

Preservation Of Heritage School Buildings In The Philippines:

A Case Study Of The Gabaldon Buildings

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Abstract

This research is an attempt to revisit the Philippines' Gabaldon school buildings (GSB) in the light of Republic Act 11194. The research offers scrutiny of the law vis-a-vis prospects on practices of preserving and advocating the historical and cultural value of GSB. Using qualitative method of research, this study particularly employs content analysis of RA 11194. The discussion of this paper is clustered into two main sections: The narrative of GSB since its beginning, along with presenting notable details of select edifices which still serving the Philippine education system and an in-depth reading and analysis of RA 11194. It scrutinizes the provisions of the law, along with sectional mandates and its implications. A closer examination of RA 11194 brings varied perspectives on how the law can effectively contribute to successful preservation of GSB. Its mandates encompass Filipino nation-building as evidently showcased in the preservation of GSB. Preserving these structures provides an in-depth reflection of how the Filipino identity has been affirmed. RA 11194 is also an invitation for stakeholders to work together for a common cause. It provides opportunities to highlight organizational functions as once known as a classroom building becomes a significant aspect of Philippine history. Analyzing the law can be seen through three distinct perspectives: agent for Filipino nation-building, mechanism to intensify stakeholder involvement and lens to view a sustainable Filipino culture.

Keywords: *Gabaldon School Building, Heritage Schools, Philippines, Education, Conservation, Policy, Preservation*

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Introduction

As globalization invades the school setting, teaching, and learning as a process is shaped by numerous drivers. Culture is one aspect that plays a significant part in the students' curricular and academic journey. The students' overall experience in and out of the classroom contributes to the way they exhibit favorable academic performance. A study by Usen (2016:73-80) suggested that teachers employ school facilities in their practices to contribute to the "academic growth" of learners. True enough, prioritizing upkeep of school facilities and infrastructure provide a solid contribution towards equitable and quality education. "Modern, comfortable, and safe" classrooms are a few prerequisites for students to be engaged academically (Brunner & Vincent, 2018:43). Even Dagli & Gencdal (2019:166-180) stated that there exists a moderate and positive relationship between school building and teacher's organizational commitment.

The improvement of physical facilities in the context of education yields crucial impact on the academic achievement of students. Great efforts have been made to enhance curricular offerings, teacher training, and student welfare, but the fact still remains that the "buildings in which students and teachers teach and learn" have captured the attention of authorities (Gertel, McCarty & Schoff, 2004:20-24). School facilities, particularly buildings in the campus have been consistently referred to as old-age and in dire need of repair and renovation. A study by Rivera (2019, 16) showed that policies are criticized as the allocated budget for school facilities are "inadequate, inequitable, and inefficient," thus the need to enhance these policies. Ensuring people's money is directed to appropriate school project and program is one step close to reaching the goals of education. Guaranteeing facilities being used by school children are safe, secure, and of good quality are mechanisms that reflect sound policies on fiscal concerns and infrastructures in schools. As stakeholders view the upkeep of school facilities to be a complex process, advocating restoration and maintenance of these infrastructures are not a priority (Nhlapo, 2019:20).

Several research attempts have been conducted regarding school facilities and its impact on student achievement advocating that a school's environmental attributes play an important role in students' academic performance, attitudes, and behaviour (Maxwell, 1999:91). Authors have identified a clear link between school buildings and effective learning. With these in mind, it is imperative that education authorities and key persons emphasize the provision of acceptable environment, school facilities. Hopland (2013:162-171) noted how poor facilities breed negative impact on academic achievement of students in some countries. It has also been argued by Earthman (2018:47-61) that research scholars in the field have attempted to study the link between school buildings and students' academic achievement, yielding positive results, even though concerns on various methodologies have also been identified.

It is worthy to note how school facilities and structures clearly reflect the institution's legacy and contribution in the process of teaching and learning. School buildings act as a concrete evidence of the institution's past as it provides a glimpse of how it envisions itself towards the future. These artifacts, grand or not, concrete or temporary, are traces of solid school culture that serve as a reminder

that their necessary upkeep will be beneficial in understanding current school affairs and visualizing the future.

