Buffer zones for built heritage sites in the Philippine urban setting

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ABSTRACT

The protection and conservation of the built heritage in the Philippine urban setting rests mainly upon the national government in partnership with the local government and the community. The state of conservation of our built heritage in selected Philippine towns and cities reflects the ramifications of various agenda (both global and local) in the realms of heritage preservation in these urban territories. The protection and management of Philippine built heritage involve numerous national cultural treasures, national shrines, and/or national historical landmarks, a few have been declared as World Cultural Heritage Sites. In the context of World Cultural Heritage Sites, the buffer zone is considered as an efficient management tool for the protection of World Heritage properties. The recent delineation of buffer areas for the Baroque Churches of the Philippines provides an added layer of protection to the core of the World heritage property. How have local governments and communities responded to the national initiatives for heritage protection, may be gleaned from how the buffer zones, as part of the spatial system of urban areas, deal with transitions from the core to periphery of built heritage sites within the territorial jurisdiction of towns and cities. Selected towns and cities have crafted policies and plans on matters of heritage preservation vis-à-vis with development goals of the locality. The paper will delve on how the buffer zones in the Philippine urban setting bear on the state of conservation of the country's built heritage, with focus on specific cities and municipalities with National Cultural Treasures and/or National Historical Landmarks. Planning aims to optimize the potential of the built heritage sites and its urban setting.

KEYWORDS *Buffer zone, heritage, conservation, protection, historic district*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines recognizes the value of protecting and preserving the nation's heritage in the spirit of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage (also referred to as the World Heritage Convention) to which it is one of the States Parties. The protection and conservation of the country's built heritage, as embodied in our Constitution and mandated by laws such as the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 10066) and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines Law (Republic Act No. 10086), rests mainly upon three national government cultural agencies: National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP), National Museum (NM), and National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). Since 1973 the national government through the national government agencies (NHCP and NM) have identified, declared and protected numerous immovable cultural properties and historical landmarks throughout the Philippine archipelago. Six of these immovable cultural properties have been inscribed in the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites. In line with the policies and objectives of Republic Act No. 10066 the government has formulated a program for the conservation of built heritage. Through the NCCA, the program provides assistance to structures declared as National Cultural Treasures and/or inscribed in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Spanish colonial period churches located in the 11 regions of the country have been main beneficiaries of the program.

The state of conservation of our built heritage in selected Philippine towns and cities reflects the ramifications of various local and global agenda in the realms of heritage preservation

in these urban territories. The enactment of the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160) empowers every local government for its efficient and effective governance, and which are essential for the promotion of the general welfare. "Within their respective territorial jurisdictions, local governments shall ensure and support among other things the preservation and enrichment of culture." Local governments are enjoined to share with the national government the responsibility in the protection and management of Philippine built heritage involving national cultural treasures, national shrines, and national historical landmarks. How local governments have responded to the national initiatives for heritage protection may be gleaned from the local legislations enacted and administered to address the concerns of heritage preservation in the respective territorial jurisdiction of towns and cities. It may be seen on how buffer zones, as part of the spatial system of urban areas, deal with transitions from the core to periphery of built heritage sites in these urban settings. Selected towns and cities have enacted various local ordinances which embody policies, guidelines, rules and regulations on matters of heritage preservation within the locality.

This research surveys the buffer zones in the Philippine urban setting and how the buffer zones bear on the state of conservation of the country's built heritage. The research examines the various legislations by local government units (LGUs) in response to the initiatives of the national government on the protection of our immovable cultural properties, historic sites and structures. The study focuses on three municipalities where three of the four National Cultural Treasures and/or National Historical Landmarks under the protection of the national government have been recognized among others as part of World Cultural Heritage Sites.

Towns and cities as *loci* for heritage preservation

Four Roman Catholic churches built between the 16th and 18th centuries during the Spanish colonial period comprise the Baroque Churches of the Philippines that were included as a serial inscription on the UNESCO's list of World Cultural Heritage Sites in 1993. The Baroque churches are located in separate areas of the Philippine archipelago: Paoay, Ilocos Norte; Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur; Intramuros, Manila; and Miagao, Iloilo. The Baroque churches "established a style of building and design that was adapted to the physical conditions in the Philippines which had an important influence on later church architecture in the region." As dominant structures of towns, the Baroque churches "reflect excellent site planning principles following the *Ley de las Indias* (Laws of the Indies) enacted by Philip II in 1563 for all newly-discovered settlements within Spanish colonial territories." The Baroque Churches of the Philippines deserve the highest standards of conservation (as provided for in R.A. 10066) as appropriate to World Heritage properties so that its authenticity, integrity and Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) are not allowed to be compromised.

