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Preserving Mayoyao Heritage

A Community-initiated Approach to Sustainable Heritage-Tourism and LGU Cultural Policy Development in Safeguarding Rice Terraces

Io M. Jularbal, Ph.D. 



Local Regional Studies Network

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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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DISCUSSION PAPER

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



Preserving Mayoyao Heritage

A Community-initiated Approach to
Sustainable Heritage-Tourism and LGU
Cultural Policy Development in Safeguarding
Rice Terraces

Io M. Jularbal, Ph.D.

Key Highlights

- This policy paper is conceptualized taking into consideration how arising tourist cultures tend to impact indigenous community ideals on preservation of heritage, heritage areas, and customary practice in the rice terrace areas of Mayoyao Ifugao.
- This policy paper builds and draws from community ideals and indigenous customary concepts and how these play an important part on the future of the rice terraces in Mayoyao, as they currently straddle a thin line between the preservation of tradition and modern development.
- This policy focuses on putting into perspective the vital role that community members have in the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage as well as in deciding how they would move forward in terms of setting conditions in developing sustainable eco-tourism.

Introduction

The relationship between indigenous communities and tourism has always had its fair share of debatable issues. When it comes to heritage sites such as the rice terraces in Ifugao, it is a matter of a community's efforts to protect and preserve not only tangible facets of their culture but also measures in maintaining intangible aspects such as folk traditions and rituals.

In *Heritage and tourism: two sides of the coin?*, George Cassar defines heritage as:

a broad concept and includes the natural as well as the cultural environment. It encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences.
(Cassar 2014)

Cassar continues by stating that such “endeavors” in conservation and enhancement of community heritage for future generations inadvertently creates avenues for interest in visiting and exploring such sites. Tourism becomes an outcome that heritage communities tend to take advantage of because of numerous benefits offered, including employment, development, socio-economic progress, among others. But realistically, communities who engage in heritage tourism will have to contend with adding another layer of activity to an already demanding task of preservation and protection. A good example would be an assessment of priorities, as well as balancing between maintaining traditional practice or transformation towards catering to a more financially secure tourism culture. Such a scenario only highlights the essential role that the community has in terms of planning and assessment—a task that should not only be associated solely to the local government unit (LGU).

This paper focuses on emphasizing and promoting the community's role in decision making and planning. It has to be put into clearer perspective that in heritage tourism, the community is directly affected and influenced, and should therefore have a major role. In the Philippines, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, clearly states the recognition of indigenous communities and the capacity to “govern themselves, manage ancestral domains, and pursue economic, social and cultural development” (Republic Act No. 8371). A community's involvement in heritage tourism considers several risks that challenge the implementation of the IPRA. The right to self-determination may be displaced by a higher body's imposition of national

tourism developmental goals. This may not be in congruence with indigenous community ideals. A good example would be an objective demand caused by increased visitor influx without due recognition of specific ritual periods, where visitors are not allowed in specific territorial boundaries of the community. Other instances may include situations where traditional activities have to be put on hold in lieu of accommodating an influx of visitors. Other factors such as realignment of community resources, tourist population increase, and spatial considerations for accommodations among others, directly affect both environmental and cultural facets of indigenous communities.

Active and participative involvement of the community in both the early and continuing stages of heritage tourism development has the ability to steer modes of planning to be more sensitive to community needs as well as the preservation of ethnic ideals and identities. The main objective is to obtain positive contributions for both the community and tourism industry, where balance between heritage conservation is harmoniously aligned with developmental growth and sustainable income generation.

Policy Background

Located in the Province of Ifugao, the Municipality of Mayoyao is home to a system of rice terraces that has earned its place as a UNESCO world heritage site. In 1973, the Ifugao rice terraces were declared as National Treasures by Presidential Decree no. 260 in 1973 and Presidential Decree No. 1505 in 1978 (UNESCO n.d.). However, such declarations are not enough to ensure the protection and development of these areas, as modern constraints on labor migration as well as rapidly vanishing recognition of ritual and traditional customary lifeways in lieu of more modern living take hold. Coupled with environmental factors, socio-economic constraints, and abandonment, numerous factors threaten the very existence and maintenance of the Ifugao terrace system. Although national and local government efforts on the protection and conservation of the terrace system have initially instituted systematic measures to ensure the terraces' present structural survival, such measures are more focused on the maintenance of the physical existence and structure of the terrace alone. This still necessitates a well-articulated consideration on community ritual impacts, cultural life, as well as identity configuration.

