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Balancing Culture and Tourism

A Discussion on the Policy Standards for Heritage and Cultural Tourism in the Cordillera

Jeffrey H. Javier

Local Regional Studies Network

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Telephone: (02) 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 4268 / (02) 8426-0955
Email: cidspublications@up.edu.ph
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Cover Image Credit

"The growing demand on experiential or culture-based tourism requires the need to develop and institutionalize protocols and protection standards to ensure respect for indigenous customs, traditions and resources."Taken at Bangaan Rice Terraces, Banaue, Ifugao on 15 August 2025."

Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Javier

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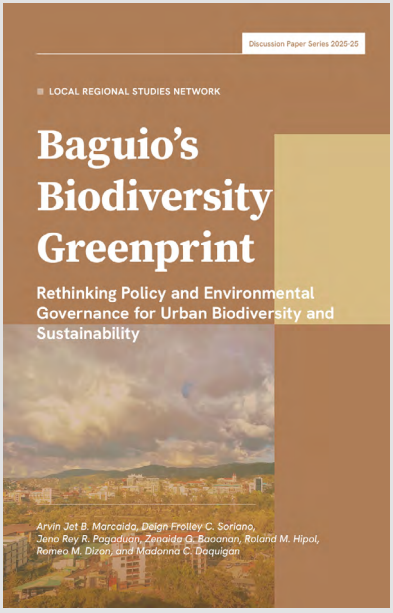

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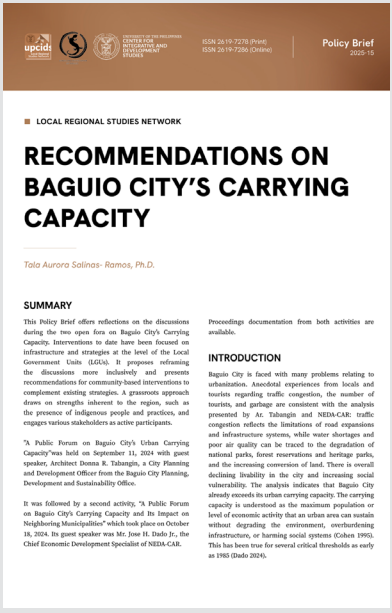

PROCEEDINGS

Recommendations on Baguio City's Carrying Capacity

Balancing Culture and Tourism

A Discussion on the Policy Standards for Heritage and Cultural Tourism in the Cordillera

Jeffrey H. Javier[1]

1 University Researcher I, Cordillera Studies Center, University of the Philippines Baguio. Email address: jhjavier1@up.edu.ph

Key Takeaways

- Importance of strong community authority in culture-centered tourism growth. Culture and heritage are increasingly positioned as major contributors to the tourism industry, especially in the Cordilleras. Regional tourism development recognizes that experiencing authentic heritage and indigenous practices drive tourist interest. This gives importance on the need to strengthen and mainstream the adoption of local cultural tourism standards anchored on local community participation into the regional tourism development frameworks and regulations to ensure community ownership over cultural narratives and interpretation.

- Institutionalization of community and culture-based tourism standards prior to integration in mainstream tourism offerings. The growing demand on including culture, indigenous industries and crafts (e.g., weaving, tattoo, cuisine, cultural sites, etc.) into tourism offerings increases the risk of commercialization without community consent, which may lead to misrepresentation or cultural appropriation. It cannot be denied that culture-based tourism enhances visitor experiences, but there is a need to both develop and institutionalize protocols and protection standards (environmental safeguards, cultural protocols, visitor codes of conduct) to ensure respect for indigenous customs, traditions, and resources. Policy actions should be proactive and not reactive to unfolding issues and concerns connected with culture and heritage tourism. Protocol agreements outlining permissible use of cultural elements, benefit-sharing arrangements, and cultural etiquette guidelines for visitors should be clearly defined and established.

- Strengthening regulation and monitoring of cultural and heritage tourism standards, documentation and education frameworks. Improving policy standards for cultural and heritage tourism in the Cordillera requires shifting governance structures toward increasing the capacity and involvement of indigenous communities, promoting co-ownership, and establishing strong cultural heritage documentation and educational standards. Establishing a strong regulation, monitoring, documentation and educational frameworks for cultural and heritage would allow the reconciliation of indigenous narratives.

Introduction

The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) is recognized as one of the country's culturally rich region. Indigenous groups such as the Ifugao, Kankanaey, Ibaloi, Bontoc, Kalinga, and Isneg have developed their cultural identities connecting agricultural practices, customs, and traditions with the region's natural landscapes. These features make the Cordillera a leading destination for heritage and cultural tourism, especially as experiential and community-based tourism gain prominence in both national and global tourism frameworks.

Tourism has become increasingly significant to the regional economy. In 2024, the Cordillera region reported approximately 1.98 million tourist arrivals, generating an estimated PHP 10.72 billion in tourism receipts, which indicates ongoing recovery and growth following the COVID-19 pandemic (Agoot 2025). Although this growth in tourism has generated employment and supported local enterprises, it has also increased the concerns on cultural commodification, unequal benefit distribution, environmental degradation, and insufficient protection of indigenous knowledge systems. There is a need for clear policy standards that can guide heritage and culture tourism development in the Cordilleras. Contribution from the local government units (LGUs), academic institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and most especially the local and indigenous communities will provide a structured policy environment and proposing normative standards for ethical, inclusive, and sustainable heritage tourism governance.

Current State of Culture and Heritage Tourism in the Cordilleras

Heritage and culture tourism refers to activities that emphasize the experience of places, artifacts, traditions, and cultural expressions that show how a community developed throughout its history. According to UNESCO, heritage tourism encompasses both tangible heritage (e.g., monuments, landscapes, artifacts) and intangible heritage (e.g., rituals, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge). In the Cordilleras, heritage tourism is best described as a dynamic living heritage system where cultural practices remain as part of everyday life. Policy development in this context should prioritize cultural preservation, community empowerment, and tourism development needs to conform to local situations.

Cultural Landscape

The Cordillera, as a cultural landscape, is a living heritage system where there is a need for appreciation of what is being protected before any development of laws or policy directions. The cultural landscapes of the Cordillera are generally associated with indigenous knowledge systems representing a deep connection of history, ecology, and social systems. Rituals still mark agricultural cycles, oral traditions are recited in a community context, crafts are deeply embedded in the life, sacred natural sites carry social and spiritual meaning, and terraces and forests are shaped by customary rules. UNESCO considers this a living heritage system, where people and landscape are examples of co-creators of culture (Aldunar 2025). The Ifugao Rice Terraces, for example, represent a cultural landscape where farming, rituals, and indigenous land use management are still practiced today. Cultural landscapes in other Cordillera provinces are also developed for heritage and sustainable tourism in other ways. In Benguet, natural landscapes are promoted as ecotourist destinations showcasing the connection of rituals, beliefs, and environment protection. Agricultural communities, highland gardens, and indigenous food practices are also used to connect agritourism with culinary traditions. In Mountain Province, culture and heritage highlight the rich traditions of its indigenous communities. Visitors are drawn to living cultural practices such as traditional weaving, music, dances, rituals, and festivals, as well as heritage sites like ancestral villages, waterfalls and other natural resources and the famous hanging coffins of Sagada.