Schools in the Philippines boast grand architectural artifacts reflecting historical and social narratives of the Filipino people. Particularly in the elementary and high schools, Gabaldon school building (GSB) were buildings designed by American Architect William Parsons thru Act Number 1801 authored by Philippine Assemblyman Isauro Gabaldon (Cepeda, 2017). While some of these GSBs stand up to this day, some buildings of the same type are also being left unkept and demolished to make way for new structures. Temporal and spatial elements have posed challenges to keep the GSB functional and in good condition.

In 2019, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte signed Republic Act 11194 which mandates the preservation of the architectural, historical, and social significance of GSB (Placido, 2019). These edifices have witnessed the daily lives of Filipino students and teachers and the quest for quality education in the country. These school buildings, which have stood for more than a hundred years, characterize high-pitch galvanized iron roofing and high ceiling to match the Philippines' tropical climate. As these buildings are part of the long history, these deserve to be treated as a cultural heritage (Honda, 2015).

Physical integrity is one concept that relates to a building being historic (Mazzarella, 2015:23-31). However, as public-school buildings face threat of deterioration and neglect, there are only limited renovations due to lack of funds (Mora, et al., 2018:969). Cultural heritage artefacts in the Philippines also manifest these dilemmas leaving minimal efforts for restoration and preservation due to fiscal concerns. With legal mandates at hand, it is expected that in the future, Filipino heritage buildings would be given emphasis and importance with respect to the roles they played in history.

This research is an attempt to revisit GSB in the light of RA 11194. The research offers scrutiny of the law vis-a-vis prospects on future practices in terms of preserving and advocating the historical and cultural value of GSB. RA 11194 signals the dawn of looking back at Filipino heritage and putting premium on rich architectural, historical, and social impact of GSB built in the 1920s. Beyond its great pillars and concrete walls, these buildings are gradually defeated by spatial and temporal elements which could eventually lead to destruction, condemnation, and demolition. As an initial study of a larger research on the preservation and conservation of heritage school buildings in the Philippines, this paper attempts to present the narrative of GSB. With the passage of RA 11194, this study seeks to look at the plight of GSB given legislative mandates, with prime consideration to temporal and spatial elements.

How do the mandates of RA 11194 capture the proactive and efficient efforts of preserving and conserving heritage buildings? What clauses of the law put premium on the temporal and spatial challenges of upholding Filipino culture by preserving heritage school buildings in the country? How does the law capture the es-

sence of being responsive in the light of heritage structures being at the threat of destruction, condemnation, and demolition? These inquiries guide the researcher in outlining the flow of this study. The government is also called on to advocate its commitment as reflected in budgetary resourcing (Benade, 2017:22). With the current challenges faced by the education sector such as ballooning student enrolment and education demands, management and sustenance of school buildings remains a big task (Al Shboul, 2018:79-91). It is hoped that while the research is contextualized in the conservation and preservation of heritage schoolhouses, this inquiry would also be relevant in terms of its contribution to limited local literature, research-based practices, and theory-founded decision making.

The significance of this research is reflected on the crucial need to document heritage edifices in the Philippines. These structures face the threat of destruction and eventual demolition. This research is a contribution to highlight Filipino heritage to instill awareness and advocate the study of Filipino culture and heritage among the readers.

Methodology

As an initial inquiry, this study is a part of a large research project on the preservation and conservation of heritage school buildings in the Philippines built in the country during the colonial period. Using qualitative method of research, this study particularly employs content analysis of RA 11194. The discussion of this paper is clustered into two main sections. The first part deals with the narrative of GSB since its beginning, along with presenting notable details of select edifices which still serving the Philippine education system either as classrooms or administrative offices. With the challenge of having limited available literature related to this study, the researcher compiles mostly online repositories and websites dedicated to the study of GSB. The second part of the study provides an in-depth reading and analysis of RA 11194. It scrutinizes the provisions of the law, along with sectional mandates and its implications.

As a study involving purely public documents, this research poses no ethical threats to humans. The researcher is guided by the principles of fairness, honesty, and objectivity in ethically handling available data used in this study. Careful analysis of gathered documents has also been observed by the proponent of this study and these data were used only for the sole purpose of this research.

