

Guinobatan through time: Preserving the historical-cultural heritage amid change

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Abstract

This study examined the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of Guinobatan, Albay amid social, economic, and physical change. Anchored on cultural sustainability and structuration perspectives, the study documented key historical and cultural heritage resources, identified current local government initiatives for heritage preservation, determined challenges affecting preservation, and developed an informational material based on the findings. The study employed a descriptive qualitative-quantitative design using a structured questionnaire, informal interview, and document-based review. Eight key informants participated in the study, including local government officials, educators, and selected residents of Guinobatan. Findings showed that the municipality has undergone a visible transition from a largely rural and agricultural landscape into a more developed municipality shaped by infrastructure, urbanization, tourism, and public service expansion. Major historical-cultural heritage resources identified in the study include the Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Church, the Municipio de Guinobatan, Banao Bridge, the Ola Monument, the Longganisa Festival, culinary heritage, and Gabaldon educational heritage. Localized cultural mapping and the safeguarding of the Longganisa Festival emerged as major preservation initiatives. However, the study also found major preservation challenges, especially inadequate research and documentation, youth disinterest, natural-disaster risks, urbanization, weak preservation of historical sites, loss of traditional knowledge, and limited cultural-tourism prioritization. Based on the findings, the study developed an informational material titled *Timeless Guinobatan: Where History and Modernity Converge* as a localized resource for preservation, instruction, and community awareness.

Keywords: Guinobatan; Cultural heritage; Historical preservation; Cultural mapping; Longganisa Festival; Albay

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is a major source of identity, continuity, and collective memory in local communities. In the Philippines, the protection of heritage is supported by constitutional and statutory mandates, including Republic Act No. 7356, which created the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and Republic Act No. 10066, or the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 [1,2]. More recently, Republic Act No. 11961 strengthened cultural mapping and enhanced cultural heritage education as mechanisms for conservation and public awareness [3]. These policy bases are significant for municipalities whose historical and cultural resources remain vulnerable to urbanization, disaster exposure, and generational disconnection.

Guinobatan, Albay is a municipality situated within a historically and environmentally dynamic landscape. Its identity has been shaped by its proximity to Mayon Volcano, its religious and civic traditions, its local foodways, and its public memory of historical figures and structures. The municipality is associated with tangible heritage resources such as the Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Church, the Municipio de Guinobatan, Banao Bridge, the Ola Monument, ancestral structures, and Gabaldon school buildings. It is also associated with intangible heritage, including the Longganisa Festival, culinary traditions, oral narratives, religious activities, and community practices.

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The preservation of these resources is not merely a matter of remembering the past. It is also a question of how a community negotiates development while retaining the values, practices, and historical markers that make it distinct. Cultural sustainability emphasizes that culture should be preserved as a living resource within sustainable development rather than treated as an isolated memory of the past [4]. Structuration theory likewise helps explain how cultural structures and contemporary community actions continuously shape one another [5]. In this sense, local heritage is both inherited and actively remade by the people who preserve, interpret, and practice it.

The need for this study arises from the continuing changes experienced by Guinobatan. The manuscript data indicate that agricultural lands, rice fields, coconut plantations, and rural spaces have been affected by infrastructure development, urbanization, and human activity. While such changes signify progress, they may also weaken traditional practices, alter heritage spaces, and reduce the connection of younger generations with local identity. Similar concerns have been raised in heritage education research, which emphasizes youth engagement, cultural socialization, and localized instructional materials as ways to sustain intangible heritage [6,7].

This study aimed to examine the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of Guinobatan, Albay amid change. Specifically, it identified key historical-cultural heritages in the municipality, described current LGU program initiatives for heritage preservation, determined challenges encountered in preservation, and developed an informational material based on the findings.

2. Materials and Methods

The study employed a descriptive research design using a blend of qualitative and quantitative data-gathering methods. This design was appropriate because the study sought to describe the historical-cultural heritage of Guinobatan, the local initiatives that support preservation, and the challenges encountered by stakeholders. The design also allowed the researcher to integrate survey-based data with informal interview responses and document-based interpretation.

