

Original Article

Determine the Role of Local Communities in Sustaining the Heritage Sites of Hungduan, Ifugao

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Abstract: Hungduan, a municipality in the Ifugao Province of the Philippines, is home to the Hungduan Rice Terraces, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In recent years, the town's heritage tourism industry has expanded, drawing visitors from around the world. Yet, cultural heritage faces increasing threats due to urbanization, globalization, natural disasters, and shifting social dynamics. These pressures highlight the necessity of active community involvement in safeguarding cultural legacy. This quantitative study investigated the engagement of local communities in sustaining the heritage sites of Hungduan, Ifugao, Philippines through survey questionnaires and statistical analysis. Findings reveal that the community actively preserves its cultural heritage by participating in cultural festivals and events, practicing bayanihan, and attending seminars and training programs. Despite these efforts, challenges such as out-migration, youth disinterest, natural disasters, and limited funding hinder traditional practices. Support from the local government, including financial incentives, heritage festivals, training initiatives, and the provision of modern farming tools such as tractors and rice mills, strengthens community efforts and enhances visitor experiences. The study further identifies best practices in heritage conservation, such as traditional farming workshops, tourism-related training, the establishment of heritage committees, and the empowerment of youth in conservation initiatives. These findings underscore the strong link between community engagement and the sustainability of heritage tourism. By highlighting the role of collaborative practices and government support, this research provides valuable insights for policy formulation, community empowerment, and the long-term preservation of Hungduan's cultural legacy.

Keywords: heritage conservation, sustainable tourism, community engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

Hungduan, a municipality in the Ifugao Province of the Philippines, is home to the Hungduan Rice Terraces, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In recent years, the town's heritage tourism industry has expanded, drawing visitors from around the world. Yet, cultural heritage faces increasing threats due to urbanization, globalization, natural disasters, and shifting social dynamics [1]. These pressures highlight the necessity of active community involvement in safeguarding cultural legacy. Community engagement in cultural heritage conservation refers to the meaningful participation of local residents in identifying, preserving, and managing cultural assets [2]. It acknowledges the role of communities as custodians of heritage and empowers them to take ownership of its sustainability. Engaging locals in heritage tourism planning, development, and management fosters inclusivity and ensures that both communities and the environment benefit from tourism initiatives [3]. This study addresses the gap in research on community engagement in sustaining heritage tourism in Hungduan. Specifically, it identifies the challenges that hinder local conservation practices and highlights the best