Results and Discussion

The Heritage Filipino School Building Called “Gabaldon”

It is said that in 1909, at least 3,000 GSB that were constructed as mandated by Act No. 1801. Notably, the inspiration of the design came from the traditional bahay kubo (nipa hut) or bahay na bato (house of stone). Both bahay kubo and bahay na bato were regarded the typical Filipino homes, showcasing traditional architecture, during the colonial period. Bahay kubo is considered as the “most indigenous domestic house” (Ogura et al., 2002:233-238), while bahay na bato served as the place for the wealthy.



Figure 1. Bahay kubo. source: <https://philippineculturaleducation.com.ph/bahay-kubo/>.

Kim and Lim (2013:29-37) noted how both bahay kubo and bahay na bato have stood the tests of nature (climate and earthquakes) and even social and cultural occurrences. Felipe (2006:16-29) has regarded bahay kubo a “fundamentally Filipino architectural icon” while bahay na bato boasts the Philippines’ “traditional style showing the strong spatial separation functionally and space wideness” (Kim and Lim, 2013:135-144).



Figure 2. Bahay na bato. Source: <https://philippineculturaleducation.com.ph/bahay-na-bato/>.

Isauro Gabaldon, the man behind GSB was born in the province of Nueva Ecija and he became the governor of the province then later became a member of the Philippine Assembly when he authored the Gabaldon Act that led to the construction of GSB all over the country with a budget of only Php 1 million. The said school buildings are intended to house for a daily attendance of at least sixty (60) students.

| Inclusive Years | Key Events |
|-----------------|--|
| 1907 | Act No. 1801 (Gabaldon Act) was passed, authored by Assemblyman Isauro Gabaldon and school buildings were designed by American Architect William Parsons |
| 1907 – 1915 | Modern public schools were built in the Philippines with an appropriation of Php 1 Million |
| 2019 | Republic Act No. 11194 “Gabaldon School Buildings Conservation Act,” was signed into law by President Rodrigo Duterte |

Figure 3. A table showing time periods and key events related to the GSB.

According to Lopez (2019), these GSBs are characterized as 7x9 meter edifices which elevate 1.2m from the ground. The structures feature concrete posts with design to prevent flooding. Located in a tropical country, the construction of GSB provided gaps in between the wooden floor to facilitate cool air ventilation.

The roof of the building is composed of lightweight nipa or galvanized iron as extensions to block the sun and raindrops (Enriquez, 2019). Further description from Enriquez (2019) featured GSB as equipped with:

“Large swing-out capiz shell inlay windows run along the stretch of the single-loaded open corridor. Ventanillas or transom windows were then used to ensure that cross ventilation is achieved, and natural lighting reaches the inside.”

Currently, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) oversee the GSB (Quizon Garciano 2019) and it is imperative to recognize how natural calamities present threats to the heritage structures. NHCP is the main government arm tasked to promote the history of the Philippines. NHCP maintains a repository of historic sites and structures in the country. Included in the website repository are pictures and notes about several GSB. Succeeding figures are few images which can be found in the NHCP Historic Sites website.



Figure 4. Rizal Elementary School Gabaldon. Source: <http://nhcphistoricsites.blogspot.com/search/label/Gabaldon%20School>.

Scrutinizing RA 11194: Preserving the Past for a Better Tomorrow

A closer examination of RA 11194 brings varied perspectives on how the law can effectively contribute to successful preservation of GSB. Analyzing the law can be seen through three distinct perspectives: agent for Filipino nation-building, mechanism to intensify stakeholder involvement and lens to view a sustainable Filipino culture. This section presents criticisms as well as strong points that point to abovementioned concerns. Central to the analysis of RA 11194 is its ultimate goal of conserving the heritage structures.

More Than a Schoolhouse: Highlighting Filipino Nation-Building

GSBs are mute witnesses of the glorious past of the Filipino people. These grand structures boast the Philippines rich culture, which also reflect the struggles and success during colonization, war, independence, and nation-building. Utilized as classrooms, GSB nurtured young minds as future leaders of the country under the expertise of Filipino teachers. As noticeable as GSB structures, each concrete wall echoes its striking contribution to Filipino nation-building through education.