The key informants were eight selected individuals from Guinobatan, Albay. They represented local government, education, barangay leadership, and community residency. The informants were selected because of their knowledge of local heritage, public initiatives, education, and community experience. The exact profile table from the manuscript is retained below.

Table 1 Profile of the Informants

Name	Position
LGU-Guinobatan Officials:	
Ann "Gemma" Y. Ongjoco	Municipal Mayor
Salvador B. Literal III	Tourism Officer
Steve Lucas	Brgy. Captain
Educators:	
Sarah Gorobao	Teacher
Jessie Oxina	Teacher
Domingo Losentales	Principal
Selected Residents	
Virgil Arres V. Ordiz	Resident
Ronnel Cerdo	Resident
TOTAL	8

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire and informal interview guide. The questionnaire covered four major areas: the evolution of Guinobatan historical and cultural aspects, significant historical events and cultural practices shaping local identity, challenges in promoting cultural heritage, and suggested measures or materials for

preservation. The informal interview was used to validate survey responses and obtain additional explanations from informants.

The questionnaire was prepared after reviewing related literature and studies on cultural heritage, cultural sustainability, cultural mapping, local history, and heritage education. It was subjected to validation by selected barangay leaders, councilors, and residents who were not included as primary informants. After approval, the researcher personally administered and retrieved the questionnaires to ensure completeness and accuracy of the gathered data.

The data were analyzed through descriptive interpretation and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to organize recurring meanings from informant responses, especially on heritage resources, preservation initiatives, and preservation challenges. Quantitative references such as percentages were retained when reported in the manuscript to indicate the relative frequency of identified challenges.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Key historical and cultural heritage in Guinobatan, Albay

The findings show that Guinobatan has a layered heritage profile composed of religious, civic, architectural, revolutionary, culinary, and educational elements. Informants described the municipality as having changed significantly within the past 30 to 50 years, particularly from a mostly rural and agricultural landscape into a more developed municipality with infrastructure projects, urbanization, and expanded public activity. One informant summarized this transition as follows:

“The municipality of Guinobatan in 30-50 years ago has changed from mostly rural, agricultural lands, rice fields, coconut plantation to more developed with infrastructure projects, urbanization and human activities altering the natural landscape. Nowadays, Guinobatan is one of the well-developed municipalities.”

This response indicates that modernization has reshaped the municipality physically and economically. The conversion of agricultural lands and rural spaces into a built environment suggests a shift from a nature-based economy toward a more urbanized and infrastructure-driven local setting. From the perspective of cultural sustainability, this transition creates both opportunity and risk. Development can strengthen access, tourism, and public services, but it can also weaken heritage spaces if preservation is not integrated into planning.

Among the identified historical heritage resources, the Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Church functions as a major symbol of religious identity and Bicolano resilience. The church represents the endurance of faith amid volcanic, seismic, and wartime disruptions. Its presence in the town center also anchors religious festivities and communal memory.

The Municipio de Guinobatan was also identified as a civic heritage marker. Informants associated the municipal hall with governance, public service, continuity, and the political identity of the municipality. As an administrative center, it represents the institutional memory of the town and its adaptation to changing needs, especially in a locality affected by volcanic and disaster-related risks.

Banao Bridge emerged as another important historical structure. The bridge represents mobility, trade, and connection between local communities and broader provincial routes. In the manuscript data, the bridge is interpreted as both functional infrastructure and an architectural marker of continuity. Its preservation is therefore significant not only because of its age but also because of its role in connecting past patterns of trade and movement with present-day transportation.

The Ola Monument was likewise identified as a significant historical landmark. It commemorates General Simeon Ola, whose memory is associated with Bicolano patriotism and resistance. The monument contributes to local historical consciousness because it makes revolutionary history visible in public space. As a commemorative site, it helps residents and visitors recognize the contribution of Guinobatan to broader Philippine historical narratives.