However, the state of these cultural landscapes within the tourism context is contested and complex. On one hand, their designation and importance in regional tourism have elevated their visibility and economic potential. They attract domestic and international visitors who seek authentic, place-based experiences that foreground local cultural practices and knowledge systems embedded in landscape practices (e.g., terrace cultivation cycles, ritual celebrations, handicraft production). On the other hand, pressures such as outmigration of younger generations, shifts in agricultural livelihoods, and heritage commodification through tourist infrastructure and commercialization pose risks to the authentic social practices and ecological conditions that sustain landscape values. These dynamics highlight a policy imperative to balance heritage conservation with sustainable tourism and participatory governance frameworks that recognize local custodians as primary stakeholders in decision-making, management, and benefit-sharing (Acabado and Martin 2025).

The cultural landscapes of the Cordillera also face interlinked environmental, social, and policy pressures. These cultural landscapes remain centrally implicated in the national and international heritage tourism framework development. As a heritage tourism resource, the Cordillera's cultural landscapes constitute both opportunities and policy challenges. Their prominence in tourism policy aligns with broader Philippine heritage and tourism strategies that emphasize sustainable, community-based models that leverage heritage values for local development while safeguarding landscape integrity (Tuble 2025). Heritage policies must underscore that cultural landscapes should not be treated as fixed attractions but as living cultural systems requiring adaptive management that integrates archaeological, ecological, and sociocultural evidence with contemporary community priorities. Such an approach emphasizes conservation ethics that respect both the material fabric and the intangible cultural practices that give these landscapes their meaning, thereby situating cultural landscapes in the Cordillera not only as tourism destinations but as dynamic embodiments of indigenous heritage, resilience, and sustainable land stewardship (Acabado and Martin 2025).

Cultural Events and Festivals

Cultural events and festivities serve as fundamental elements of heritage tourism for the region; they display indigenous identity while attracting visitors to the area. The region provides numerous cultural events and festivities which showcase its various indigenous communities. The celebrations transmit indigenous knowledge and create spaces for cultural exchange between people. It includes traditional ceremonies and modern festive occasions combining old customs with new tourist attractions. Among the most prominent is the Panagbenga Festival in Baguio City, although it is not considered cultural in nature, the month-long celebration held every February celebrates the season of bloom, local horticulture, and mountain culture through flower-covered floats, street dancing inspired by the traditional Cordilleran dance, and community exhibitions.

Complementing Panagbenga is the Cordillera Festival of Festivals, a flagship program of the regional office of the Department of Tourism that brings together major festivals from across the CAR provinces and cities into a consolidated showcase. This event highlights a range of indigenous celebrations like Abra's Kawayan Festival, Apayao's Lapat Festival, Benguet's Adivay Festival, Ifugao's Gotad Ad Ifugao, Kalinga's Matagoan Festival, and Mountain Province's Lang-ay Festival into a single showcase. These festivals

feature indigenous dances, music, rituals, crafts, and storytelling, promoting cultural heritage as a unified regional identity while drawing both domestic and international tourists. According to the DOT-CAR, cultural festivities are part of broader efforts to enhance tourism experiences in CAR. The region's festivals are foundational as experiential anchors to the growth of heritage tourism (Dar 2024)

Aside from cultural exchange, cultural events and festivities also contribute to economic development by generating livelihood opportunities for performers, artisans, and local small businesses. Tourist visits also support related sectors such as accommodation, food services, and craft markets during peak festival seasons. The Lang-ay and Etag festivals of Mountain Province, for instance, have been credited with boosting the locality's economy and tourism industry through heightened tourist visits.

In summary, cultural events and festivities in the Cordillera are part of the cornerstone of the region's heritage tourism landscape. Through both traditional indigenous celebrations and collaborative regional showcases, these festivities enhance tourism attractiveness, support socio-economic resilience, and reinforce a sense of cultural identity. Strategic policy support is therefore essential to ensure that these events continue to thrive in ways that are culturally respectful, economically inclusive, and sustainable. Unlike conventional tourism, which often prioritizes profit over preservation, culture-based tourism focuses on local empowerment. These initiatives are designed to benefit communities socially, economically, and culturally, with residents leading efforts to preserve their heritage through craft, ritual, and landscape stewardship (Tuble 2025).

Policy Landscape and Existing Frameworks and Initiatives on Culture and Heritage Tourism

Through stakeholder and community consultations, existing governance and policy frameworks for culture and heritage as tourism resources were shared by LGUs, Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs), and accredited tour guide associations from Mountain Province and Benguet. The two provinces present varying governance policy frameworks and strategies for managing heritage and cultural tourism. As an example, the municipality of Sagada in Mountain Province, recognized as a forerunner for cultural heritage and ecotourism in the region, has existing local laws in consonance with the

protection and management of its indigenous cultural activities and natural attractions, including the hanging coffins, limestone caves, and rice terraces. In contrast, the municipality of Bokod, Benguet has only recently articulated its strategic directions towards developing a nature-based tourism as part of its broader local tourism development agenda. It has less established tourism infrastructure to leverage its natural assets, such as Ambuklao Dam, Daclan sulfur springs, and panoramic forest landscapes of Mount Purgatory, while seeking to expand its economic base beyond traditional rural sectors. The two municipalities provide contrasting local policy systems and governance capabilities at different stages of tourism growth. This demonstrates how the local governments plan and achieve sustainable tourism development according to their unique social, economic, and cultural conditions.

The community consultations were complemented with a two-day public forum on "Cultural and Heritage Policies in the Cordilleras," which convened LGUs, government agencies, private sector, CSOs, and the academe to present and assess the current policy landscape and identify emerging policy directions in culture and heritage tourism management. Key national and regional agencies, including the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Department of Tourism–CAR (DOT-CAR), Department of Environment and Natural Resources–CAR (DENR-CAR), National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), and Department of Economy, Planning, and Development–CAR (DEPDEV-CAR), presented their institutional mandates, policy instruments and directions, and programmatic interventions for the promotion, protection, and management of culture and heritage. Selected LGUs from Mountain Province (Sagada and Bontoc) and Benguet (Bokod and Provincial Tourism Office) further shared their experiences and governance responses to issues such as the growth of a culturally based heritage economy.