The international community recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach to urban planning and development of cities. Citing the outcome document of United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), *The Future We Want*, stressed how dependent communities are on ecosystems for their livelihoods, their economic, social and physical well-being, and their cultural heritage.

> "We recognize that, if they are well planned and developed including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies. In this regard, we recognize the need for a holistic approach to urban development and human settlements that provides for affordable housing and infrastructure and prioritizes slum upgrading and urban regeneration. We commit to work towards improving the quality of human settlements, including the living and working conditions of both urban and rural dwellers in the context of poverty eradication so that all people have access to basic services, housing and mobility. We also recognize the need for conservation as appropriate of the natural and cultural heritage of human settlements, the revitalization of historic districts, and the rehabilitation of city centers."

The old section or historic district of the city or town can be redeveloped and revitalized by adopting the integrated conservation paradigm. "Urban management should aim to create harmony, avoid undesirable uses and maintain the existing scale of buildings, as well as their functional and cultural values. The methodology of this approach is called integrated conservation." Conservation planning aims to optimize the use of the potential of the historic areas. The basis for planning and conservation is the knowledge and understanding of the historic urban fabric. The integrated conservation of historic urban areas implies an interdisciplinary collaboration under the leadership of a qualified planner sensitive to heritage conservation. Feilden and Jokilehto emphasize that the historic districts' varying ordinances have corresponding technical, social, political or economic motives. Determining the rationale behind these local legislations vis-a-vis with local heritage conservation practices will give an understanding of the explanation

behind the physical plan of the territories and the planning norms for the appropriate urban conservation of subject territories and their built heritage. Towns and cities as loci of history and culture should be the embodiment of how well they value heritage preservation in their planning endeavors to attain sustainable development goals.

The buffer zone

A buffer zone is defined in the UNESCO Operational Guidelines as "an area surrounding the nominated property which has complementary legal and/ or customary restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the property. This should include the immediate setting of the nominated property, important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection. The area constituting the buffer zone should be determined in each case through appropriate mechanisms. Details on the size, characteristics and authorized uses of a buffer zone, as well as a map indicating the precise boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, should be provided in the nomination."

A buffer zone is considered as "an important mechanism for improving care, protection and management of inscribed World Heritage properties." Within the buffer zone, it is understood that "the goal is to manage or control a range of qualities of proposed developments (height, density, use, design (form, image, patterns) etc.) in order to minimize negative impacts" on the OUV of the World Heritage property. A buffer zone is "a management tool to deal with the transition from a site to its surroundings through added protection, which safeguards certain aspects of the site." Apart from the site's setting and views, it has been argued that "there is a much larger range of issues related to use and function, form and design, traditions and techniques, and spirit and feeling that may also need to be protected when setting a buffer zone for a cultural heritage site." The strengths and weaknesses, as well as the advantages and problems concerning buffer zones are explained as follows:

> "Buffer zones can be a very important management tool in protecting World Heritage sites. In controlling the transition between the heightened protection of the World Heritage site and the surrounding territories, a buffer zone may set limits to protect views, settings, land uses, and other aspects, but may also positively encourage developments that would be beneficial to the site and community. Another advantage of a buffer zone is that it can be a very clear and unambiguous tool. The line on the map and the accompanying regulations can make it very clear to all interested parties what is allowed, what isn't allowed, and where. This certainty is very attractive to governments, decision makers, and developers. "
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> "Unfortunately however, as set up, buffer zones in the World Heritage context often are ambiguous and confusing. This confusion stems from a number of problems. The most serious is that in many cases the buffer zones have no basis in the national or local planning laws. A second problem is that even when the line on the map is clear and enforceable, often there are not the necessary regulations and policies to make them useful."
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> "When used only to deal with "visual issues" a great opportunity is often missed to positively influence many development decisions in the buffer zone that will both improve protection of the site and the quality of life of the community."

Buffer zones should form part of an integrated urban planning process. As part of the planning process it can negotiate and include the concerns for heritage, the needs of development and improved quality of life. Buffer zones can both protect and enhance the World Heritage Property while bringing benefits to the local community.

In the context of Philippine historic centers and heritage zones, a buffer zone is defined as a "special protective zone around an historic district center, town or property." Planning requirements for the conservation and development of historic centers and heritage zones include the identification and designation of a protective buffer zone.

