

《Session 1》

Safeguarding Ifugao Heritage Amidst Transformations

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The theme safeguarding cultural heritage involves a thorough study of the values of a heritage site needing protection. These are the natural and/or cultural significant characteristics of a site, that have historical, aesthetic and scientific values worthy of preservation.

Initially before safeguarding can take place, both external and internal factors that have been causing, or those that may cause positive and negative impact on these heritage values are determined. These are those that are initiated or influenced by forces in the political, economic, social, and/or cultural arena, which may cause the site to deteriorate, or to be conserved. An analysis of these forces helps in knowing the cause and effects of problems and assist in determining possible solutions that will help mitigate negative impacts.

The etymology of the word safeguard is traced from Old French words *sauve* or safe, and *garde* or guard. Safeguard means “a precautionary measure, stipulation or device”. This may also mean “to protect from harm” and “to take care”.

As a precautionary measure, safeguarding is performed to a well-conserved site having intact heritage values, prior to the appearance of any negative incident that will cause damage to the site. This is to prevent the site from physically experiencing problems of deterioration. In cases where a heritage site is already undergoing negative impact, safeguarding is carried out to prevent the site from future/further negative impact that may lead to further degradation, damage or deterioration. In general, safeguarding may also be defined as conservation.

In the case of Ifugao heritage, “conscious” safeguarding is presently being undertaken as a consequence of its inscription in the UNESCO WHL, and much later, as a result of its listing to the WHL in danger. Progressive transformations taking place in the province have lead authorities to deliberate efforts of safeguard-

ing their valuable heritage. Prior to inscription, the Ifugaos have been naturally managing their rice terraces and culture, as instinctively and unconsciously as they have done so in the past and through time immemorial. The Ifugao rice terraces together with their culture have been passed on through generations.

Ifugao province significantly forms part of the Cordillera Region, whose rice terraces and culture is the one, which have been inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The first four priority sites that have been inscribed in the WHL are located within the Ifugao province. The rice terraces and culture of the Cordillera has been classified as a cultural landscape having both natural and cultural characteristics of outstanding universal value.

“The term ‘cultural landscape’ embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment. Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature.”

WHL Convention explains the importance of protecting cultural landscapes in an international level as follows: “*the continued existence of traditional forms of land-use supports biological diversity in many regions of the world. The protection of traditional cultural landscapes is therefore helpful in maintaining biological diversity.*”

Studying the different cultures of the world does not only help in maintaining biological and cultural diversity but also assists in understanding how each and every culture stands up to constant transformations that have contributed to their disappearance. In safeguarding these cultures, the understanding of factors causing these transformations likewise helps determine appropriate approaches to conservation. Most cases in the world show that it is the same factors that are causing such transformations, but approaches to conservation are normally performed on a case-to-case basis. It is here where a thorough study of the specific characteristics of a site is undertaken, to determine specific solutions to each problem.

In living cultures such as that of the Ifugaos, transformations are inevitable. The culture in itself has evolved through time. However, it is only recently that forces causing these transformations are thoughtfully being studied, as a result of the rapidly progressing changes currently taking place in the province.

WHL inscription describes the Ifugao rice terraces as a site that bears a unique and exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition and civilization, which is still living. In its environment is seen an outstanding example of a distinct type of landscape and culture, which have manifested itself in an architectural and technological ensemble, illustrating significant stages in history. In the Ifugao is shown an outstanding example of traditional human settlements and land-uses, representative of the uniqueness of their culture.

Ifugao has both natural and cultural heritage making it in the cultural landscape category. The site is located within the Philippine Cordillera mountain range, amidst rugged mountainous landscapes, north of the island of Luzon, Philippine archipelago. The name of people of this province, the “*Ifugaos*” is derived from the root word *Ipugo*, which literally means “from the hills”. The term *Ipugo* also refers to a kind of rice grain cultivated by the Ifugaos.

The Ifugao province concentrated on agricultural practices, which have resulted to the development of their extensive mountainous environment into rice terraces. Combined with traditional processes, these terraced landscapes have enriched the areas’ cultural growth.

Theories by anthropologists indicate that Ifugaos are descendants of the 3rd wave of settlers, the Malays, that inhabited the three main islands of the Philippines (Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao), between 300 B.C. to 850 A.D. This indicates that the terraces were developed approximate 2000 years ago. However, other anthropologists believed that the development of Ifugao’s rice terrace culture is dated on a later period, sometime during the 15th century. Others have dated these to a much later century. Though dating of the fields has not been well established, this has not reduced the heritage value of the area.

Significant to the area are the traditions that came hand in hand with agricultural development, whose uniqueness have brought them worldwide recognition.