strategies for safeguarding heritage resources. The findings are expected to guide stakeholders—including local government officials, tourism operators, and community leaders—toward strengthening community participation, improving cultural and environmental conservation, and promoting inclusive tourism [4]. The implications extend beyond Hungduan, offering insights for other communities seeking sustainable heritage tourism. By foregrounding local knowledge, youth involvement, and government support, this study contributes to creating a model of heritage tourism that preserves cultural identity while ensuring long-term sustainability [5]. Community engagement in heritage conservation has been widely examined across global contexts. Studies have shown that cultural heritage is increasingly threatened by urbanization, globalization, and natural disasters, necessitating active participation of local communities [6]. An author [7] emphasized that community involvement in the identification, documentation, and management of heritage assets empowers residents to act as custodians of their cultural legacy. Similarly [8] in their study of the Melaka World Heritage Site in Malaysia, highlighted that meaningful participation, transparency, and capacity building are essential for sustaining heritage sites, despite persistent challenges such as limited resources and coordination. Other perspectives reinforce the importance of inclusive and context-specific strategies. An author [9] reported that poor management, insufficient funding, and lack of stakeholder involvement endangered heritage in Ethiopia. An author [10] underscored the role of trust and power-sharing in stakeholder collaboration in China's intangible cultural heritage tourism. An author [11] critiqued uniform approaches to community-based tourism, calling instead for models tailored to local contexts. Likewise, [12] argued for genuine participatory decision-making in Kenya, while [13] proposed social return on investment to evaluate community benefits beyond economics. Collectively, these works stress that heritage conservation requires flexible governance models responsive to local needs [14]. In Europe, [15] examined the Oude water neighborhood in the Netherlands, finding that early communication and shared responsibility fostered a sense of ownership, though challenges remained due to power imbalances. Similarly, [16] traced the shift from top-down conservation to participatory models, while [17] demonstrated the transformative role of local involvement in achieving sustainable heritage tourism in developing countries. The Philippine context has also been studied extensively. Author [18,19], and [20] all emphasized fostering community ownership and shared responsibility as crucial strategies for heritage protection. An author [21], focusing on the Ifugao Rice Terraces, stressed the significance of indigenous knowledge and equitable benefit-sharing in community-based conservation. An author [22] showed that in Banaue, community engagement generated positive outcomes such as cultural preservation and employment but also posed challenges, including unequal benefit distribution and external control. An author [23] similarly recognized both challenges and opportunities, pointing to responsible tourism as a path to cultural revitalization. Heritage conservation in Hungduan is further contextualized by regional studies. An author [24] documented how tourism in the Ifugao Rice Terraces generated income and conservation awareness but also risked cultural commodification if not community-led. An author [25] provides broader critiques of global tourism practices, calling for models that prioritize community empowerment and cultural preservation. Meanwhile, [26] demonstrated that active community engagement across all stages of tourism planning and implementation in the Philippines ensures equitable benefits and enhances long-term sustainability. Taken together, these studies affirm that community participation is an indispensable factor in heritage preservation. They also reveal recurring challenges, including lack of funding, limited awareness, external pressures, and generational gaps in interest. This body of literature provides the foundation for examining Hungduan, where community-driven practices and government support intersect to sustain heritage tourism. This study is grounded in the discourse of sustainable tourism and community-based resource management (CBRM). Sustainable tourism emphasizes development that minimizes negative socio-cultural, environmental, and economic impacts while maximizing benefits for local communities [27]. Within this perspective, the community of Hungduan demonstrates ownership and stewardship of its heritage

through cultural festivals, bayanihan practices, and participation in educational programs. The theory of collaborative management by [28] further informs this study, highlighting shared decision-making and power distribution among stakeholders, including local communities. This framework aligns with the active participation of Hungduan residents in cultural events, bayanihan, and training initiatives. Such practices ensure the long-term integrity of heritage sites while fostering economic opportunities and cultural pride. However, challenges also exist. An author [29] identified youth disinterest and resource limitations as barriers to effective CBRM, while he emphasized the vulnerability of heritage sites to natural disasters. Addressing these issues requires supportive local government initiatives, such as financial assistance, training programs, and technological support, to strengthen community engagement in heritage conservation.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design utilizing a Likert scale to collect data. A structured questionnaire was distributed to respondents to examine community engagement in the conservation of cultural heritage in Hungduan, Ifugao. The study was conducted in Hungduan, Ifugao. Respondents included members of the local government unit (LGU), tourism establishment owners, tourist guides, farmers, parents, and youth. Stratified and random sampling were used to ensure fair representation. Thirty percent of each category was selected randomly, except for tourism establishment owners, where a 100% response rate was achieved.

Table 01: Stratified Sampling

Respondents	Population Size	Sample Size	Percentage Represented
Local Government Unit	54	16	30%
Tourism Establishment Owners	10	10	100%
Tourist Guides	28	8	30%
Rice Field Owners/Farmers	50	15	30%