Figure 5. Negros Occidental High School Gabaldon. Source: <http://nhcphistoricsites.blogspot.com/search/label/Gabaldon%20School>.



Figure 6. Rizal Elementary School. Source: <http://nhcphistoricsites.blogspot.com/search/label/Gabaldon%20School>.



Figure 7. Rizal Elementary School Gabaldon. Source: <http://nhcphistoricsites.blogspot.com/search/label/Gabaldon%20School>.

The mandates of RA 11194 encompass Filipino nation-building as evidently showcased in the preservation of GSB. The law captures advocacies that strengthen the Filipino spirit that is concretized by Philippine history, culture, and society. RA 11194 presents GSB beyond the impressive pillars and solid walls. Certain provisions of the law act as reinforcement in pinpointing nation-building and championing the Filipino spirit.

The Section 2 – Declaration of Policy of RA 11194 clearly states the policy of the State to conserve and promote historical and cultural structures such as GSB through conservation and restoration in order to preserve its architectural, historical and social significance which is a move towards the preservation of our national heritage that has been neglected over the years like these buildings that have been serving countless generation of students who are usually unaware of their historical significance and are destructive and careless in their use.

Also, Section 4 – GSB as Cultural Properties declares all GSB as part of Cultural properties under RA 10066 can be seen as a move that cements the role of the structure as a valuable asset. Elevating the status of GSB as “cultural properties” can be seen as an aggressive move in recognizing its roles in the past and even in the future of Philippine education system. It does not only capture how GSBs are treated in the realm of teaching and learning but also in the context of history, society, and culture of the Filipino people.

To be able to fully embed how GSBs have played a significant role in the past, a mandate could also be issued on the historical narratives of the structures: how it stood over the decades in the midst of nature and man-made catastrophe. As GSB can be found all over the country, it is no doubt that each structure had been a crucial factor in shaping local or even national events. In the long run, integrating lessons on GSB could provide an avenue for a more contextualized lesson in Social

Studies, Local History, and other related academic subjects. This could also deepen the students' identity and sense of pride when it comes to the narratives of the past.

Conserving GSB all over the country is one step towards realizing a strong foundation for Filipino nation-building: rooted on the glorious past of the people, stories of the people, and narratives for the people. Preserving heritage structures in the country can also be equated to formally laying the steppingstone towards strengthening Filipino consciousness through historical and social aspects.

Stakeholder Commitment and Involvement

It is worthy to note how the law upholds the contribution of each stakeholder in advancing advocacies towards the preservation of Filipino heritage. Section 5 explicitly calls for each local government units to adopt measures stipulated in the law with regards to the preservation of GSB. By doing so, each locality will be given a sense of history of their own as these structures can be seen right at their communities. Citizens will also be given the opportunity to contribute since these buildings have been part of their collective, if not just individual consciousness. Sustaining commitment and involvement of various stakeholders cannot just be confined to education personnel. Even civilians can also participate in the efforts of preservation since it is assumed that once in their lives, a relative or even they have been part of the history of GSB.

Section 4 – GSB as Cultural Properties exempts public school teachers the liability for acts that may cause damages that may lead to emergency repairs to the structures. As these buildings were built decades ago and some classes are held in GSB, it is significant to note how teachers could be placed in a situation that the practice of their profession could also create an impact on the general appearance of the building due to continued use. True enough, the current increase in student population should be revisited as this greatly affects GSB's deterioration.

In Section 6 – Appropriations, mandates the DepEd the funding inclusion to implement RA 11194. Though DepEd will be working hand in hand with NCCA, NHCP and NM, funding for the conservation of the said buildings are solely to be shouldered by the department while it waives through educational advancements brought about by the implementation of the country's new curriculum, instead of sharing the funds with National Commission on Culture and the Arts, National Historical Commission of the Philippines and the National Museum who are also intended to safeguard the country's heritage sites thus declaring these buildings as heritage sites bears no meaning. Working and funding the project implementation and involving linked government agencies would surely bring a shared commitment and sense of ownership as each institution would take pride in advocating the preservation of GSB not just for instructional purposes, but also for historical and social gains.