Rice Terrace

The Ifugao culture is embedded on traditions that are based on a framework of strong thresholds of beliefs, established from the power of nature and animal worship. The culture is therefore entrenched in cus-

toms and traditions strongly cosmological in origin and animistic in nature. Ifugao myth describes their belief in the existence of a Sky world God. Successive events to this belief lead to the development of the Ifugao culture and traditional practices. Rituals related to rice cultivation, the raising of animals for subsistence and their belief in the sacrifice of these to appease gods in times of trouble or glorify them have been practiced as part of their existence. A ritual called the *baki*, dedicated to man and rice culture, is their basic rite and this was performed by mumbakis or native priests.



The Bakle ritual (Rice cake ritual)

Rituals for every stage of the rice agricultural cycle are performed in granaries. Gods are invoked for favor to protect each stage of the rice agricultural cycle and granary gods called *bulul* are brought out, done simultaneously with the offering of animals and the drinking of the rice wine or *baya*.

Work in the fields is strenuous and demanding and is considered a noble profession. During planting and harvesting season, men and women toil the land, from morning to late afternoon. The rice terraces are a most valued possession, given so much meaning and personal attachment that these have been handed down through generations.

In 1995, the World Heritage Committee inscribed the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras under criteria (iii), (iv) and (v), based on the joint evaluation by ICOMOS and IUCN. The rice terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras considered outstanding examples of living cultural landscapes have been evaluated through their cultural values, illustrating traditional techniques and presenting a remarkable harmony between humankind and their natural environment.

The Ifugao culture, to date, has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible changes. In 2001, the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordillera was down inscribed to the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger because of the susceptibility of these terraced fields, together with its natural environment, to economic and social forces that have led to its physical erosion and decay. Both tangible and intangible aspects of the cultural and natural heritage of the Ifugaos have

therefore been affected by transformations that are a result of a variety of factors.

Out migration has been considered the prime mover in the changing lifestyles of the Ifugaos. The abandonment of the terraces have been observed as more Ifugao youth have migrated to other places because of the economically profitable conditions presented outside the province. The agricultural yield is just enough to sustain a family's whole year food supply and a parent's dream of improving his children's lives has resulted to their encouragement to study in the cities. This quest for a progressive life has therefore brought people to live in other places, resulting to the neglect of some of the terraced fields. And while majority of the farmers living in the area are of the aged generation, the productive young laborers are outside the province. This scarcity of working hands to maintain the land has also contributed to the slow disappearance of traditional agricultural practices.

National government programs directed toward the development of all remote areas of the Philippines have also been seen as one influential factor affecting the integrity of significant heritage sites of the country. Programs aimed to provide basic human necessities to remote places, like road systems, water and electricity, communications have been considered to improve lifestyles and standard of livings, but at the same time have been known to impact on these cultural values. Modern influences brought about by television and cable, have likewise influenced young impressionable Ifugaos with what is in vogue in other parts of the country and the world. The younger generation exposed to the outside world has become appreciative and more assimilated to these other cultures.

As these modern influences filter through the region, it is not only social transformations that have affected the integrity of their culture. Physical changes in the rice terraces have also been observed. Modifications in the traditional manner of buttressing rice terrace walls using stones or sticky clay have been seen, presently with the use of cement as consolidating material to facilitate work. Fastness of this method has been appreciated but likewise feared to impact on the disappearance of traditional practices. Moreover, pathways leading to rice fields have recently been cemented to pave way for an effortless walk along mountain trails.

The depletion of surrounding watersheds (forests), as a result of the unregulated cutting of trees by community members, has also affected the integrity of the rice fields. Likewise, the conversion of these areas into other uses such as quarry sites, or the sourcing of timber for woodcarving, and the application of the slash

and burn techniques (*kaingin*) on these forested areas for gardening, have actually contributed to accelerated soil erosion, consequently affecting water sources. This has led to inadequate water supply of the rice fields.

And because of lack of maintenance, old irrigation systems too have experienced damage resulting to diminished water supply. Among others, the high cost of repair has been seen as one of the other reasons for the lack of maintenance. Consequently, the scarcity of water supply has caused the earth foundation to become brittle, leading to erosions in the irrigation canals.

Inconsistent weather patterns influenced by the El Nino phenomenon has also been seen to bring drought to the region. And because of lack of maintenance of the fields, drought has resulted to their destruction. During rainy season, these dried up paddies have become prone to erosion, leading to the collapse of terrace walls. The rice terrace landscape then becomes a picture of damaged walls.