The traditional building of terraces in Mayoyao is a community-initiated activity involving the majority. This effort takes into consideration time, rituality, resources, and production. There are no terraces if there is no community, because the community is the terrace. Tourism has become an alternative livelihood source for the Mayoyao community. Tourism-driven activities delve into the establishment of facilities that cater to specific needs such as accommodations, transportation, and food establishments, among others. Throughout the years, the Mayoyao community has been able to arrive at accords in terms of incorporating community sensibility and culture with tourist needs and demands. But as the years progress, the influx of visitors is gaining thrust, increasing demands for service and attention. This results in the disruption of traditional community ways and the observance of customary as well as ritual observance calendars. A careful balance between economic gain and preservation of tradition is needed more than ever.

Alexandra Bitusikova's essay "Cultural Heritage as a Means of Heritage Tourism Development" argues that

UNESCO's World Heritage List, which has become an accreditation scheme for heritage sites, either serves the purposes of tourism (as a major source of revenue) or nation building. This trend illustrates how transnational processes are subject to national and local economic considerations and political agendas (Bitusikova 2021, 84).

The UNESCO declaration of the Mayoyao terraces as a heritage site is held in high regard by the community. It serves as a clear international recognition of the abilities, culture, and tradition. Many in the area also understand this recognition to function as conditioning the community that the terraces have the potential for tourist income generation. At present, guided tours are conducted in the terrace areas, calling forth the establishment of cemented pathways on scenic routes as well as tourist-centered amenities within the community.

The reality is, field work (and workers) also become part of the touristic gaze and activity. Tilling the fields, planting, and even maintaining the terraces are included as part of what visitors expect in a well packaged heritage tourism experience. Such conditions quickly transform tourism into a more intrusive activity that ignores boundaries between local activity with touristic activity. For a rice culture driven community like Mayoyao, all community

activity, tradition, and rituals, revolve on the propagation of rice. Since time immemorial, the strict observation of such has led to shaping the community to what it is at present. The entry and influx of visitors in the area, which also includes ritual and cultural spaces, implies an abrupt adjustment from the community. Accommodating the visitor now becomes a primary concern that requires an immediate response which also impacts the delicate continuity of planting and harvest cycles.

In the overall context of the rapid emergence of heritage and cultural tourism in indigenous areas in the Philippines, traditional ways of life are often endangered. This policy paper believes that it is important and crucial to know and understand how such modes of touristic enterprise impacts the preservation and continuity of traditional community lifeways in Mayoyao, specifically the preservation and maintenance of their rice terraces. Considering the inevitability of heritage tourism's involvement in the community, this policy paper aims to explore and provide feasible and sustainable systematic protocols through which tourism can become a tool that not only provides economic gain, but also be a conduit for the preservation, maintenance, and promotion of ritual and tradition. To provide better perspectives regarding this, this paper promotes and highlights the primacy of community engagement in assessing and developing means through which ritual and tradition can best co-exist with tourism cultures.

Indeed, there is no question on the potential of heritage tourism to attract and invite tourists, both locally and internationally. Its potential in providing significant economic gain for communities is even acknowledged as highly efficacious. In terms of preserving and maintaining the Mayoyao rice terraces, tourism, with proper management, aim, and direction can be a tool that supports conservation efforts and creates a sustainable tourism culture that ensures the continuity and non-interference of community folkways and tradition.

The article "The Impact of Cultural Tourism on Local Traditions" argues that:

Cultural tourism can provide significant economic benefits to local communities by attracting visitors interested in authentic cultural experiences. However, this tourism must be managed carefully to prevent the commodification of culture that can arise from unchecked tourism growth. Conservation efforts can help balance economic interests with the need to preserve local traditions,

ensuring that tourism contributes positively to the community without eroding its cultural foundations. Involving the local community in conservation efforts fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their cultural heritage (Surata et al. 2024, 674-675).

The intricate relationship between heritage preservation and tourism requires coordination and proactive participation from the community. The challenges that heritage tourism can inflict on the Mayoyao community and terraces may delve on notions of traditional repurposing for touristic consumption. If left unabated, this may even lead to the destruction of the terraces caused by massive commercialization, the loss of traditional modes of living, or even an overall transformation of the terrace and the community as dictated by enterprise and mercantilist intents.

Though it is common in the Philippines to impose policies within the purview of the local government, it should also be emphasized that the community has a larger responsibility regarding the conceptualization, development, and deliberation of such policies, as they are the ones who are primarily affected by tourism.