The cultural heritage of Guinobatan is also strongly expressed through the Longganisa Festival and culinary tradition. The festival transforms a local food product into a public celebration of identity, entrepreneurship, and community pride. The Guinobatan longganisa is not merely a delicacy; it operates as a cultural product that links households, local producers, markets, tourism, and collective memory. The festival also illustrates structuration in practice: residents, producers, performers, and local officials actively reproduce tradition by staging it in a contemporary public format.

Educational heritage was identified through the Gabaldon school buildings. These structures are part of a wider national heritage category recognized under the Gabaldon School Buildings Conservation Act, which mandates the conservation of Gabaldon school buildings nationwide [8]. For Guinobatan, these buildings represent the historical value of public education and the continuity of civic learning across generations.

3.2. Current LGU program initiatives in the preservation of historical and cultural heritage

The findings reveal that the Local Government Unit of Guinobatan operates through the Guinobatan Culture and Arts Council in close coordination with the Municipal Tourism Office. The manuscript identifies the Localized Cultural Mapping Project as one of the major program initiatives supporting the preservation of historical and cultural heritage. Cultural mapping is important because it provides a systematic inventory of heritage resources and supports planning, protection, and public awareness. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts has also promoted participatory cultural mapping as a tool for local communities [9].

“The Local Government Unit operates through the Guinobatan Culture and Arts Council in close coordination with the Municipal Tourism Office.”

In Guinobatan, the cultural mapping initiative categorizes heritage resources into tangible immovable properties, tangible movable assets, and intangible heritage. Tangible immovable properties include structural landmarks such as the Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Church, ancestral homes, the municipal hall, bridges, monuments, and school buildings. Tangible movable assets may include relics, religious art, and historical objects. Intangible heritage includes oral histories, local folklore, traditional practices, culinary knowledge, and community customs.

The findings also identify the safeguarding of the Longganisa Festival and culinary heritage as another major initiative. This initiative gives public visibility to local food production and traditional culinary craftsmanship. It also creates an economic incentive to preserve the cultural identity of the product. In this regard, the Longganisa Festival operates both as a cultural-preservation activity and a local development strategy.

One of the informants said that, *“there’s a safeguarding initiative on the Longganisa Festival Culinary which always held every August. With this program initiative, Guinobateños can actively safeguard the intangible culinary craftsmanship of the town.”*

These initiatives are consistent with cultural sustainability because they treat heritage as a living resource that must be documented, practiced, transmitted, and linked with present community needs. However, the findings also imply that cultural mapping and festival-based safeguarding require continuous funding, documentation standards, youth participation, and institutional monitoring to remain effective.

3.3. Challenges in the preservation of historical and cultural heritage

The findings show that Guinobatan faces several preservation challenges. The most pressing challenge reported in the manuscript was inadequate research and documentation, cited by 100% of the informants. This indicates that while the municipality has rich heritage resources, these are not yet recorded and organized in a sufficiently systematic way. Without documentation, oral narratives, site histories, family-based knowledge, and traditional practices remain vulnerable to loss.

Another informant says, *“the culture of Guinobatan is facing a multi-front challenge, with the most pressing issue being a lack of research and documentation, cited by 100% of them.”*

Natural-disaster risks and declining youth interest were also cited by 87.5% of the informants. Guinobatan’s proximity to Mayon Volcano and its exposure to typhoons, floods, and other hazards make physical heritage sites vulnerable. At the same time, youth disinterest threatens the continuity of intangible heritage. Even if structures survive, practices such as oral storytelling, folk healing, traditional courtship customs, local music, and food preparation methods may disappear if they are not transmitted to younger generations.