National Legal and Policy Context

Heritage and cultural tourism in the Philippines operate within a comprehensive national legal and policy environment that seeks to balance cultural conservation and sustainable tourism development. The 1987 Philippine Constitution laid down the foundation by mandating the State to preserve, protect, and promote the historical and cultural heritage of the nation. This constitutional mandate establishes cultural heritage as a public asset for tourism development. Heritage and cultural tourism policies in the Philippines function to connect both national economic development goals and cultural preservation and identity development.

National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 10066 as amended by Republic Act No. 11961)

The foundation of the country's heritage governance system is Republic Act No. 10066 and its amendment Republic Act No. 11961, otherwise known as the "National Cultural Heritage Act." The Act provides a comprehensive legal definition of cultural heritage, encompassing tangible, intangible, and natural heritage with cultural significance. This would guide how cultural heritage is conserved, utilized, and integrated into development, governance, and community engagement.

1. A Balance of Heritage and Development (Conservation, Promotion and Preservation)

   R.A. No. 10066 mandates the state to conserve, develop, promote and popularize the country's historical and cultural heritage and resources as a matter of public policy. It shall approach the problem of conservation in an integrated and holistic manner, cutting across all relevant disciplines and technologies. The Act is particularly relevant to tourism, as it regulates the use, alteration, and presentation of cultural properties. This places heritage tourism as part of the government's cultural development agenda.

2. Designation and management of Heritage Zones and Cultural Landscapes as Tourism Resources

   The law institutionalizes heritage zoning to ensure that development interventions are regulated in ways that minimize adverse impacts on culturally significant areas. The Act serves as the legal basis for the establishment and management of heritage zones or areas of historical and cultural significance and value. This includes the implementation of adaptive reuse of cultural property which serves as a focal point for cultural tourism development.

3. Standards for documentation and inventory

   Republic Act No. 11961 mandates that all important cultural property must be documented and included in a national registry. It establishes mechanisms for the identification, documentation, conservation, and protection of cultural properties which provides a basis for planning tourism development, interpretation, and heritage education. R.A. No. 11961 significantly strengthened the governance of heritage-based tourism by expanding provisions on cultural mapping, inventory systems, heritage education, and community participation.

4. Institutional coordination and cooperation

   R.A. No. 11961 institutionalizes coordination and cooperation mechanisms among cultural and tourism agencies in ensuring that tourism planning is consistent with heritage conservation standards. This provides a stronger impetus for the NCCA to coordinate the development of plans, programs and policies on heritage and culture with the LGUs, DOT, NCIP, other cultural agencies, academe, CSOs, and community. Local government units are likewise encouraged to integrate heritage programs into their development and investment plans, strengthening a decentralized policy standard for heritage tourism. This establishes the LGUs as primary heritage managers while connecting heritage protection activities to sustainable development plans.

R.A. No. 11961 provides a strong support that the local government has the ownership of heritage and cultural maps and has the responsibility to propose measures for the promotion, protection and preservation of such heritage and cultural assets. The central feature of this law is community participation, and it requires that elders must first be consulted, cultural bearers must guide documentation, traditional practices must shape policy, and community protocols must inform mapping (Aldunar 2025).

National Tourism Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 9593)

Republic Act No. 9593 or the "National Tourism Act of 2009" establishes tourism as an important industry of the national economy. While the law did not exclusively provide standards for culture and heritage tourism, several of its provisions include cultural preservation, community participation, and sustainable development as policy standards in the planning, regulation and implementation of tourism. This provides the policy framework that recognize culture and heritage as essential components of tourism and mandate its growth through sustainable and inclusive mechanisms.

1. Conservation, Protection and Promotion of Heritage

   R.A. No. 9593 emphasizes that tourism should conserve and promote cultural heritage and identity. Tourism should also be able to promote an industry that is ecologically sustainable, participative, culturally sensitive, ethically, and socially equitable for local communities. It also mentions that sustainable tourism should be anchored on the country's history, culture, and natural endowments to ensure their protection, preservation, and promotion. The Act establishes heritage site protection requirements

protecting indigenous communities and important cultural sites against deterioration, while tourism planning and regulation must include both environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation methods.

2. Integrating cultural sensitivity and community participation in tourism development planning

R.A. No. 9593 prioritizes responsible tourism development that involves local communities, including indigenous peoples, in tourism planning and implementation. Tourism development must engage the local communities in the conservation of cultural and biophysical diversity; determination of ecotourism sites and in ensuring benefits of tourism for the local communities. Recognizing community participation in tourism development is important, especially in the Cordilleras, where tourism is centered on indigenous knowledge systems, heritage, and ancestral domains. The policy standards recommended by the law emphasize not only preservation but also empowerment and benefit-sharing for host indigenous communities.

3. Development of Tourism Enterprise Zones

The law allows the development of heritage and cultural sites as Tourism Enterprise Zones as long as their development processes respect indigenous culture and follow heritage conservation guidelines and include the local residents in their operations. This provides a mechanism to institutionalize funding support for heritage site development and preservation, as well as facilitate infrastructure improvement and conservation activities critical to the management of cultural resources identified for tourism. The law directs the allocation of at least five percent of the tax revenues for the development of historic, cultural, and heritage sites as tourist resources (R.A. No. 9593).

4. Policy implications for cultural and heritage tourism in the Cordilleras

The provisions of the National Tourism Act have significant implications on the cultural and heritage tourism development in the Cordilleras. A region characterized by the strong presence of indigenous communities, tourism development must align with existing traditional governance systems and must recognize the indigenous peoples (IPs) and communities as primary stakeholders, and not merely beneficiaries of tourism activities. Customary laws and practices including decision-making processes and structures should be properly integrated in the planning process. With

these, the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act or IPRA) must be taken into consideration to ensure a culturally sensitive tourism development.

Another implication of R.A. No. 9593 concerns the protection of living cultural heritage and landscapes. In the Cordilleras, cultural heritage also includes agricultural practices, rituals, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems that continue to govern community life. Landscapes such as rice terraces, communal watersheds, and villages serve as integrated socio-ecological systems. Tourism policy and infrastructure development must consider and respect existing indigenous resource management systems to avoid compromising the integrity of these natural resources. Safeguards must be established to prevent commodification, misrepresentation, and disruption of these practices because of tourism. For the Cordillera, tourism policy framework highlights the need for culturally informed heritage impact assessments and ethical tourism guidelines that prioritize indigenous perspectives over commercial considerations. Rather than treating cultural heritage as a marketable product, tourism should serve as a support mechanism for sustainability and in reinforcing the role of indigenous communities as custodians of their heritage (Table 2025).