In line with the preservation of its rice terraces, community involvement also has the potential to:

1. Enforce local knowledge as a core construct for the development of strategic methods for preservation measures as well as tourism management;
2. Directly and immediately detect and mitigate threats from both environmental and touristic factors;
3. Establish sustainable collaborative efforts amongst stakeholders, business owners, the local government, as well as tourists in terms of maintaining community traditional practice, in alignment with tourism development; and
4. Redesign, modify, and renegotiate existing terrace restoration and tourism related policies in coherence to community-based approaches.

Surata et al. (2024) further opine that “Community participation is essential in the preservation of cultural heritage, especially in the context of tourism.” Taking into consideration the Mayoyao Rice Terraces, community engagement with its preservation supports and develops not only community responsibility, but also builds community ideals of ownership over tradition and place. Such an ownership empowers the community in further involving themselves not only in physical acts of heritage preservation, but also in overall decision-making processes.

Definition of Terms

Heritage Tourism

Zeitlin and Burr (2011) define heritage tourism as:

...tourism focused on aspects of history or cultural heritage. It includes events and festivals, as well as sites and attractions related to the people, lifestyles, and traditions of the past.

Taking into consideration its main aspects, heritage tourism relies on an authentic experience in terms of both tangible and intangible forms of a community’s cultural space and ritual folkways to be enjoyed an experienced by the visitor. Heritage tourism fundamentally functions towards not only on an entertainment aspect of travel, but also that of an educational and immersive experience that aims towards maintenance of tradition and economic gain for the community.

Sustainable Tourism

As defined by Surata et. al. (2024), sustainable tourism “...fully takes into account current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, industry, environment, and host communities.” Sustainability under heritage tourism implies an active move towards maintaining and preserving heritage sites and heritage as a culture in general, not only for purposes of tourism, but as a means of securing a community’s cultural past towards the future.

Community-initiated

For this paper, the concept of “community-initiated” as an approach implies that efforts in heritage preservation and heritage tourism emanate primarily from the community. Conceptualization, strategic planning, and management are part of these initial steps which would eventually cascade towards higher decision and enactment bodies such as the local government unit. The community-initiated approach, presupposes that the community is in a position that puts them in a better perspective to elaborate and interpret concepts that are the very foundations of what heritage is. Community participation guarantees community cohesion, authenticity of cultural practice, as well as sustainability and economic balance with tourism.

Proposed policy guidelines

The foundations of this proposed policy are based on community initiative and engagement as keys to feasible and sustainable cultural heritage site preservation, specifically in the case of the Mayoyao rice terraces, where heritage tourism efforts are directly related to community state and welfare. The preservation and conservation of heritage sites in principle should “also seek to conserve the effort, skill, and dedication of the original builders.” (Li et al. 2021, 2). Under this perspective, conservation also functions in meeting contemporary community demands, economic welfare, and proper and responsible appropriation of heritage areas, while actively maintaining the sites originality and keeping its cultural value intact.

Hari Srinivas (2022, 1) states that “heritage conservation must be prioritized and woven into the larger fabric of urban development to sustain cities’ identities and ensure long-term cultural, economic, and social benefits.” As illustrated by Srinivas’ model (Fig. 1), this proposal also adheres to the notion that community development is innately a part of the process through which heritage conservation affects urban development as well matters involving the progress economic ventures, tourism, and governance.

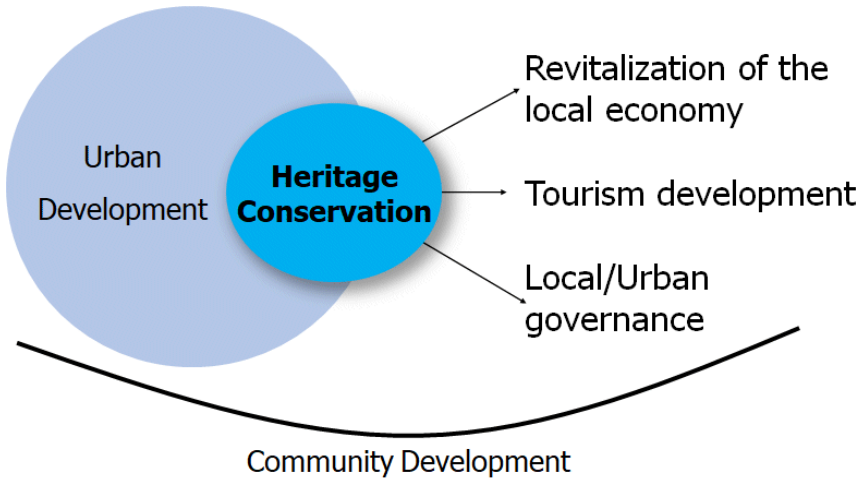


Figure 1. Community development heritage conservation model (Srinivas 2022)