Modern influences to traditional systems are manifested in the scarcity of traditional settlements within the region. Present Ifugaos have been subjected to western influences in their present concept of space. The original four-walled single room house called *bale* became a multiple roomed structure, complete with all modern amenities seen in contemporary living. Improvements using new materials and systems of construction have allowed modifications to this traditional building architecture. Galvanized iron sheets have likewise replaced old thatched roofs of surviving granaries, while house components have been modified using contemporary materials. Rarely can be seen the once famous traditional settlements that made the region's landscape distinctly unique.

The dependency on financial assistance from international and national funding agencies has also contributed to the disappearance of traditional methods of agricultural practices. The reliance on new systems and the neglect of the old has been feared to cause impact on the preservation of cultural values.

Government programs that superficially allow improvements to traditional systems have been considered as another prime mover of these transformations taking place in the province. An example is the introduction of non-endemic flora species in forests, and fauna in the rice terraces to help improve lives of the people and therefore augment their income. Although initial intentions were good, these have actually caused problems to the province. The proliferation of incompatible flora in the forests have likewise affected watersheds, while the introduction of animal species in the rice fields to add to their food supply, like the Japanese golden snails, have in reality caused pestilence on the fields.

Inadequate government policies that fail to regulate developments, like the un-controlled urbanization and commercialization of some centers, have also resulted to the destruction of the cultural landscape. In the Banaue district, for example, haphazard appearance of newly constructed or unfinished buildings encroaching the once serene forest cover of the area has been observed. Lack of building codes to regulate these developments is seen as one of the perpetrators. Zoning regulations not in congruence with conservation principles, are also seen as one factor causing the degradation to the heritage values of the site.

Although these transformations taking place, particularly the upgrading of the standards of living of these mountain people, are considered as improvements to the cultural development of the region, they have unfortunately likewise lead to the erosion of the cultural foundations of the people, which may specifically result to the gradual disappearance of their traditional practices. Traditional practices of this living culture, whose future is incessantly being impinged upon by the evolution of values continuously taking place, is now placed on dilemma.

As main focal point of the inscription centering on the rice terraces being a product of the interaction of the works of man and nature, a master conservation plan was developed in 1996 to address the needs of managing the tangible representations of the rice culture. Together with the efforts that focused on the conservation of the terraces, the Banaue Rice Terraces Task Force (BRTTF) was formed. However, due to political reasons, the Banaue Rice Terraces Task Force (BRTTF) was abolished on 17 September, 2002, by Presidential Executive Order No. 72, which effectively transferred the responsibilities, functions, and assets of the Task Force to the Ifugao Provincial Government. The Ifugao Rice Terrace and Cultural Heritage Office is now the functional legal body under the Governor's office to organize and implement development on behalf of Ifugao as part of the rice terrace and culture of the Philippine Cordillera World Heritage Site.

In answer to problems that the Ifugao rice culture have been facing, government programs have been identified to immediately arrest issues related to the preservation of their traditional rice practices. Amongst these are the reforestation of the surrounding watersheds; the immediate repair of communal irrigation systems; the restoration of collapsed terrace walls; the sourcing of alternative livelihood for terrace farmers in order to convince them to remain in the province and cultivate the land; the building of road networks within terraced areas to intensify economic activities; the use of tourism as a strategy for development, most



the Urban development of Banaue district showing new buildings near the rice terraces and forested areas

especially the introduction of eco tourism programs; the strengthening in the appreciation of the young generation to the values of the Ifugao culture; the strengthening of institutional development of the community organizations; and the augmentation to agricultural production of non-terraced lands that would help economic growth.

And to address issues on the urbanization of rice-terraced areas, land use plans are also currently being formulated on the grass roots (*barangays*) level of government. Community members have been empowered through consultations and participation in decision-making processes, especially on views related to the development of their ancestral lands. In the land use plans currently being developed, conservation issues are being considered part of the working strategy. Identification of proper zoning systems has also become an important component, giving attention to the delineation of core heritage and buffer zones to ensure preservation of the most significant areas of the Ifugao terraced landscapes. Community based enforceable legislations are also being developed to effectively ensure that land use and zoning ordinances will be properly implemented.

Though some of the identified solutions have conflicting effects to the integrity of conservation efforts, for example the building of road networks which has earlier been identified as a precursor for urban transformations taking place in remote villages of the country, these have been weighed upon as positive instruments that would in a way help alleviate poor economic conditions of these remote areas.

In all these identified specific solutions, safeguarding of heritage values as the essence to ensure the future of the Ifugao rice terrace and culture is seen, in general, through the mitigation of future problems, and the impedance from further development of presently experienced negative impacts. Factors causing all these have been identified as those forces in the political, economic and social field. However, together with the concerted rehabilitation efforts aimed at conserving the Ifugao rice terraces and its culture, and the specific approaches to conservation that have earlier been identified, the local government still feels that the cooperation and support of the people is the main key to ensure success to these conservation programs.