National Commission for Culture and the Arts (Republic Act No. 7356)

Complementing the National Cultural Heritage Act is Republic Act No. 7356, which created the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). The NCCA serves as the main government agency in the development of policies, coordination, and provision of grants for cultural advancement in the country. The NCCA is mandated to conduct and implement cultural research, heritage conservation programs, and cultural tourism initiatives that emphasize community participation and cultural diversity. The NCCA plays a critical role in the declaration of heritage sites and archaeological resources, and in the provision of technical support for the conservation of heritage resources. This mandates directly affect heritage tourism planning and interpretation.

Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (Republic Act No. 8371)

Heritage and cultural tourism governance in the Philippines is further shaped by cross-cutting legislation, particularly with Republic Act No. 8371 or the "Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997." This law is especially relevant in regions with strong indigenous presence, such as the Cordillera Administrative Region, as it recognizes the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities to

ancestral domains, cultural integrity, and self-determined development. In the context of cultural tourism, R.A. No. 8371 emphasizes the critical contribution of FPIC in any development activities that affect their ancestral lands and indigenous heritage. Through the FPIC process, indigenous governance systems are taken into consideration in tourism regulation and heritage management.

Philippine National Tourism Development Plan 2023-2028

The Philippine National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023–2028 provides the strategic plan for tourism development. The plan intends to establish Philippine tourism as a sustainable and resilient industry which competes with global tourism markets through its foundation in Filipino cultural heritage and national identity. It includes the development of a cultural and heritage framework to properly coordinate the conservation and use of tangible and intangible heritage. As such, the plan aims to promote cultural experiences as a primary tourism product by focusing on building deeper narratives and understanding of stories of place, people, and community. It conceptualizes tourism as a cultural and social enterprise that will be able to develop, foster, and build deeper cultural experiences through mapping, packaging, and promoting heritage sites, trails, cultural routes, festivals, crafts, and food. It also includes the importance of consultation and coordination with key government offices, communities, indigenous peoples, and elders in the development of culture-oriented tourism products.

Together, these policy standards have significant implications for cultural and heritage tourism in the Cordillera. These national policies underscore cultural and heritage conservation as a fundamental requirement for tourism development. These laws establish indigenous rights and community participation as essential elements to guide sustainable tourism development in the region. These national policy frameworks demand a balance between development activities and cultural heritage preservation. For the Cordillera, where most tourism products hinge on culture and heritage, these national policies provide a direction for integrating cultural and heritage preservation into tourism development. Tourism should be able to emphasize empowerment of local stakeholders and protection of cultural resources.

Policy Directions for Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Mr. Rudy Aldunar, head of the Policy Review and Development unit of the NCCA, presented in the forum that the conservation, protection, and promotion of heritage is not a legal or technical issue, but a community issue

shaped by daily decisions made in homes, ritual places, rice terraces, forests, schools, and the local government. He mentioned that there is a need to appreciate what is being protected before developing laws or policy directions. Cordillera is one of the only regions in the Philippines where indigenous governance systems remain active. With these premises, the NCAA is tasked to harmonize needed laws to what the community needs. He mentioned that an important principle to be considered in developing policy directions is that cultural development must be community-led, where the government must support cultural processes, not dominate them. At the NCCA, policies are developed towards strengthening cultural institutions and community-led initiatives (Aldunar 2025). Among the policy directions prioritized by the NCCA is the institutionalization of Schools of Living Traditions (SLTs). Accordingly, the institutionalization of SLTs as a formal government-supported cultural learning center will provide a structured community-based transmission mechanism to the youth. This will also include the recognition and compensation of Masters of Living Traditions and requiring consent and leadership of ICCs in establishing SLTs. This is significant for culture and heritage tourism in the Cordillera as institutional support ensures that culture and traditions are sustained within their proper cultural context rather than reduced to its commercial value. SLTs can contribute to the authenticity of cultural experiences offered to tourists. Tourists are able to engage with traditions that are actively practiced and accurately represented by the community itself. Furthermore, institutionalization of SLT's will allow the Masters of Living Traditions to monitor and regulate cultural presentations, thereby preventing cultural misrepresentation and exploitation. Mr. Aldunar also mentioned that the NCCA is currently working with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) for cultural mapping to be part of the LGU tasks and mandates. With the guidelines for cultural mapping, the LGU as owners of cultural heritage will need to register their identified heritage resources to the Philippine Registry of Heritage. With its registration, utilization of heritage resources will be requested from the LGU. This ensures that the local government has now control over the development of its registered heritage resources. The NCCA is also working on the formulation of a law for the protection of communal intellectual property, which covers oral tradition and other indigenous knowledge systems. Part of the measure is for the communities to benefit from the use of intellectual property.

On the part of the DOT, Ms. Sylvia Chinayog, Cordillera Regional Chief Tourism Operations Officer, stated that the DOT anchors their programs on the Tourism National Development Plan and the Philippine Development Plan. All the objectives and goals have been outlined in the two plans.

Accordingly, three objectives under the Tourism National Development Plan for 2023-2028 are related to culture. These are especially applicable to the Cordilleras, which anchors tourism to its natural, cultural, and heritage resources. She mentioned that before cultural or heritage sites and resources are made accessible to visitors, communities are consulted, assessed, and capacitated for the development and promotion of their resource for tourism. Additionally, the DOT also consults with the NCIP in the selection of communities with potential experiential tourism. These are being explored first for tourists to have a first-hand experience of what the communities can offer and avoid cultural appropriation. The agency also introduced the Philippine Experience Program, which creates a tourism circuit that connects Baguio, Mt. Province, and Benguet that features diverse destinations. Under the tourism circuit, tourists are brought to open spaces where they can experience what communities have, including traditional dishes or cuisine for culinary or Cordillera food heritage, and experience indigenous massage services like the *dagdagay* and the *kulkulis* (Chinayog 2025). The program promotes culture and heritage tourism in the Cordilleras not just as mere sightseeing, but where tourists can engage and experience the everyday practices and traditions of the local communities. The program provides a strategic framework for positioning the Cordilleras not only as a scenic destination but as a culturally significant region where heritage and lived experience are central to tourism.