Table 02: Random Sampling

Respondents	Population
Parents	41
Youth	42

The study utilized both structured and unstructured questionnaires. A pilot test was conducted among LGU members, and the instrument was revised based on their feedback. Validation was performed by experts from Ifugao State University and other institutions. The final survey consisted of four categories: (1) community activities for heritage conservation, (2) best practices in conservation, (3) internal and external hindering factors, and (4) LGU programs supporting conservation. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the Mayor of Hungduan and the target respondents. The purpose of the study was explained, and respondents were guided through the questionnaire as needed. For non-readers, items were explained in the local dialect to ensure clarity and accuracy. Data were tallied and consulted with a statistician. Frequency counts were used to determine the number of responses for each item, while ranking was applied to identify the relative importance of practices and hindering factors. In checkbox items, higher counts received top ranks, while in ranking items, the lowest total score represented the highest level of importance. The study adhered to ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants. Consent was obtained prior to participation, and

all data were securely stored. Respondents were assured that their answers would remain confidential and used solely for research purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Hungduan community actively engages in cultural preservation through festivals, bayanihan, and participation in training activities. Table 03 presents the most common activities, with cultural festivals ranking highest, followed by bayanihan and participation in information, education, and communication (IEC) programs.

Table 03: Community Activities for Maintaining Heritage Tourism

Activities	Frequency	Rank
Cultural festivals and events (e.g., Punbuk, Tungoh and Hungduan)	94	1
Bayanihan system ("Bad-dang," "Dang-ah," "Ub-buh")	85	2
Participation in IEC, seminars, and training	81	3
Initiatives for cleanliness (waste management, clean-up drives)	78	4
Voluntary terrace maintenance	65	5
Reforestation	53	6

Table 04 shows that traditional farming workshops and training are identified as the best community practice, followed by the establishment of heritage committees and youth engagement.

Table 04: Best Community Practices in Heritage Conservation

Practices	Frequency	Rank
Traditional farming workshops and tourism-related training	84	1
Existence of community heritage committees	74	2
Youth engagement and empowerment	71	3
Heritage tourism promotion and awareness campaigns	73	4
Heritage conservation IEC	58	5
Public art and murals	54	6
Heritage workers' aid/assistance	53	7

Internal challenges include out-migration, youth disinterest, and the aging farming population. These issues weaken the transmission of traditional knowledge and practices.

Table 05: Internal Factors Hindering Heritage Conservation

Internal Problems	Total Rank Score	Rank
Out-migration and job shifting	236	1
Youth disinterest	266	2
Aging farmer population	288	3
Diminishing traditional knowledge	377	4
Dependence on government grants	413	5
Preference for modern farming	423	6

Natural disasters and lack of funding emerged as the most critical external threats to heritage conservation in Hungduan.

Table 06: External Factors Hindering Heritage Conservation

External Problems	Total Rank Score	Rank
Natural disasters	244	1
Lack of funding for heritage programs	265	2
Lack of resources for maintenance	312	3
Modernization and development	381	4.5
Substandard government projects	381	4.5
Poor exposure to tourism promotion	428	6

The local government provides strong support through heritage festivals, financial assistance, and training initiatives. Table 7 highlights the most significant programs.

Table 07: LGU Programs Supporting Heritage Conservation

Programs	Frequency	Rank
Cultural heritage festivals	89	1
Local farmers' financial assistance	83	2
IEC seminars and training	82	3
Distribution of farm machinery (tractor, rice mill)	81	4
Capacity building for tour guides	80	5
Terraces restoration program	78	6
Heritage trail development and protection	74	7
Documentation and publication of cultural heritage	64	8
Educational outreach programs	61	9
Heritage protection and preservation ordinance/plan	60	10

