. There appears to a gap between the stakeholders, especially on the part of the Local Government Unit. The restoration of the church to its former glory will entail immense sums and cooperation between concerned agencies. Other alternatives, such as rebuilding or maintaining the ruins as is are being explored. Surprisingly, tourism and tourism-fueled economy did suffer much because of the damage. In conclusion, much is at stake and much must still be done in deciding the final fate of the Cultural Heritage Sites of Loboc.

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