Buffer zone for the Church of San Agustin in Paoay, Ilocos Norte

The Municipality of Paoay, Ilocos Norte is a fourth class municipality with a population of 23,956 inhabitants and a land area of 7,624 hectares. The Municipality of Paoay has 31 barangays. The Roman Catholic Church of Paoay (a.k.a. the Church of San Agustin in Paoay) was declared a National Cultural Treasure in 1973 by virtue of Presidential Decree 260. The Church of Paoay is a serial component of the Baroque Churches of the Philippines.

There are two complementing ordinances on heritage preservation in the Municipality of Paoay. In 2002 the Sangguniang Bayan of Paoay enacted Municipal Ordinance No. 2002-08: "An ordinance establishing the Paoay Heritage District, adopting a development plan therefor, and providing rules and regulations for its implementation and operation." The 2002 Ordinance was approved by Municipal Mayor Reginita Nenuca V. Evangelista on November 20, 2002, and took effect on January 01, 2003. In 2011 the Sangguniang Bayan

of Paoay enacted Municipal Ordinance No. 2011-04 otherwise known as "An ordinance amending certain provisions of Municipal Ordinance No. 2002-08: An ordinance establishing the Paoay Heritage District, adopting a development plan therefor, and providing rules and regulations for its implementation and operation." The 2011 Ordinance was approved by Municipal Mayor Bonifacio C. Clemente Jr. on November 29, 2011. The Municipal Ordinance No. 2002-08 as amended by the Municipal Ordinance No. 2011-04 were the complementing legislations for the core and buffer zones for the Church of Paoay. The Church of Paoay occupies a core zone with a total land area of 27,547 square meters, and a buffer zone of 138,629 square meters (refer to Figure 1).

The 2002 Ordinance consists of nine articles as follows: Article I Establishment of the Heritage District and definitions; Article II Statement of Policies and Policy Guidelines; Article III Structure or Building Requirements; Article IV Streetscapes and Opens Spaces Improvements; Article V Specific Structural requirements and Designs; Article VI Design Review Board; Article VII Paoay Heritage District Fund; Article VIII Administration and Implementation; and Article IX Final Provisions. The 2002 Ordinance's main purpose is the establishment in the municipality of Paoay



Figure 1 *Map of the core and buffer zone of the Church of San Agustin in Paoay, Ilocos Norte (After NAMRIA, 2011).*

Heritage District based on the physical plan of the 1999 Master Plan prepared, formulated and approved by the Paoay Church Restoration Task Force (23 September 1999). This ordinance intends to maintain the Heritage District as a focus of government, tourism, commerce, religious and educational activities without altering a distinct thematic character. It defines the boundaries of the Paoay Heritage District's core and buffer zone (Section 2). It states general land use policies, specific land uses, building requirements, streetscapes and open space requirements. It provides specific structural requirements and designs, including basic considerations on traffic management. It created a Design Review Board (Article VI) who regulates all design and construction related activities within the Heritage District. It established a Heritage District Fund to be used for programs, projects and activities related to the Heritage District. The special fund is sourced from tax levies or imposed fees on business establishments, building constructions, film activities and use of facilities within the district.

The 2011 Ordinance amended certain provisions in the 2002 Ordinance particularly the boundaries of the core and buffer zones (Section 1), on the prohibited use in the Heritage District (Section 2), on the building height restrictions (Section 3), and on the imposition of user's fees (Section 4). This ordinance redefines the boundaries of the core and buffer zones of the Paoay Heritage District. Although UNESCO referred back to the Philippine government (as State Party) the proposed core and proposed buffer zones for a clarification on the addition of the ruin as part of the core component, it seems favorable to the shared buffer zone for the Church of Paoay as stated in the report. "The shared buffer zone surrounding both components covers an area of 13.86 hectares. Its delimitation appears sufficient to provide adequate protection for the existing property of this serial component."

Buffer zone for the Church of Santo Tomas in Miagao, Iloilo

The Municipality of Miagao, Iloilo is a first class municipality with a population of 64,545 inhabitants and a land area of 15,680 hectares. The Municipality of Miagao has 119 barangays. The Church of Miagao (a.k.a. Church of Santo Tomas de Villanueva in Miagao) was declared a National Historical Landmark in 1973 by virtue of Presidential Decree 260. More than 16 years after the 1993 UNESCO declaration, the Municipality of Miagao came up with a local legislation on heritage preservation within its territorial jurisdiction. On June 23, 2010, the Sangguniang Bayan of Miagao enacted Ordinance No. 03 series of 2010: "An ordinance providing for the protection and preservation of heritage and tourism sites and landmarks within the Municipality of Miagao, and providing funds therefor." The 2010 Ordinance was approved by Municipal Mayor Julieta N. Flores on July 13, 2010. On December 26, 2011 the Municipality of Miagao unanimously adopted Resolution No. 2011-079: "Resolution authorizing the conduct of a survey by the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) to determine the actual boundary of the core and buffer zones of the Miagao Church based on the area proposed by the municipality." The 2011 Resolution was attested and certified to be duly adopted by Municipal Vice-Mayor Jose Rey N. Noble. The Municipality of Miagao's Municipal Ordinance No. 2010-03 and Municipal Resolution No. 2011-079 were the complementing legislations and basis concerning the core and buffer zones of Miagao Church. The Church of Miagao has a core zone with a total land area of 9,209 square meters and a buffer zone of 299,443 square meters (refer to Figure 2).