Policy directions of the DENR on cultural and heritage tourism, as presented by Ms. Linda Claire Pawid, Senior Ecosystems Management Specialist of the regional office, covers the management of protected areas and the development of guidelines for the registration, documentation, and confirmation of all sustainable traditional indigenous forest resources management systems and practices of indigenous cultural communities in the ancestral domains utilized for tourism purposes. To cite an example, Ms. Pawid shared that the Protected Areas Management Bureau (PAMB) of the DENR puts a limit on the number of visitors of Mount Pulag in Benguet as control mechanism. There is a limit being given to travels and tours, allowing only 12 visitors per travel and tour and around 30-50 tourists at a time to hike the summit. For Sagada, where spelunking is popular, the DENR assists the local government in developing its Cave Management Plan, which places a limit to the carrying capacity and the time of access. The agency, together with the DOT assist the LGUs in determining the carrying capacity of their tourism sites to identify control mechanisms and limit the number of tourists according to what the sites can handle (Pawid 2025).

The Regional Development Council (RDC-CAR) of the Department of Economy, Planning and Development (DEPDEV), on the other hand, provides strategic frameworks that integrate culture, governance, environment, and development to guide the local governments in policy making. In relation to cultural and heritage tourism, Ms. Ma. Emelie G. Daquipil, Chief Economic Specialist, mentioned that the RDC has approved several resolutions demonstrating the concrete support for cultural heritage that includes the development of the weaving industry, integration of cultural education in regional programs, promotion of cultural festivals and tourism initiatives, and encouragement of local ordinances for the identification and protection of cultural and traditional properties. These resolutions are seen to translate policy frameworks into actionable initiatives at the local level (Daquipil 2025).

The NCIP does not have specific policy direction when it comes to heritage and tourism. However, Mr. Rocky Ngalob, NCIP-CAR Special Concerns Officer, informed that several sections of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act cover matters on the preservation and development of culture. Section 33 of the IPRA on the rights to religious sites and ceremonies, mentions that it is unlawful to explore, excavate or make diggings on archeological sites of the ICCs/IPs for the purpose of obtaining mineral of cultural values without FPIC of the community concerned. Additionally, the section also cited that it is likewise illegal to deface, remove, or otherwise destroy artifacts which are of great importance to the ICCs/IPs for the preservation of their cultural heritage and criminal charges and penalties are provided for this. Section 25 of the IPRA talks about excluded areas for development which are used according to how they are identified, like the sacred grounds, burial sites, identified international and local cultural and heritage sites, critical areas, and identified or reserved by the ICCs/IPs for special purposes. The NCIP released several administrative orders to guide and support the implementation of Section 33. Administrative Order 1 and 3 of 2012 provides the guidelines for the conduct of the FPIC while Administrative Order 2 of 2018 provides the directive for the development of the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development Protection Plan (ADSDPP). The ADSDPP provides the roadmap for the sustainable development, cultural preservation, and environmental protection and integration of indigenous knowledge systems of the ancestral domain. Administrative Order 2 s.2012 is about the Indigenous Peoples Structure (IPS), which is the totality of indigenous governance in the indigenous political structure. As an example, he cited the dap-ay system in Sagada in the conduct of *begnas* or *tengaw*, community rituals for thanksgiving and prayers requiring residents to stay in the village and outsiders to refrain from entering, ensuring harmony and allowing the spiritual blessings to take effect. The *dap-ay* system

documents how the decision-making of elders treat institutions like the *dap-ay*. It is considered sacred but can be subject to commercial purposes or something that can be left alone. The system provides the guidelines on how they decide if they want to change its purpose. Nonetheless, Mr. Ngalob emphasized that the FPIC is the most important feature of the IPRA. The FPIC raises the need to secure consent before entering or using the heritage or culture of indigenous peoples and this includes use for tourism (Ngalob 2025).

Overall, the resource persons from the different line agencies agree that policy standards related to culture and heritage, in general, should consider the narratives of the IPs. Accordingly, the point of view of IPs lacks due recognition in policy development. Apart from the narratives, ownership should also be incorporated in any standards that will be developed.

Local Policy Standards on Culture and Heritage Tourism

The Cordillera region serves as an example on how national frameworks function when indigenous heritage and cultural resources are used for tourism development. Existing legal frameworks allow the management of cultural and heritage tourism as mechanism to promote sustainable development and empowering of local communities. At the local government level, cultural and heritage tourism is integrated into the local land use plans, tourism development strategies, and cultural ordinances. These local instruments illustrate how national policy frameworks are translated into governance mechanisms that directly shape cultural and heritage tourism practices at the community or local government level. However, the effectiveness of these policy frameworks remains in its enforcement at the local community level. For the project, policy formulation and implementation on cultural and heritage tourism from the municipalities of Sagada and Bontoc in Mountain Province and Bokod, Benguet were taken into consideration. The municipality of Sagada provides an overview of a local government widely recognized for culture as part of its tourism industry. It can be said that the Sagada LGU has made advancements in policy formulation and implementation relative to cultural and heritage tourism. In contrast, the municipalities of Bontoc and Bokod offer a point of view of LGUs who are still emerging or starting to recognize the contribution of its cultural and heritage assets in their tourism industry.

Regulation and protection of cultural products in cultural and heritage tourism

The provincial government of Mountain Province is an excellent model of a local government that has a policy on regulation to protect its indigenous material culture. Provincial Ordinance No. 573 provides the legal background for prohibiting the manufacturing, distribution, and sale of machine-made replicas of Cordillera indigenous woven materials and apparel in physical and online stores across the province. The ordinance is geared towards the protection of indigenous handweaving practices of the Cordillera indigenous peoples, which are deeply rooted in their history, identity, and livelihood, from counterfeit and machine-made imitations (Baguio Herald Express 2025). This ordinance provides a good example of putting restrictions to cultural indigenous knowledge, skills and practices that can be included for commercial purposes under the tourism context. This also illustrates a model of integrating heritage protection with economic regulation.

1. Adoption of local tourism codes, executive orders and ordinances on tourism

Additionally, each LGU has its own Municipal Tourism Code that guides and regulate in the implementation of tourism related activities at the local level. The local tourism codes provide a localized policy framework to ensure a balance between the promotion and development of cultural and heritage tourism and the protection of the local communities' culture and heritage. One of its most important provisions is the recognition of culture as a primary asset that must be protected from commercialization and misrepresentation. As an example, the Municipal Tourism Code of Sagada requires the mandatory use of accredited and registered local tour guides for all their major cultural and heritage sites tour. Its "No Guide, No Tour" rule ensures that tour visits in important cultural and heritage site are properly regulated. Moreover, this standard also ensures that the community narratives and local knowledge are part of the tourism experience.