Finally, RA 11194 has created a niche for collective efforts among involved government agencies to work hand in hand for a common cause. The legal mandate has provided an avenue to forge institutional linkages between concerned public institutions. While GSBs can be found at the heart of public schools in the Philippines, DepEd is not left alone in this quest to preserve and conserve the structure. The commitment and involvement of stakeholders become central in implementing RA 11194.

GSBs: The Past in the Present for the Future of Filipino Culture

GSBs reflect the glorious past of the Filipino people. It is evident that the quest for quality education has been at the core of Filipino consciousness even during colonial times. The present-day GSB tells how the Philippine society has evolved and preserving these structures is one step ahead towards bringing its narratives to the next generation. Sustaining the future of the Filipino culture is one significant mechanism to express value for history, identity, and consciousness.

Section 5 explicitly prohibits the “modification, alteration, destruction, demolition, or relocation” of GSBs. This order as stated into law provides an assurance that GSBs will be first and foremost given the attention it deserves. Mechanisms that uphold the original design of GSBs could also signal a sense of history: Mandating the preservation of the façade and GSBs unique characteristics also contribute to holistic efforts in putting investments on the past for the future of the Filipino culture.

To ensure that GSBs could stand the current situation, particularly the dawn RA 10533, permit and technical consultations are required in case conservation measures are necessary. GSBs do not just echo the past but it also leaves a statement that it can be of significance in the contemporary times.

The preservation of GSB goes beyond maximizing the practical use of school buildings. It creates a vital understanding to Filipino heritage and consciousness. More than adhering to environmentally accepted industry practices, the preservation of GSB resurfaces the glorious past of the Filipino people. As GSBs are given space for sustainable use, its preservation signals the comeback of its original historic forms and stability. It is high time that policy makers put premium on reviving culture and heritage through preservation and restoration. It is imperative that programs and policies concerning heritage buildings be revisited as it not only fulfills historical interest, but it also nurtures sustainability. Responsive and timely guidelines must be advanced to uphold GSBs past and identify. This way, the needs of the contemporary times are met while preserving the golden experiences of the past.

GSB is a gift from the past for the future generations of Filipinos. As these can be found all over the Philippines, it brings another perspective of the country’s culture and the preservation of GSB can be considered as stream of knowledge and consciousness of the past. The narrative of GSB cannot just be confined on education contexts alone; it also encompasses cultural, social, and historical chronicles.

Conclusions

As an initial inquiry of a larger study, this paper attempts to revisit RA 11194 in relation to efforts to preserve GSB in the Philippines. For its humble beginnings which can be traced through bahay kubo to bahay na bato, GSBs serve as testaments of the Filipino struggles towards quality education even during the colonial period. The structures showcase the glorious past of the Filipino people and the unique characteristics of GSBs are sophisticated features of the colorful and celebrated historical past.

GSB can be seen as an agent towards nation building. Preserving these structures provides an in-depth reflection of how the Filipino identity has been affirmed. GSB tells the stories of the great Filipino ancestors and their quests. RA 11194 is also an invitation for stakeholders to work together for a common cause. It provides opportunities to highlight organizational functions as once known as a classroom building becomes a significant aspect of Philippine history. Lastly, RA 11194 is one step towards realizing a sustainable culture: preserving and conserving the past so the future generation can also contribute to its narratives. RA 11194 is an assurance that GSB can still be witnessed by the future generations of the Filipino people.

Preserving heritage building can be seen as an aspect towards knowledge generation rooted on historical past. It provides contemporary perspectives in order to visualize the future. Studies such as these are platforms that celebrate cultural experiences for continuity and sustainable future. Especially during the contemporary times, advocating the preservation and conservation of GSB call for stringent measures. Social development in the midst of efforts to value the past requires commitment and sound policy attempts to ensure cultural resources are valued and given attention.

Future studies will focus on specific inquiries regarding particular GSB in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. It will highlight features and characteristics the how these structures can be compared and contrasted, despite known common similarities. How each GSB has significantly played roles towards community development will also be explored.

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