The 2010 Ordinance consists of six articles as follows: Article I Title, Purpose and Intent; Article II Legal Framework and Definition of Terms; Article III The Local Heritage Review Board; Artice IV Inventory, Procedures and Incentives; Article V Miscellaneous and Penal Provisions; and Article VI Final Provisions. This ordinance intends to preserve and protect heritage resources within the municipality that contributes to Miagao's historical development, distinctive character, economic value, tourism and improved quality of life. It created a Local Heritage Review Board (Article III) to take initiatives in the inventory of heritage resources based on defined criteria, raising community awareness, and serve as the Municipality's main resource on matters of history, heritage planning protection and preservation. It provides for a review and permit process involving the demolition or major alteration of a property listed in the inventory (Article IV Section 6 and 7). It provides affected property owners incentives such as financial assistance, and tax credits (Article IV Section 9). It has a special provision concerning height restrictions (Section 10) for buildings within 100 meters radius from the Church of Miagao premises. "There shall be no construction, erection of buildings or structure higher than 15 meters from the ground line of the Miagao Church, within 100 meters radius from the church premises."

The 2011 Resolution defines the boundaries of the core zone of the Church of Miagao, and its buffer zone. However, UNESCO referred back to the Philippine government (as State Party) the proposed buffer zone and sought some clarifications as follows:

> "The boundaries of the serial component of the Church of Santo Tomas de Villanueva in Miagao, Iloilo, remain unchanged at 0.92 hectare. The



Figure 2 *Map of the core and buffer zone of the Church of Sto. Tomas de Villanueva in Miagao, Iloilo. (After NAMRIA, 2011)*

buffer zone surrounding the site provides adequate protection in three directions within an area of 29.94 hectares. However, no buffer zone is proposed towards the south-west of the property and the rationale for the lack of buffer zone in this area has not been given in the documentation provided by the State Party. ICOMOS considers that it would be desirable to establish a buffer zone which surrounds the property in all directions and thereby can offer adequate protection from all potential negative – including visual – impacts."

In line with the intent of the special provision of the 2010 Ordinance, it should have provided at the very least 100 meters of buffer zone on the Southwest of the core zone. It is logical to establish a buffer zone a bit symmetrical in layout as it will adequately protect the Church of Miagao from potential adverse impacts on all directions.

Buffer zone for the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asuncion in Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur

The Municipality of Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur is a third class municipality with a population of

28,597 inhabitants and a total land area of 6,331 hectares. The Municipality of Santa. Maria has 33 barangays. The Church of Santa Maria (a.k.a. the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción) was declared a National Historical Landmark in 1974 with the issuance of Presidential Decree No. 375 which amended Section 2 of Presidential Decree No. 260. The Municipality of Sta. Maria in Ilocos Sur enacted Municipal Ordinance No. 01 Series of 2012 on January 11, 2012. The ordinance is otherwise known as "An ordinance establishing the Sta. Maria Heritage District, adopting a development plan therefore, and providing rules and regulations for its implementation and operation." The Municipal Ordinance No. 01-2012 was adopted as the complementary local legislation concerning the core and buffer zones of the Church of Santa Maria. The Church of Santa Maria has a core zone with a total land area of 23,579 square meters, and a buffer zone of 268,286 square meters (refer to Figure 3).

The 2012 Ordinance is comprised of four articles: Article I Establishment of the Heritage District and Definitions; Article II Statement of Policies and Policy Guidelines; Article III Administration



Figure 3 *Map of the core and buffer zone of the Church of La Nuestra Senora De La Asuncion in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur (After NAMRIA, 2011).*

and Enforcement; and Article IV Final Provisions. Similar with the Paoay 2002 Ordinance, this 2012 Ordinance's main purpose is to establish a heritage district within the municipality with the Church of Santa Maria forming part of the core. This Ordinance intends to maintain a center of government, religion, education, community development and commerce that also serves as a viable tourism zone. It states general land use policies, allowed and disallowed use in the core and buffer zones. It created the Santa Maria Heritage District Council for the administration and enforcement of the ordinance. It created a Design Review Board (Section 9). The boundaries of the core and buffer zones are established. However, UNESCO referred back to the Philippine government (as State Party) the proposed buffer zone and sought some clarifications as follows:

> "Previously slightly larger parts of the historic cemetery and the surrounding green slopes have been excluded from the boundaries. The expanded area extends to the south but no justification was provided for the new inclusions. The area covered by the newly proposed boundaries amounts to 2.36 hectares while the exact size of the previously inscribed area is unclear due to its schematic delimitation on an out-of-scale map sketched in 1993."
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> "The State Party also proposes boundaries for a buffer zone which has been established and which includes significant parts of the surrounding historic city including the new and old central markets. Whilst this buffer zone seems to offer adequate protection towards the east and west, no buffer zone surrounds the property boundaries towards the north and south and the rationale for this unbalanced buffer zone distribution has not been given in the documentation provided. ICOMOS recommends that a buffer zone should provide protection from all directions and should accordingly be expanded north- and southwards for the property component."

It is but logical to provide a buffer zone a bit symmetrical in layout that allows adequate protection from all directions.

Discussions

At the time of the inscription of the Baroque Churches of the Philippines twenty years ago, its buffer zones were undefined. The buffer zone is considered as an efficient management tool for the protection of World Heritage properties. In 2012, the cartographic maps reflecting the identified core and buffer zones of the four Baroque churches located in the historic districts of Paoay, Santa Maria, Intramuros, and Miagao, were completed and officially transmitted to UNESCO. The respective buffer zones for the sites in Paoay, Santa Maria and Miagao are represented by an area of land around the core and within the territory of the municipality in which the property is situated. The recent delineation of buffer areas for the Baroque Churches of the Philippines were based on the complementing local legislation that hopes to provide added layer of protection to the core of the World heritage property.

The common main underlying purpose of the local ordinances on heritage preservation in the three municipalities is the architectural intent to establish a district that serves as a buffer or transition zone to address potential threats that may adversely affect the OUV of the Baroque Churches of the Philippines. Physical development are restricted and regulated through the municipalities' respective Heritage/ Design Review Boards. There are land use policies, allowed and disallowed uses within the buffer zones. Both Paoay and Miagao have height restrictions for buildings within the buffer zones. Although Paoay has provisions for streetscapes and open space improvements, it has no specific provisions concerning visual corridors and vista points. Specific provisions on the identification and establishment of visual corridors and vista points (as required in the NHCP Guidelines) as well as their development and protection, are not explicitly mentioned nor delineated in the buffer zones of the three municipalities. Incentives to encourage heritage preservation vary among the three municipalities, and are not well established. In the case of Miagao it provides tax credits and financial assistance, while Paoay imposes fees and tax levies to generate revenues for a special Heritage District Fund. The legislations reflect the municipalities' value for heritage preservation, economic development and improved quality of life, in their planning efforts for their respective territorial and administrative jurisdictions.

The local ordinances on heritage preservation reflect how the national government encourages the active involvement of local communities as important stakeholders in the consultative processes of urban planning and local governance. However these planning efforts need to be further strengthened and sustained through the formulation of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) enacted into a Zoning Ordinance that covers a wider time horizon. The CLUP may cover a minimum period of ten years, and serves as the framework for all the other plans of the LGUs. The CLUP and Zoning Ordinance should be periodically reviewed as deemed appropriate by LGUs to ensure the attainment of the municipalities' planned development goals and objectives. The review of the CLUP and Zoning Ordinance should be an opportunity to integrate the pressing global and national agenda on matters dealing

with cultural and natural heritage. It is the appropriate opportunity to revisit the various protocols, declarations and policies set by the international organizations such as UNESCO. It will likewise be an opportunity to incorporate the suitable guidelines, policies and standards set by the national government agencies concerning the conservation of historic centers and heritage zones. The pre-existing heritage conservation plans for the municipalities (as in the case of the 1999 Paoay Heritage District Master Plan) should be integrated in the crafting of an updated CLUP. Disaster risk reduction should be integrated in these plans especially within the zones of the municipalities where built heritage are situated. The LGUs should adopt a risk preparedness program for the protection of historic centers and heritage zones. As part of the local planning and policy making process, the LGUs should generate more data, and transform available data into relevant development indicators that could guide the municipalities to monitor and measure progress towards the "preservation and enrichment of culture."

Buffer zones for built heritage sites in our urban settings should reflect how we could best implement heritage conservation endeavors in an all-inclusive approach to ensure that our towns and cities remain sustainable and meaningful loci of our history and culture.

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