

PAMB, DENR Mandate, Heritage, Environmental and Archaeological Concern: Clearing the Path for a Better Site Management in BNBNP

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Abstract

Man's relationship with nature has historically been one of imbalance and overuse. Closely every step in human history has unfortunately been accompanied with an increase in environmental degradation. At first, humans were incredibly in-tune with their surroundings. The ability of humans to manipulate the landscape and recognize the consequences of doing so puts the researchers in a peculiar position. As a species we are assigned the duty to provide and proliferate. Our goal is to achieve stability for ourselves and our kin. However, we also have an obligation to maintain the environment, as we depend on the resources and space it provides. The question then becomes: what is our role in nature? Do we have the right to manipulate the land, mountains, and heritage sites? Or do we have an obligation to reduce our numbers and merely subsist? In order to answer these questions, we must rely on our knowledge of Earth, evolution, and our influence on the environment. This research focuses on the heritage protection of Biak naBato which has an archaeological and historical potential. It contributes in protecting and developing the natural built and historic environment of the Biak naBato National Park (BNBNP).

Keywords: Heritage, PAMB, DENR, BNBNP, NCAA, Archaeological Site, and Environment Protection

Environmental or archaeological agenda in protecting a site boils down to a general conclusion that whatever that site is, it is substantial to the people who live there. In a wider perspective, it is important for everybody as a nation. That's why there is an endless effort to provide that protection by creating agencies who have specific mandate to safeguard any significant site for whatever reason in relation to history, environment, culture, from the emergence of the Philippine government.

In the Philippines there are at least 53 National Parks declared, 8 Wild Life Sanctuaries, 6 Protected Landscapes/Seascapes, 2 Wilderness Areas, 1 Fish Sanctuary, 8 National Integrated Protected Areas and 7 Municipal Marine Reserve (World Institute for Conservation of Nature and Environment- WICE). The drafting of the Omnibus Cultural Heritage Law, otherwise known as the "Philippine Cultural Heritage Law" aims to provide protection and preservation of the Philippine Cultural Heritage. This began as an interface program within the Sub commission for Cultural Heritage (SCH) in 1994. This was initiated by the Commissioner for SCH, Felice Prudente Sta Maria as an advocacy mandate of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (www.lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2010/ra_10066_2010).

The bill was further deliberated on by the NCCA members of the 22 National Committees and the affiliate government agencies, like the National Museum, Cultural Center of the Philippines, National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP), Records Management and Archives Office and the Intramuros Administration for the Department of Tourism (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/media>). The first Omnibus Philippine Cultural Heritage Law considers existing laws pertaining to culture and cultural properties, international conventions, heritage laws of different countries and most importantly our local needs.

Among the major features of the proposed bill are as follow:

1. A redefinition of cultural properties to encompass tangible and intangible properties;
2. A sharing of responsibilities among national, provincial and local government systems- and private owners- in the maintenance of cultural properties, which includes financing and training of property managers;
3. A system to prioritize which cultural properties will be conserved ahead of others-allowing quality maintenance of major historical sites and collections;

4. The used of sustained cultural education- through the national formal and non-formal schooling, as well as the informal programs run by local governments- in order to generate people, support for conservation;
5. The inclusion of natural sites of scenic, aesthetic, historical or cultural value as cultural properties;
6. Creation of a national Cultural Properties Committee and a Conservation Trust Fund for National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties;
7. Maximizing the NCCA network of integrated public and private support for protection of the national heritage;
8. Designation of History Zones, Art Zones and History & Art Zones to enhance residents' sense of place; and to protect both cultural properties and histories;
9. Sustaining local culture studies in formal, non-formal and informal education;
10. Strengthening cultural information conduits and their interfacing on local, provincial and national levels;
11. Sustaining research and dissemination of local histories as a goal for local, provincial and national governments.

(Source: *Philippine Cultural Heritage Law*)

And in the last year of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, a very significant bill in heritage protection is passed on Fourteenth Congress. The Republic Act No. 10066 also known as "National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009, "an act proving for the protection and conservation of the National Cultural Heritage, strengthening the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and its affiliated cultural agencies and for other purposes."