It is vital for this policy to imply that heritage conservation is not only a matter of preserving culture for a community, but also plays a major role in its sustainable development. Srinivas (2022) mentions two key reasons for the integration of cultural heritage preservation with community participation: first is the importance of community involvement for the success of any heritage initiative, and second are the implications for civic pride and city-image building among citizens. Its integration therefore into the “larger developmental process” of the community is dependent on the direct involvement of the community, which in turn also becomes a factor towards its success.

Community and Tourism

For Mayoyao, the preservation and conservation of its rice terraces is inimical to the community’s survival since time immemorial. At present, the rice terraces’ links with the local economy extends to its recognition of tourism as a key factor in bringing in much needed income and development, to the point that the integration between tourism and the terraces is generally accepted. As a response, the Mayoyao LGU has initiated its own “Rice Terraces Restoration Plan” with reference to the UNESCO declaration of the area as a heritage site. According to the UNESCO world heritage convention, the Cordillera rice terrace maintenance reflects:

...a primarily cooperative approach of the whole community which is based on detailed knowledge of the rich diversity of biological resources existing in the Ifugao agro-ecosystem, a finely tuned annual system respecting lunar cycles, zoning and planning, extensive soil conservation, mastery of a most complex pest control regime based on the processing of a variety of herbs, accompanied by religious rituals. (UNESCO World Heritage Convention n.d.)

The protection of the Cordillera rice terraces adheres to requirements set by the UNESCO. The institution of a six-year master plan set up in 1994 placates preservation efforts to be undertaken by both the Provincial Government of Ifugao and the National Commission for the Culture and the Arts (NCCA). This takes into consideration an active consultation as well as participation from the community which includes:

Development of potential tourism sites including access roads, improvement of services at the tourism service centers, crafting of ordinances focusing on cultural heritage issues and development, and urging M/BLGUs to take active roles in tourism promotion to contribute in tourism growth in the province (Provincial Planning and Development Office 2024, 9).

Bearing this in mind, the Ifugao Rice Terraces Master Plan does not fall short in terms of considering community participation as well as tourism potentials for income. As part of the master plan's support component, the development of eco-tourism "supportive to the conservation of the rice terraces at all levels" is part of its community based initiative. But what is needed is a solid foundation on guidelines that directly create negotiations between community and heritage-tourism undertakings, more specifically, community-initiated roles in terms of heritage and eco-tourism management, supervision, and capacity building.

The development of a community-initiated and engaged heritage tourism model, if optimized properly and effectively implemented, has the ability to not only attract tourism benefits, but may also enhance "the well-being of the community" (Wijaynati et al. 2023). Sustainable community and industry growth, resource and heritage conservation, as well as the fulfillment of community needs and stakeholder benefits are key constructs that the community-initiated approach intends to accomplish. Wijaynati et al. (2023)

suggest the use of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) method which is comprised of “four components such as 1) community participation, 2) knowledge and planning, 3) regulatory systems, and 4) financial tools .”

The HUL method works on the principle that:

A historical perspective and the existence of heritage are essential to anticipate threats to culture. The Historical perspective is constructed to realize the right concepts, including urban planning, sustainable development, and climate adaptation (Wijaynati et al. 2023, 1631).

For this policy, the HUL method will be reinterpreted to include more on aspects of heritage knowledge as well as indigenous culture, as this is considered to be primary for the Mayoyao rice terrace community. The method will be as follows:

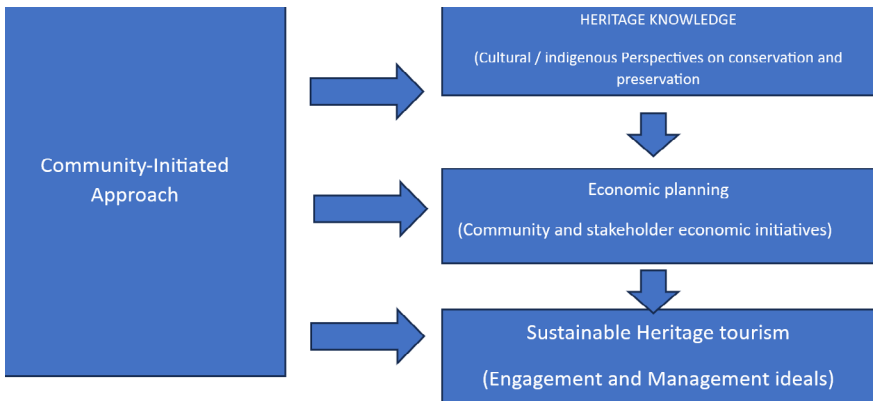


Fig. 2 Community initiated model

The community-initiated approach would first take into consideration heritage knowledge. These are core concepts that fully signify the community’s role, since it is within this cluster that directly provides inherent value to the terraces, both concerning culture and identity. This at the same time contextualizes and legitimizes the role of the community to be in the position of identifying and interpreting the rice terraces as important in both communal and economic ventures. Heritage knowledge also provides

standards for authenticity of heritage, its identification, and directions towards proper cultural representation and valuation. In the case of Mayoyao where rice culture is tantamount to community value, heritage knowledge promotes a proactive participation of the community in terrace area management, terrace conservation, revival, and identification of other key potential areas for heritage tourism. Economic planning based on heritage knowledge would now take into consideration community and stakeholder initiatives in terms of appropriating the terraces for touristic valuation, but it is an appropriation that strictly adheres to community mandates as well as cultural sensitivity. Heritage knowledge based economic planning is effective in assessing the community's financial and social needs, along with those of other stakeholders, but serves its purpose as a regulatory function, strategically guaranteeing that tourism ventures do not end up exhausting and exploiting heritage sites. Taking into consideration Mayoyao's rice production activities as being part of its heritage value and image, economic planning should work its way in bolstering heritage industries that have originally been set in place and recognized as traditional sources of income by the community. Heritage industries also include terrace building and maintenance, traditional community and terrace owner labor arrangements, as well as other crop and resource production emanating from the terraces. The recognition of rituals in heritage tourism activities is also important, as they provide a deep-rooted semblance of reinforced and shared community value. Rituals have the ability to enforce and sustain social and economic interaction:

Rituals matter for economic outcomes because they influence the extent of the market for better or worse. Some rituals encourage and facilitate interaction, while others constrain the extent of the market, and hence development, by limiting interaction with those considered 'outsiders.' In addition to influencing development through monetary income, many rituals also affect capabilities of individuals to lead dignified and flourishing lives. As such, understanding the various nuances of rituals is important for understanding development in the broadest sense (Coyne and Mathers 2011, 75)

The persistence of rituals in a community dictates the survival of its tangible and intangible heritage. The Mayoyao rice terraces exist as a testimony the community following and valuing rituals even at present. The terraces coupled with community rituals are among many factors that build Mayoyao identity. Such social rituals and customary practices function in establishing social

understanding as well as coordination and cooperation. Through rituals, economic influence can be achieved as it serves its purpose in “facilitating coordination” and as a “signaling mechanism” that makes possible “interaction and exchange” all focused in solving community problems towards unified strides in development (Coyne and Mathers 2011). The success and feasibility of obtaining sustainable community-initiated heritage tourism relies on community recognition and responsibility. This can be made possible with an effective application of heritage knowledge in the development of culture-based sound economic plans which are strategically guided by community cultural ideals and concepts.

Strategizing for Sustainable Heritage Tourism

Mayoyao tourism is presently subject to a growing urbanization and modernizing urban landscape which finds itself thriving next to measures directed towards the preservation of cultural heritage. As part of the UNESCO declaration of its rice terraces as heritage areas, LGU has focused its efforts projects that are aligned to the integration of socio-economic with cultural preservation and tourism. The terraces have been transformed into becoming a branded heritage destination, a flagship visual ideal through which the community has built around its touristic imagery and design. But such branding and signification has the tendency to transform the terraces into artifacts intended only for touristic consumption, disconnected from its traditional and historic roots and value. A successful heritage and community-based tourism policy should concentrate on cultural prioritization, community empowerment, as well as grassroots policy and capacity development.

Tourist motivation as far as heritage sites are concerned are driven by;

...the unique cultural aspects and experiences provided by the local community. Cultural satisfaction criteria include destination-specific attributes and cultural products, including authenticity, accessibility, narratives of cultural exhibits, unique experiences, service and infrastructure quality, safety and security, staff, transportation and signage, accommodation, and culinary experiences (Shubbar et al. 2025, 624).