The local government of Sagada also established a system for the collection of tourism fees. According to local tour guides, the fees are intended to help manage the impact of tourism on the local environment and culture and ensure that funds are available for community projects. Collected fees are usually allocated for the maintenance of tourist spots, capacity-building programs for local tour guides, and the preservation of Sagada's cultural and natural heritage. Some of the fees collected include environmental

fee, entrance fees (for cave and trekking), cultural performance fees, and other administrative fees. Tour guide fees are usually collected by the accredited tour guide associations for organized touring. As mentioned by the Municipal Tourism Officer, fees collected are determined through a combination of community participation and the cost of tourism infrastructure support. The LGU also ensures that the fees established are within what other tourist destinations are collecting. This helps ensure that Sagada remains competitive while reflecting the uniqueness of its cultural and natural attractions. Nonetheless, the fees are ensured to be fair and equitable, for both the community, as owners of the heritage resources and service providers, and the tourists who wants to experience the community's culture and heritage. For the municipality of Bokod, Benguet, the local tour guides are organized by the local government. Through the assistance of the LGU, the local tour guide association was able to formulate a code of ethics for local tour guides. Aside from this, the centralized organization of the tour guide association by the LGU ensures that there will be no competition among tour guide associations and that management of tourism activities are well coordinated between the LGU and the association.

2. Heritage Zones and Built Environment Protection

The local tourism development plans also include the identification of heritage zones and built environment protected areas. These zones guide the development of activities including tourism within heritage areas. A unique case is for the municipality of Bokod, where majority of its heritage zones and tourist attractions fall within the jurisdiction of government agencies. The local government has minimal control over the management decisions over these zones and tourist sites. The Ambuklao dam, for example, is under the jurisdiction of the National Power Corporation and SN Aboitiz while their mountaineering sites like Mount Purgatory is under the supervision of the PAMB and DENR. The local government serves more as a recommending body to the agencies managing these zones. Due to these special arrangements, assignment of responsibilities and accountabilities between the LGU and the national agencies are not clear. These often results into issues on coordination and conflicts in the implementation of regulatory measures.

3. Municipal Designation of Heritage Assets

The local government of Sagada has made advancement in the designation of heritage assets. The local government has already passed several ordinances,

executive orders, and resolutions recognizing and protecting key local structures and sites of cultural significance. Sagada is now preparing a more comprehensive and detailed tourism code. Consultations were done per sector from the tourist guides, local transportation providers and operators, home stays and inns, weavers, and food handlers. One of the best practices of the Sangguniang Bayan of Sagada is inviting elders in policy making to ensure that tourism will conform with the customary concept of umili or the ancestral domain management. IPMRs at the barangay level and at the municipal level participate in the consultations and policy development (Malabong 2025). Among the examples of the policies adopted by the local government on culture and heritage assets include the prohibition of entry of tourists to sites during observance of community rituals such as *sagangsang*, *toling*, *pasa-a*, *sedey*, and during *begnas* and their *ubayas*.

4. Cultural and Heritage Mapping, Inventory and Documentation

The national policy framework mandates that the local government units conduct a mapping, inventory, and documentation of all their cultural and heritage resources. As mentioned in the previous sections, these resources need to be registered with the national heritage registry. According to the NCCA, they have provided the LGUs with the guidelines on conducting the mapping, inventory, and documentation. The cultural and heritage inventories of the LGU include ritual practices, traditional arts and crafts, celebrations, oral histories, and architectural heritage, serving not only as protective registries but also as reference bases for developing interpretive programs and community-based tourism products. At the local government level, budget allocations have already been approved to support activities for cultural mapping. The LGUs also recognize the importance of cultural mapping to properly identify their cultural assets and pass corresponding policies to protect these assets. These policies are some examples showing that heritage protective legislation is operational at multiple LGU levels.

Institutionalization of Heritage Governance Bodies

Upon the recommendation of the NCCA, the local government units worked on the establishment (or proposal) of local councils for culture and arts (LCACs). The LCACs are seen as the main local special body to lead in planning and recommending policies to address culture and heritage issues, as well as align culture with the local development plans. In order to achieve proper representation in the LCAC membership, the IPMRs from Bokod informed that it is important to include local tourist guides as primary custodians or

handlers of the heritage resources, representation from the council of Elders as knowledge bearers and the youth sector to ensure sustainability of actions especially those related to culture. The IPMRs also acknowledge the importance of including the academe, from grade school to higher education, in the Council for the research, documentation and development of educational materials that will ensure the knowledge transfer of culture to the younger generations. As mentioned by the IPMRs of Bokod, it is becoming difficult to encourage the younger generation to participate in cultural activities.

Policy Analysis: Key Policy Challenges in Culture and Heritage Tourism

Cultural Commodification and Authenticity

While tourism offers economic benefits, cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, environmental strain, and social disruption are the common issues and challenges encountered by the local communities in cultural and heritage tourism. Indigenous communities face the risk of their cultural symbols and practices being commodified or diluted for tourist consumption. Some communities resist such commercialization, prioritizing cultural preservation over economic gain (Jularbal 2019). A persistent challenge in heritage tourism is the risk of reducing cultural practices to consumable spectacles. In the Cordilleras, rituals and performances are sometimes modified to fit tourist schedules, potentially undermining their cultural meaning and sacredness. As mentioned by Ms. Maria Theresa Abad, Municipal Tourism Officer of Sagada, this is one of the major challenges encountered by the local government. It is a challenge for the local government to address these issues and come up with a totally inclusive municipal tourism policy and development framework. As it is, response from the local government on these issues is still reactive rather than proactive. Accordingly, the municipality is trying its best to mobilize the various stakeholders in updating their municipal tourism policies and plans. In addition, Ms. Carmen Malabong of the Sangguniang Bayan of Sagada is in support that tourism has a threat on cultural conservation that leads to the formulation of related regulation policies. Tourism serves as a catalyst for the formalization and strengthening of customary governance in the municipality. With their experiences, policies like the tourism code are regularly undergoing amendments through sectoral consultations. The consultations help align the tourism plans with community needs and what the local tourism is designed for. Still, the local government recognizes that issues like commodification

continuously arises. Aside from sacred sites identified as tourism assets, rituals, and practices such as the *begnas* has become a show to tourists (Malabong 2025).

For the Province of Benguet, Tourism Officer Kenneth Kelcho, informed that the provincial government through their office is providing programs for the conservation and preservation of heritage and culture like conduct of trainings on song, music, and dances given to tourist frontliners, tourist guides, porters, and tourist providers. However, he mentioned that the local tourism offices still need further capacity building in the roll out of the Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties (PRECUP) to assist the communities in the registration of their cultural and heritage resources. Technical assistance to the School of Living Traditions (SLT) projects is required by the province. Additionally, the absence of a policy to regulate the use of social media, such as vlogging, is another issue that needs to be addressed in cultural and heritage tourism. As stated by Mr. Kelcho, while tourism promotes visibility and economic gains, there is a risk of misrepresentation, especially with the use of social media. Social media, like vlogging, is a strong tool for education and promotion of culture but at the same time it can lead to misinformation, or misrepresentation. In the absence of the policy, their office tries their best to review the materials related to culture and heritage of the province posted on social media to ensure factual information. However, Mr. Kelcho informed that their office has limitations considering the wide audience and space covered by social media.