The NCCA was created by Corazon C. Aquino on April 3, 1992 through Republic Act No. 7356 to formulate policies for the Development of Culture and Arts. The Commission is composed of the following members:

1. Undersecretary of the Department of Education
2. Undersecretary of Tourism
3. Chairman of the House Committee on Culture
4. Chairman of the Senate Committee on Culture
5. President of the Cultural Center of the Philippines
6. Executive Director of the National Historical Commission
7. Director of the National Museum
8. Director of the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino
9. Director of the National Library
10. Director of the National Archives of the Philippines
11. Executive Director of NCCA
12. Head of the Subcommission on the Arts
13. Head of the Subcommission on Cultural Dissemination
14. Head of the Subcommission on Cultural Communities and Traditional Arts
15. Head of the Subcommission on Cultural Heritage

(Source: *Manual of Operation National Commission for Culture and the Arts*)

The board of commissioners is tasked to be more specific in cultural heritage protection in terms of their concern as a cultural government agency, which is a very strategic plan by the government given the fact that we are in the phase of researching and documenting cultural dynamics in every land of the country.

However, there is a chance of overlapping, disagreement in defining a rule in heritage protection among these agencies which can provide confusion to people. A very controversial incident is the issue of Torre De Manila. The National Historical Commission of the Philippines came up with a disparate stance: that the Torre de Manila developer, DM Consunji Inc. (DMCI), did not violate heritage laws. While the NCCA and the National Museum of the Philippines (NMP), have joined forces in the legal battle to protect the vista corridor of the Rizal Monument. For reference, take note that all the major cultural agencies of the state, namely the NMP, NHCP, the National Library of the Philippines, the National Archives of the Philippines, the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, and the Cultural Center of the Philippines, are all represented in the board of commissioners of the NCCA.

One can thus imagine the tension of divergence only because one agency opted to be the odd one out. But the greatest damage is in the Filipino public for it is primarily the state that educates us in heritage and culture (Montalvan II, PDI: October 12, 2015). It is a must for every government agency to maintain their image as knowledgeable, passionate in history and culture, protector of heritage and non-conformist in dealing to private sector or anyone agendas that can affect the intangible and tangible symbol for the nation. These government agencies must provide credibility by making decision favorable to the nationalistic orientation of many Filipinos.

The very situation of NCCA, NMP and NHCP colliding with their positions regarding this matter provides miseducation and long term damage to our national identity. In R.A. 10066, strengthening the NCCA by identifying the role of cultural agencies in the countries, Article VIII, Section 31 stated that: Responsibilities of Cultural Agencies for Designation of Cultural Property. The cultural agencies, in conformity with their respective charters and mandates, shall define and delineate their respective areas of responsibility with respect to cultural property and assessment of national cultural treasures and national historical landmarks, sites or monuments. These areas shall be subjected for periodic re-assessment whenever necessary.

For purposes of this Act, the following shall be the responsibilities of cultural agencies in the categorization of cultural property:

- (a)The Cultural Center of the Philippines shall be responsible for significant cultural property pertaining to the performing arts;
- (b)The National Archives of the Philippines shall be responsible for significant archival materials;
- (c)The National Library shall be responsible for rare and significant contemporary Philippine books, manuscripts such as, but not limited to, presidential papers, periodicals, newspapers, singly or in collection, and libraries and electronic records;
- (d)The National Historical Institute shall be responsible for significant movable and immovable cultural property that pertains to Philippine history, heroes and the conservation of historical artefacts;
- (e)The National Museum shall be responsible for significant movable and immovable cultural and natural property pertaining to collections of fine arts, archaeology, anthropology, botany, geology, zoology and astronomy, including its conservation aspect; and
- (f)The Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino shall be responsible for the dissemination development, and the promotion of the Filipino national language and the conservation of ethnic languages.

Also in RA 10066 even the agencies in relation to environment cleared their role in heritage protection of the country: Article VIII, Section 32 (G) stated that:

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources which shall be responsible for the establishment and management of the National Integrated Protected Areas System and the conservation of wildlife resources, including caves and cave resources and which shall coordinate with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the conservation of natural resources that are cultural sanctuaries of indigenous people. Involving the DENR in heritage protection is really important because they are the one issuing the permit in any mining and construction of buildings, dams and other structure that can affect the biodiversity of the mountains, environment in general and archaeological site.

In doing their mandate, DENR created satellite offices in the province, the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office. This local office is specifically responsible for the management of the National Park (if ever there is) in the area. And the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992 (Republic Act No. 7586) also provides legal basis in creating protected area management system by organizing Protected Area Management Board (PAMB).