Culture plays a pivotal role in the success of any heritage tourism activity. But such aspects of uniqueness, destination-specific offerings, and even quality, among other factors are all dependent on how the community generates its own paradigm for authenticity. In the case of the Mayoyao terraces, its touristic motivational value, lies more in its tangible cultural aspects of authenticity as well as its rich history. It is rather understood that tourist expectations may not necessarily be at par with certain conditions of the terraces, especially in periods where planting cycles may leave the terraces in conditions below visitor expectations (i.e. field fallow period / soil resting stages). The community should have a plan to cater to tourism policies that are in-tune with seasonal and planting cycles, rather than forcing its heritage to continually adjust to touristic need and expectations. It now becomes a matter of developing an adaptive tourism construct that follows community, cultural, and environmental conditions and not the other way around. Shubbar et al. (2025, 625) state that “The need to develop a policy for cultural heritage tourism is to guarantee long-term cultural heritage tourism development with a balance between cultural values, environmental assets, and economic results.”

Authenticity with reference to the Mayoyao rice terraces does not only imply the exactness of the terraces' visual appearance, but also involves more under perspectives of culture, ritual, and tradition. At present the local government of Mayoyao has engaged the community in the restoration and maintenance of the terraces not only for purposes of tourism, but also in support of the posterity of community value, identity, and tradition. There is, however, the threat of gentrification as well as appropriation and economic valuation of cultural activities (Shubbar et al., 2025, 625). The sobering reality is, at more modern constructs, several rituals and cultural activities remain very expensive, time-sensitive, and exclusivist. Tourists demand not only to witness, but also to be involved in ritual and a more hands-on experience with tangible culture like the rice terraces, several communities involved in heritage tourism therefore respond by transforming culture and ritual as a paid performative that can be rendered upon request therefore reducing authentic value. Aside from this, tourist sites run the risk of damage and continual degradation due to visitations and use from tourists. Heritage sites also may result in the displacement of localities in favor of tourism structures. In dealing with such conditions, heritage tourism policy should equip itself with the understanding that cultural authenticity should not be confined to fixed tourist and commercial standards. Instead, it should initially emanate from community expression and consideration of long held cultural beliefs and ethnic contexts of interpretation.

The five-step concept of cultural heritage tourism (Fig. 3), though concentrating on urban regeneration, may also be utilized in developing specific heritage tourism areas such as the Mayoyao rice terraces. Its first step, cultural policy-making, may provide avenues to safeguard authenticity and cultural specificities in the development of heritage as part of a viable tourism construct. Cultural policy-making also creates proper standards, criterion, and norms in defining the direction of rice terrace-based tourism. In line with the first step, the second step, heritage tourism as a niche market, puts into focus the pivotal role that the rice terraces have in the overall design of the tourism sector in Mayoyao. This also disambiguates the terraces from other heritage areas and sources. Specifically specialized segments with unique offerings, needs, and characteristics should remain individually distinguishable in terms of its ability in securing economic benefit for the community. Third, the heritagization of everyday past cultural activities allows for community valuing and emphasis of their history as an intangible part of their culture. Such recognition of history as part of heritage strengthens community ideals and identities which in turn supports the protection and sustainable preservation of heritage sites. The fourth step, branding heritage places, would now function under already standardized conditions set by the initial steps. Branding should be done with community dictate in mind, sensitive to cultural nuances and traditional identifiers, securing community identity, and contributing to a unified aesthetic. And finally, the fifth step, participatory management for heritage tourism, implies that community initiative is a major factor in the development and sustainability of the heritage site. But the success of participatory management relies on the whole hearted commitment of the community in support of heritage tourism and this can be supported by a secure and strong sense of community identity and responsibility as well as an idea of potential for benefits. Heritage tourism if actively participated by the community has the potential to enhance quality of life for residents as well as attracting more viable options for income generation.



Fig 3. Five-step concept of the development of cultural heritage tourism (Lak et al. 2020)

Emerging trends in tourism dynamics and modern ideals on locality transformation towards modernity and development are major challenges that heritage tourism face. The Mayoyao rice terraces has had its share of assumed development plans that has inadvertently led to its destruction, be it the introduction of invasive species believed to aid in improving soil quality, to adoption of modern farming methods and rice varieties for higher yield, and total abandonment of the terraces all together due to labor migration among so many others that tend to render tradition obsolete, are considerations that necessitate a paradigm shift in terms of how the community will develop a formidable and sustainable heritage tourism policy. Be that as it may, policy-making should be sensitive to taking these factors into consideration. The success of a heritage tourism plan should not be solely based on enforcing projects aimed towards increasing tourist visit projections, but should also function in mitigating influences that lead to the loss of tradition and culture. Success can also be gauged through improved community life and its ability in strengthening community identity. Economic gain from tourism should be directed towards the general benefit of each and every individual in the community and also the preservation and sustainability towards the rice terraces. Policy-making, in terms of the rice terraces, as a heritage tourism zone should be made at step-by-step intervals, safeguarded and maneuvered by the community, sensitive to community needs and responses, as well as to stakeholders and businesses.