The same results further indicate that *“the threats posed by natural disasters, a reality for any town near Mayon, and a declining interest among the youth, both noted by 87.5% of the participants.”*

Urbanization, weak preservation of historical sites, and loss of traditional knowledge were identified by 75% of respondents. These findings suggest that modernization is not automatically harmful, but it becomes a threat when

development proceeds without cultural safeguards. Commercial development, road expansion, construction, and changes in livelihood can displace heritage spaces or weaken the everyday practice of tradition.

Political prioritization and limited cultural tourism promotion were cited by 62.5% of the informants. This finding suggests that heritage preservation requires stronger institutional commitment. If heritage is not incorporated into municipal planning, school programs, tourism promotion, and budget priorities, preservation efforts may remain fragmented or dependent on short-term activities.

Taken together, the findings show that heritage preservation in Guinobatan requires a coordinated approach. Documentation must be strengthened, youth participation must be activated, physical sites must be protected, and local culture must be integrated into education and tourism. These recommendations are consistent with studies emphasizing the importance of heritage education, cultural socialization, and youth engagement in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage [6,7].

3.4. Informational material developed from the findings

Based on the findings, the study developed an informational material titled *Timeless Guinobatan: Where History and Modernity Converge*. The material is designed to present the municipality's major historical-cultural heritage resources in a format that may be used by schools, local stakeholders, tourists, and residents. It translates the findings into a readable and accessible resource for heritage awareness.

The informational material serves three major functions. First, it preserves local narratives by organizing significant heritage resources and community interpretations in one document. Second, it may function as a supplementary instructional material for local history, culture-based education, and community heritage awareness. Third, it supports public engagement by encouraging residents and visitors to view Guinobatan's heritage as a living foundation for development rather than as a detached memory of the past.

The material also helps address the problem of cultural amnesia. By presenting religious, civic, revolutionary, culinary, and educational heritage together, it encourages intergenerational dialogue and strengthens the link between history and modernity. The output therefore responds directly to the study's finding that documentation, youth engagement, and public awareness are essential for sustainable preservation.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that Guinobatan, Albay has undergone a significant transition from a predominantly rural and agricultural municipality into a more developed and infrastructure-driven community. This transition has created opportunities for progress but has also placed pressure on heritage spaces, traditional practices, and community memory.

The key historical-cultural heritage resources of Guinobatan include the Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Church, the Municipio de Guinobatan, Banao Bridge, the Ola Monument, the Longganisa Festival, culinary heritage, and Gabaldon educational heritage. These resources collectively represent the municipality's religious identity, civic development, historical memory, economic life, and educational tradition.

The Localized Cultural Mapping Project and the safeguarding of the Longganisa Festival are important LGU initiatives for heritage preservation. However, these programs must be continuously supported through documentation, planning, funding, school integration, and community participation to ensure long-term cultural sustainability.

The most urgent challenges are inadequate research and documentation, youth disinterest, natural-disaster risks, urbanization, weak preservation of historical sites, loss of traditional knowledge, and limited cultural-tourism prioritization. The informational material *Timeless Guinobatan: Where History and Modernity Converge* is an appropriate output because it responds to these challenges by organizing local heritage into a usable resource for preservation, instruction, and public awareness.

4.1. Recommendations

The Local Government Unit and local academic institutions should establish a digital heritage archive containing oral-history interviews, photographs, site documentation, cultural maps, and a database of tangible and intangible heritage resources.

The Cultural Mapping Project and the Longganisa Festival should be continuously implemented, regularly updated, and supported by dedicated funding and institutional monitoring.

Local schools should adopt the informational material Timeless Guinobatan: Where History and Modernity Converge as a supplementary resource in Social Studies, Arts, Values Education, and local-history activities.

The municipality should organize youth-centered heritage activities, including storytelling contests, cultural mapping workshops, culinary demonstrations, folk-healing documentation, and competitions that revive fading traditions such as harana and pamamanhikan.

The LGU should develop heritage-sensitive tourism plans that protect historical structures while promoting local products, civic monuments, educational heritage, and cultural festivals.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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