The local chief executive of Bokod, Hon. Eric Donn Ignacio, on the other hand, acknowledged that the municipality lacks or has no policies documented related to the protection and preservation of culture and heritage. The LCE expressed that, although it is unfortunate, culture and heritage policies have not been priority of the LGU. Nonetheless, the local government has already allocated funding for the cultural mapping activities through the guidance of the NCCA. As a start, the LGU has already prepared its reports on its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which includes the preservation and conservation of ancestral houses, festivals, dance troupe, and putting up their own museum. The LCE also mentioned that the community still observes and solicits the direct and active participation of elders and cultural bearers. They are tapped as resource persons during lectures and demonstration on how the rituals and dances are to be properly performed. Like Sagada, Mayor Ignacio observed that cultural heritage is now more geared towards tourism, rather than continuity. Culture and heritage are now an alternative income for some. The IPMRs of Bokod affirmed the LCE's observation but mentioned that for the municipality, the community still decides what rituals and practices can be

done for presentation to the public. The community still observes rituals that are off-limits for public presentation.

Equity and Benefit Sharing

Although tourism generates revenue, benefits are not always equitably distributed and go to the local communities. As mentioned in the previous sections, fees are established and collected by the local government unit and used for the development and maintenance of tourism infrastructure support. However, as a tour guide of Sagada have mentioned, fees are generally collected from tourists and not from external tour operators. External tour operators have a larger leeway in including additional charges and mark-ups to what is established by the LGU. Moreover, external tour operators and urban-based enterprises often capture a larger share of tourism income, while indigenous communities bear the social and environmental costs. The local level lacks mechanisms that regulate these external tour operators and urban-based enterprises.

Conservation and Environmental Pressure from Tourism

The rapid infrastructure development intended to improve tourism access, such as roads, trails and accommodation facilities, poses risks to the fragile ecosystems, cultural dynamics, and heritage landscapes if not properly regulated. With the improvement in accessibility, tourism results in a larger volume of visitors for the community. As mentioned by a tour guide of Sagada, the influx of visitors sometimes exceeds the capacity that can be handled by the cultural sites. Aside from this, rituals that require the closure of the cultural sites for certain period are often shortened to fast track the re-opening and accommodate the tourists. It was also mentioned that opening of cultural and heritage sites, like the burial caves, natural sites and sacred grounds, and inclusion of cultural practices in tour packages, should be limited to what is already existing. The tour guide also mentioned that there are rituals that should be totally off-limits to tourists even if they are willing to provide the corresponding resources to observe these practices. One such ritual or practice is the *"panag-puur"* or *"panag-apoy"* (lighting of fire) during the All-Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. Accordingly, this is a cultural practice that is meant to be solemn as a way for families to remember their loved ones who passed away and not meant for tourism. However, with the influx of tourist, this practiced is disturbed and constantly posted on social media. As informed by the Municipal Tourism Officer, this

practice is not arranged by the local government but more of a solemn private event. It is not scheduled by the LGU and there is no general schedule when it will be done, but is just done by the people.

Institutional Coordination and Capacity Gaps

Despite the existence of local culture and arts councils, coordination between LGUs, national agencies, and communities remains uneven. Data gaps and limited technical capacity further constrain evidence-based planning. An equally important communication or policy gap mentioned by the Sagada local tour guides is with external tour operators arranging tourist visits to the municipality. Accordingly, external tour operators and coordinators arrange visits that have more than the capacity of what they (external operators) can handle and pass the responsibility of regulating the number to the local tour guides. These often results to tourists that are not able to have their preferred time slots in the arranged guided tours and the local guides blamed.

Conclusion

Cultural and heritage tourism in the Cordilleras illustrates both important possibilities and complex governance challenges. The establishment of policy standards requires that indigenous rights and participatory governance are prioritized to ensure that tourism contributes to sustainable development and protection of culture and heritage. Cultural tourism is an evolving phenomenon driven by tourists' interest in authentic heritage and local practices. To ensure that tourism benefits local communities while preserving their cultural integrity, effective policies should actively involve local populations, especially indigenous groups, in decision-making processes. This involvement ensures that their knowledge, norms, and traditions are respected and integrated into tourism planning (Jularbal 2019).

The involvement of indigenous communities into local development planning and policy formulation should be a basic essential for sustainable heritage tourism in the Cordillera. Cultural governance must move beyond political and technical management and prioritize indigenous contributions to ensure that policies are rooted in community interests rather than commercial interests. The involvement of elders and community leaders in policy development establishes better alignment between established standards and indigenous cultural practices. Their active participation serves as a fundamental protection

mechanism against cultural commodification while protecting the integrity and ownership over their indigenous knowledge systems.

Likewise, the FPIC mandate within the IPRA should be a key component in the development of cultural and heritage tourism standards to ensure that tourism development respects ancestral domain stewardship. This ensures that indigenous peoples are acknowledged as primary owners of the tourism value chain rather than passive subjects for tourism observation. Prioritizing community-based models of developing tourism standards in general guarantees a more authentic and sustainable experiential offering to visitors.

Policy Innovations: Improving the Standards for Heritage and Culture Tourism Governance and Participation Standards

1. Institutionalize an integrated and community-led cultural and heritage tourism governance and participation standards

   A persistent policy gap in Cordillera tourism is the lack of formal mechanisms that ensure indigenous communities have authoritative voice in cultural tourism planning, governance, and benefit sharing. While initiatives like the Best Tourism Village awards of the DOT aim to empower local tourism planning, they remain largely fiscal incentives within an existing model, rather than structural reforms to policy and governance frameworks (Cabreza 2025). Furthermore, Cordillera cultural policy discourse emphasizes culture as a core development agenda. Leaders note that in autonomy discussions, culture must not be "merely cosmetic," but structurally embedded within the regional policy, positioning indigenous worldviews and institutions at the center of development, including tourism. Policies should push for sustainable tourism to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage and protection of the region's ecology. Policy standards should promote the holistic understanding of the indigenous peoples of Cordillera without sacrificing the gains which the region made through tourism (Lubguban 2018).