The development of a comprehensive and unified heritage plan should be directed towards preventing the destruction and appropriation of the rice terraces as a mere tourist zone. It should always see the terraces as an organic and living part of tangible culture that has served its purpose in safeguarding Mayoyao culture and heritage for thousands of years. Effective heritage and heritage site management takes into consideration not only the physical heritage zone, but also the intangible cultural and ethnic elements that are conjointly and organically part of it. Site and culture should never be considered separate and distinct. A community-based and -led management plan set in protecting both the terraces and rice culture per-se is an essential initial component towards creating a unified heritage strategy. Sustainable tourism as part of the strategy can be further bolstered by establishing healthy multi-sectoral linkages that work in conjunction with the community. This is feasible in the Mayoyao context since majority of business owners, civic organizations, as well as stake holders are also part of the locality. But it should also take into consideration collaboration with outside sectors as inevitable.

Collaborative community engagement

To ensure community involvement and collaboration, it must be made clear that a feasible community-based tourism model should imply a return of benefits as well other forms of remuneration that benefit the whole community in a progressive and sustainable construct. But aside from a return of benefits, community engagement is also forged and instituted in instances when decision-making is also a vital role given to its members. The conditions in Mayoyao, where community members are owners of the terraces, guarantees that heritage tourism is not only community-based, but also community-owned. The local government unit has also stepped in to procure abandoned terrace plots and have taken the liberty of shelling-out financing in its repair, maintenance, and marketing as part of its heritage zones. There is a sense of autonomy on how the community spends its earnings, but a divisive financial and resource plan should also be stipulated where the security and posterity of the terraces must be considered. Heritage tourism in Mayoyao aids in improving living conditions for the members of its community and also provides for avenues of capital engagement. But projects should be worked hand-in-hand and cooperatively by both community and the LGU for these to still be sensitive and supportive of heritage protection. Proactive consultations and partnership built on common goals and trust is what should drive community engagement in promoting heritage tourism.

Tourist intake has constantly increased in Mayoyao over the years and it is within this rising intake that the Mayoyao community has taken strides in culture preservation and identity construction and growth. But a major question is whether the community is ready to handle the inevitability of larger tourist intake and if the terraces can cope with such an increase. It is necessary for any community-based heritage tourism policy to be in tune with properly balancing heritage preservation with development driven towards accommodating rising tourist numbers, while at the same time taking into consideration equitability, income generation, and overall community wellbeing. Realistically speaking, pride and identity are not enough to foster sustainable community involvement. Communities need resources to productively and constructively manage heritage tourism. Community engagement policy should include financial, benefit, and infrastructure elements. A proactive lead from the LGU can ensure that these can be met or even at least, be put into proper succession and made transparent to the community and other stakeholders.

Effective community empowerment is not simply about participation and cooperation; it is also honed by developing a sense of initiative and leadership based on emphasis on ownership and cultural management knowledge of the terraces. Coordination and the identification of key multisectoral players can be both innovated and strategized by the community. Emphasis on community ownership can empower communities, instilling in them responsibility and authority especially when it comes to the formulation and development of strategies for sustainability. Six core analytical dimensions should be taken into consideration in the assessment heritage tourism frameworks based on a study by Liorancaite-Sukiene and Jureniene (2025, 6). These are: 1) community participation intensity, 2) integration of indigenous/traditional knowledge, 3) environmental and climate alignment, 4) institutional support and funding mechanisms, 5) tourism impact orientation, and 6) technology integration. For the Mayoyao community rice terraces heritage tourism, it is only imperative that dimensions involving community participation, traditional knowledge, and environmental considerations be at the top of priorities. Increasing attention on these dimensions creates a virtually sustainable construct that will organically cascade and wholistically aid the remaining aspects. Through the use of the six core analytical dimensions, a rough evaluation of the state of Mayoyao rice terraces heritage tourism can be made.