A protected area is managed by a multi-sectoral PAMB, composed of the DENR regional executive director under whose jurisdiction of the protected area is located; one representative of the autonomous regional government, if applicable; the provincial development officer; one representative of the municipal government; one representative from each barangay covering the protected area; one representative from each tribal community, if applicable; at least three representatives from NGOs or local community organizations; and, if necessary, one representative from other departments or national government agencies involved in protected areas (La Viña, p. 20).

Biak naBato National Park

The responsibility in heritage management of the nation is equally shared by some government agencies to ensure that coordination, collaboration and joint project development maybe happen for a much effective and sustainable program that will benefit the environmental, cultural and archaeological aspect of the nation properties. Biak naBato National Park as a very important historical, archaeological and environmental site in Bulacan indeed requires effort from both cultural and environmental agencies to provide protection for the total land area of 2, 117 hectares.

In 1937, President Manuel L. Quezon declared Biak naBato area as a National Park to honor the First Philippine Republic. Account in history mentioned that Aguinaldo went from Talisay, Batangas to Biak naBato to establish his headquarters. News of Aguinaldo’s arrival reached the towns of Central Luzon and as a consequence, armed men from Pangasinan, Zambales, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija and Ilocos provinces, renewed their armed resistance against the Spaniards. From Biak naBato, Aguinaldo and his men joined forces with General Mariano Llanera of Nueva Ecija and fought the Spaniard soldiers garrisoned in the Central Luzon provinces.

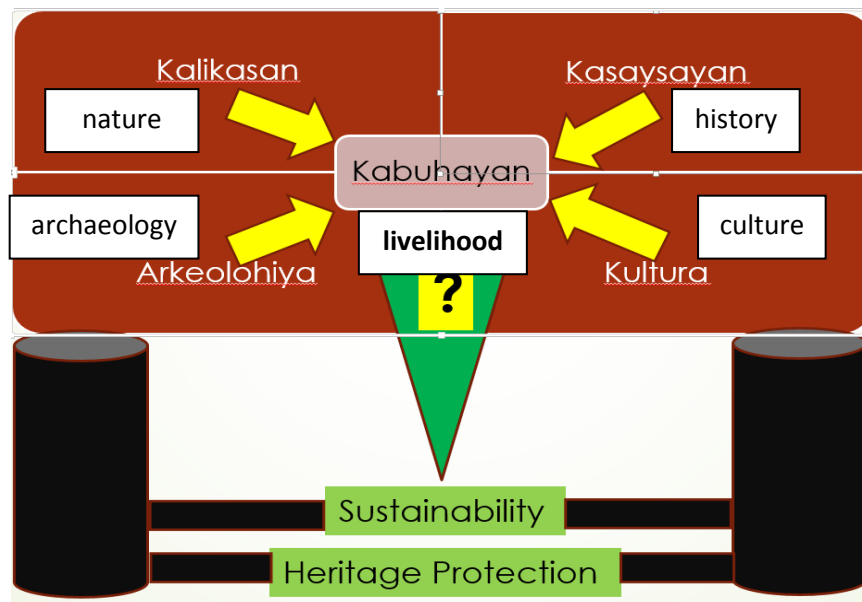
In present time Biak naBatonot only serves historical memories for Bulakenyos, this mountain range geologically characterized by the three mountain peaks- the Patuka-ibon, SusongDalaga and Kuarto-kuarto – provide livelihood, food and water resources for the community of San Miguel De Mayumo and Dona Remedios Trinidad. The abundant source of Kawayan serve as a raw material for the making of temporary fences sold by the locals and the water system in more than 300 caves in the area provide water source for the whole community. It is very clear that BNBPN must be protected not only as a heritage site but also as environmental site significant in the way of life and survival of the nearby municipality. Protected not only from mining, land conversion, treasure hunters but also from the abuse of the very people dependent in this mountain.

Multidisciplinary Approach in Program Development

There is no presence of archaeological project in BNBPN. It is understandable for some reasons. Firstly, there is no expertise in the field of archaeology in Bulacan. Secondly, to start an archaeological program, it must be sustainable for a long time in order to ensure the success of it, generation of funds in this kind of need is very difficult. Lastly, simply because no one from the government agencies is telling them that BNBPN is a very strategic site for archaeology because of its geological structure (Pleistocene landscape according to Dr. Armand Mijares).