   Jularbal (2019) in his discussion paper, also mentioned that to prevent the commodification of local culture while promoting sustainable tourism, strategies must include establishing guidelines that maintain and preserve

local ways and traditions, ensuring the authenticity and distinctiveness of the community's heritage are upheld. Additionally, community involvement and education are essential, empowering community members to participate actively in tourism development and decision-making, which helps align tourism practices with community values and reduces the risk of cultural exploitation. This community-driven process emphasizes that the community leads decision-making, respecting indigenous laws, cultural norms, and environmental concerns, ultimately creating a sustainable tourism culture that protects community identity and heritage while benefiting both hosts and visitors (Jularbal 2019). As mentioned by Mr. Rocky Ngalob of the NCIP in the public forum, there should be a free, prior, and informed consent from the indigenous communities before integrating sacred and cultural sites in any tour packages. Accordingly, the FPIC will allow the narratives of the indigenous communities to be included in any cultural and heritage tourism standards.

2. Mandatory multi-stakeholder consultations in tourism planning

Communities should take the lead in developing a structured cultural and heritage standards to make it align with their ideals. The community has the primary knowledge and understanding on how tourism affects their culture, environment, and development. There should be a clearly defined cultural and heritage tourism-related targets such as changing tourist behavior, limiting tourist access to ritual spaces and practices, distinguishing community and tourist spaces, areas for preservation, economic incentives, and cultural representation (Jularbal 2019). Institutionalizing community participation in the planning and development process would allow the proper identification and definition of heritage tourism products, establishment of appropriate cultural protocols including the proper timing of cultural events, and access of sacred site and natural ecosystems. This would mainstream indigenous welfare and priorities over economic potentials in policy standard development. Institutionalizing indigenous community participation in planning shifts policy from tourism for communities to tourism by and with communities which supports participatory cultural conservation and aligns tourism standards with indigenous cultural priorities rather than commercial benefits.

3. Strengthening regulation and monitoring of cultural and heritage tourism standards, documentation and education frameworks

Improving policy standards for cultural and heritage tourism in the Cordillera requires shifting governance structures toward increasing the involvement and capacity of the indigenous communities, co-ownership, and establishing strong cultural heritage documentation and educational standards. These policy actions align with sustainable, equitable, and inclusive cultural tourism development that balance economic opportunity with the preservation of heritage and indigenous values. Still, policy guidance for consistent documentation, safeguarding standards, interpretation, and tourist education is fragmented. As mentioned by Mr. Aldunar, the NCCA has already completed the guidelines for the community mapping but are still awaiting the approval of the DILG to properly delineate the activity to the LGUs. The LGUs, likewise, have their own system of documenting their practices and cultural resources.

4. Development of site-specific conservation and visitor management plans

Communities must delineate spaces for rituals and tourism, limit cultural appropriation, schedule events thoughtfully, and enforce environmental protections to maintain cultural authenticity (Jularbal 2019). This includes the development of tourist or visitor protocols guidelines that establishes appropriate procedures on how visitors should interact with specific heritage sites, ceremonies, rituals and crafts developed by the indigenous communities. As mentioned by a local tour guide of Sagada, culture and heritage in tourism should still require the strict observance of community protocols, rituals and practices. Tourism should not be an excuse to relax or not strictly follow the observance of the community protocols during rituals and practices. Moreover, specific conservation and visitor management plans will decrease the need to open-up or convert more of the community's sacred and cultural sites to accommodate the increasing number of tourists. As of the moment, the local tour guides are the ones managing the visitor traffic in the identified tourism sites of Sagada.

5. Comprehensive documentation protocols and education modules

There must be the establishment systematic documentation of tangible and intangible heritage (rituals, textiles, resource management systems, presentations, etc.), ideally in collaboration with local communities and cultural institutions.. With the completion of the NCCA of the LGU cultural mapping guidelines, involvement of indigenous communities in the planning process should be strengthened. Nonetheless, ownership of the data from the cultural mapping should remain with the LGU and

request for its use will be facilitated by the LGU. Cultural inventories should also be properly registered with the Philippine Registry of Heritage. Public accessibility should however be approved by the NCCA and the LGU.

There should also be the creation of cultural orientation materials for tourists (e.g., guidebooks, signage with local languages, guided interpretation scripts), to curb misrepresentation and foster respect. These are to be included in tourism training curricula for guides and community tourism practitioners. Orientations on community practices and protocols are conducted prior to the site visits but as stated by a local tour guide in Sagada, guidebooks and signages will provide a constant reminder for the visitors on the protocols of the community throughout their visit. Additionally, with the guidebooks, there will be a single and unified narrative that the tour guides will follow. These could also be developed into policies and integrated in tourism training curricula for guides and community tourism practitioners. For Bokod, the IPMRs collectively shared that the creation of cultural education modules will not only benefit tourists but also the local communities, especially the youth. Interests of the community members might be enticed upon seeing the different rituals, practices and dances that can be documented.

6. Establishment of accreditation, registration and monitoring systems for tour operators, organizers and coordinators

Accreditation and registration of tour operators, organizers and coordinators will serve as mechanism for accountability, ensuring that tourism practitioners adhere to established standards on cultural sensitivity, environmental carrying capacity, and community engagement. The accreditation and registration process will enable the local government to establish and maintain a database of legitimate operators. This database will allow the LGUs to track compliance with safety regulations, tour package offerings, and culturally appropriate interpretation of heritage resources. Part of the accreditation and registration standards could include cultural orientation and environmental carrying capacity protocols for tour coordinators and organizers. With accreditation and registration, the LGUs will also be able to recognize best practices of operators that follow sustainability and cultural preservation standards. Registration can also improve transparency, enabling tourists to verify accredited operators and encouraging industry self-regulation. As shared by a tour guide from Sagada, the local guides do not have control over the number of tourists

> brought in by external tour operators, organizers and coordinators and this sometimes exceeds the maximum number. Add to this, fly-by-night tour organizers and coordinators that leave their clients to the care of the tour guides without providing any information of the packages that they avail. Most often, as shared by the tour guide, violations and incidences occur with groups of large number. Nonetheless, the tour guide shared that accreditation and registration should not be viewed as additional business requirement and regulatory control but as a strategy and standard to ensure that clients receive the best quality of tourism services they paid for.

Policy standards should contemplate the importance of developing policies that are conceived, designed, deliberated, and agreed upon by local communities, respecting their knowledge, experiences, and cultural contexts. Policies should also function in cultural and heritage maintenance, protection, preservation, and improvement, especially in heritage-based tourism areas. Additionally, community involvement and education are emphasized as crucial in reshaping tourism to align with community ideals and prevent cultural commodification. Indigenous communities can effectively participate in the planning and management of cultural tourism initiatives by setting decision-making processes in accordance with their laws and regulations, which may include delineating ritual spaces, limiting the appropriation of folkways and cultural items, scheduling ritual and celebratory events, and developing environmental protection measures. Additionally, community involvement and education are crucial in reshaping tourism to align with community ideals, ensuring that their cultural identity and heritage are preserved and respected (Jularbal 2019).

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