As of the writing of this study, Mayoyao undoubtedly marks high in terms of cultural knowledge and heritage elements. However, it still needs a lot of improvement in dimensions of technological integration as well as institutional

funding. Liorancaite-Sukiene and Jureniene (2025, 7) argue that “rural communities often struggle with financial and human resource constraints, making stakeholder investment and digitalization critical for the long-term sustainability of heritage-tourism.” Such constraints can be effectively mitigated by an effective redistribution of control and power to grass-roots levels. By doing this, authority to control finances and tourism design can be actively made by the community, who is intuitively directed and institutionally guided. Also, a grass-roots level approach ensures that heritage tourism policy and platforms are led by the administrative cultural frameworks instituted by the community and that benefits are made felt and remain with them. Community based heritage tourism, as demonstrates that, “multi-stakeholder governance, community empowerment, and technology adoption (e.g., 3D modeling) are critical for balancing heritage conservation and economic development” (Liorancaite-Sukiene and Jureniene 2025, 7). A sustainable heritage tourism plan therefore is inclusive, cooperative, and considerably ecumenical as it not only brings the community together but also makes it a point to imply that everyone has a pivotal role. But community perspectives also have to be outward thinking and developmentally driven. Considerations for technological advancement, outsider investment, as well as tourist needs are matters that the community should also strategize and design.

A collaborative community engagement strategy may also include the addition of more contemporary engagement methods towards stakeholders and tourists. This guarantees that the heritage site and the culture where it emanates from is maintained but at the same time, made continually evolving and relevant. An active participation from the community not only guarantees continual use and utility of heritage, but also emphasizes its transformation in accordance to modern conditions. More contemporary engagement methods may also include the institution of clear-cut and well-defined duties and responsibilities to serve as guides for the community. These should be based on an assessment of available community resources as well as a comprehensive evaluation of community capabilities and capacities. This may also lead to the institutionalization of community retooling and training in response to changing needs, demands, along with possible expansion of economic sources. The objective of this is to transform the community by capitalizing on its strengths while at the same time moving towards conscious efforts in heritage preservation. The institution of well-defined roles prevents mismanagement and the overextension of the community's ability by committing to tasks deemed virtually impossible for them without the proper skillset and tools. A realistic assessment of capacity and resource is key in the initial stages of activity planning and in establishing steps in development and expansion.

Conclusion

The role of the community in decision making and planning is essential in the creation of heritage tourism policy. For the residents of Mayoyao in Ifugao, the rice terraces are emblematic of their rich history and cultural pride. The consideration of the rice terraces as a formidable tourism income source is based on the idea that the community wants to share and exhibit to a greater audience what ultimately defines Mayoyao identity. A caveat to such the development of a policy is arriving at a balance where modernity finds itself in struggles for sustainability amidst heritage preservation and authenticity. The rice terraces are not a mere tangible tourist attraction, but a product of rich history and continuing value for tradition and culture. Heritage tourism in this instance becomes a reaction aimed towards preservation and maintenance not only of the terraces, but the entire culture and community that has built and maintained it from time immemorial while at the same time conveying these as part of a tourism plan that will in turn benefit the community at the same time.

Active and participative involvement from the community should be what is incorporated in every stage of the institutionalization of heritage tourism, from its establishment, planning, continuity, and evolution. The preservation and conservation of heritage sites is deeply rooted to community culture, ethnicity, and most importantly, identity. It is these factors that create not only meaningful safeguarding, but one that is built on the decisions and visions of the community therefore forging sustainability. The development of an effective community led heritage tourism strategy also relies on the establishment of a well-balanced community involvement with stakeholders, the local government, and the tourists per-se. Transparency in terms of goals, incentives, as well as future plans and financial benefit distribution is inimical as these imply and emphasize community roles.

A community based and culturally sensitive grass-roots approach to heritage tourism management offers more relevant and sustainable strategies, in comparison to the adoption of international models, since these work around and strongly consider specificities, strengths, and limitations of the community. A best case-scenario for community-led heritage tourism is the establishment of community-centered management and governance models that not only empower local participation, but also forge direct participation in decision making and planning. It is inimical that the voice of the community is what drives the development of policies. Not only does this lead to a decentralization of authority in terms of decision-making, planning, and goal orientation, but

consideration and focus on the grass-roots enforces ideals that steer heritage tourism to its fundamental principles. The proliferation of decision-making powers not only devolves long held bases of authority from the center but establishes decisions as organically in support of community empowerment and vision.

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