The findings revealed that cultural festivals such as Tungoh and Hungduan and Punbuk are the most prominent activities in sustaining heritage tourism. This aligns with [30,31], who noted that festivals enhance heritage awareness and attract visitors. Similarly, the bayanihan system demonstrates intergenerational transmission of cultural values, echoing the work of [32] and [33] on the role of shared practices in preserving heritage landscapes. Although initiatives such as voluntary terrace maintenance and reforestation were less frequently reported, these remain important for long-term conservation, consistent with [34], who advocate for inclusive tourism models that integrate environmental stewardship. Traditional farming workshops and training emerged as the most valued practices, highlighting the importance of knowledge transfer. This supports [35], who emphasized the effectiveness of education in fostering heritage stewardship. The presence of community heritage committees reflects organized conservation efforts, resonating with [36] on community-based resource management. Youth engagement was also recognized as essential, consistent with [37] and [38], who stressed the importance of involving younger generations in cultural preservation. While heritage promotion and public art ranked lower, they nonetheless illustrate the potential for awareness-building strategies, as [39] suggested in his study on public art and cultural memory. Internal factors such as out-migration, youth disinterest, and an aging farmer population mirror broader concerns about rural sustainability. These findings are consistent with [40] and [41], who linked economic migration to community decline, and [42], who highlighted generational challenges in traditional farming. Externally, natural disasters and limited funding were identified as the greatest threats, echoing [43] and [44] on the vulnerability of heritage to environmental hazards. Authors [45] and [46] also underscored the critical role of financial support in conservation. Interestingly, modernization was perceived as less threatening, suggesting a degree of acceptance toward integrating new technologies, as [47] and [48] also observed in studies of heritage-modernity coexistence. The prominence of cultural festivals as LGU initiatives confirms [49] and [50] findings on the tourism and cultural value of festivals. Financial assistance for farmers supports the economic foundation of heritage, consistent with [51] and [52] on

rural development. Knowledge dissemination through IEC programs also aligns with [53], who identified education as a driver of cultural appreciation. The provision of modern farming equipment illustrates an openness to technological integration, resonating with [54] on balancing tradition and modernity in agricultural landscapes. Similarly, capacity building for tour guides supports sustainable tourism promotion, as [55] and [56] highlighted. Overall, the results validate the principles of community-based resource management [57] and sustainable tourism [58]. Hungduan's experience demonstrates how local practices, institutional support, and shared decision-making sustain heritage tourism despite challenges. However, consistent with [59], constraints such as youth disengagement, limited resources, and disaster risks remain significant. This underscores the need for continuous capacity building, innovative livelihood strategies, and integrated governance to ensure the long-term sustainability of Hungduan's heritage.

4. CONCLUSION

Findings reveal that the community actively preserves its cultural heritage by participating in cultural festivals and events, practicing bayanihan, and attending seminars and training programs. Despite these efforts, challenges such as out-migration, youth disinterest, natural disasters, and limited funding hinder traditional practices. Support from the local government, including financial incentives, heritage festivals, training initiatives, and the provision of modern farming tools such as tractors and rice mills, strengthens community efforts and enhances visitor experiences. The study further identifies best practices in heritage conservation, such as traditional farming workshops, tourism-related training, the establishment of heritage committees, and the empowerment of youth in conservation initiatives. These findings underscore the strong link between community engagement and the sustainability of heritage tourism. By highlighting the role of collaborative practices and government support, this research provides valuable insights for policy formulation, community empowerment, and the long-term preservation of Hungduan's cultural legacy.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are offered to strengthen heritage conservation efforts in Hungduan. For the Municipal and Barangay Local Government Units, it is recommended that youth be actively engaged in traditional farming workshops, seminars, and tourism-related training to foster intergenerational knowledge transfer. Diversifying local livelihood opportunities through Agri-tourism, product exports, and skills development programs could address out-migration and enhance economic resilience. The development of strong marketing and distribution channels for local produce is also encouraged, alongside the expansion of tourism activities that highlight cultural heritage. Furthermore, local governments should ensure transparent communication of conservation initiatives by providing regular updates, public reports, and open forums, while also establishing grievance mechanisms to address community concerns. For the local community, particularly the youth, participation in government-led seminars, trainings, and conservation programs is strongly encouraged. Embracing sustainable farming practices will be essential in maintaining the rice terraces and ensuring the long-term preservation of cultural heritage sites. For future researchers, it is suggested that studies further examine the effectiveness of the community engagement strategies implemented by local government units. Moreover, exploring the potential of digital platforms and social media to facilitate awareness, participation, and dialogue could provide new insights into strengthening community-based heritage conservation. These recommendations highlight the need for shared responsibility among government institutions, local communities, and the research sector. By fostering collaboration and innovation, Hungduan's heritage sites can be preserved as living cultural landscapes that continue to benefit both present and future generations.

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