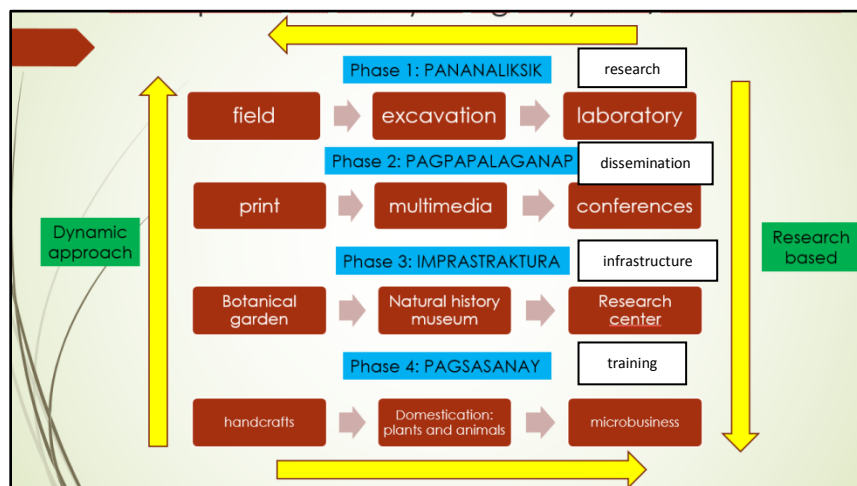
Given this situation in Biak naBato and by knowing how significant it is historically, archaeologically and environmentally, a multidisciplinary program approach can be effective to put heritage protection in the whole area.

Figure A shows the foundation of perspective in the multidisciplinary approach.



Since integration of archaeology for the national park management is new, the program also involves known field for them that most likely PAMB will approve and appreciate. The figure shows that once the environment, history, culture and archaeology is developed and protected it will create source of income for the community and these people from the community who deeply understand the value of their environment and stories in it are also the one provide sustainability of the heritage protection. Not simply because this mountain is their source of income but they fully understand that their identity as a Bulakenyos is connected in it.

Figure B shows a step by step process for the implementation of the heritage protection program based on the perspective foundation on Figure A:



The best way to convince the community is to provide scientific information based from the research conducted by some reputable academic agencies, professional advocates and environmental advocates who are experienced enough to conduct survey method in the field, parallel studies and feasibility studies in Biak naBato. These researches in Phase 1 will serve as the only basis for the next three steps of the program. The second phase is the information dissemination process which plays a vital role to make communities (local, national and international) involve in the program so that any plan that are illegal and destructive in the area will be automatically rejected by the people and the legal court.

The third phase is the infrastructure. Before implementing this, it requires updated and a lot of site studies assuring that these facilities will not affect the biodiversity of the park. And also, it requires hiring professional employees to manage the three components of the structure – botanical garden, museum and research center. Training prioritizing the community within the park and emphasizing that any business, domestication, artwork for selling as some memorabilia must not be a factor in changing and deterioration of the environment will be the fourth phase. The training must also involve the option for scholarship for the younger ones in the community for formal schooling.

These phases must be done based on reliable research but the system must be dynamic enough to recognize flexibility in the implementation, meaning, even if the phase 2 is not yet done we can proceed to phase 3 as long as there is an available research as a basis of the action. These agencies who are mandated to provide heritage protection in RA 10066 including the DENR, National Museum and others must conduct regular information update regarding heritage. In Bulacan, specifically in BNBPNP there are so many reports of cave looting (BuLSU-CBS Report 2015). This information coming from the locals most of the time can be a good source in identifying significant site of heritage. The government agencies concern must have that kind of presence in municipalities before somebody in the area do something illegal that can damage the heritage.

Archaeological research must always be considered in conducting cave assessment activities of the PAMB and DENR in BNBPNP. Pursuant to Republic Act No. 9072, otherwise known as the National Caves and Cave Resources Management and Protection Act of 2001, and Sections 10, 12 and 13 of its Implementing Rules and Regulations, (DAO 2003-29), a Manual on Cave Classification is hereby prescribed and adopted for all caves within public domain and private lands, including those found within protected areas for the guidance of all concerned. Page 9 of this Act specifically mentions potential artefacts in the cave must be evaluated.

The DENR and PAMB should consider a formal invitation in some academic communities who has the professional experience in cave archaeology to join the assessment activity. Heritage protection can be done in a multilateral dimension from every different perspective of any agency from the government. DENR must consider archaeological research activities in an area managed by their office even if this is a protected area. Why? Eventually these research activities will provide information for better understanding of the past and this understanding can lead to authentic concern from the people that will lead also to the development of a program not only for the protection of the heritage but also for the livelihood of the community for better living.

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