

Cultural Significance of Mt. Mayon Natural Park: Albay's Icon of Natural Heritage

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ABSTRACT

Mt. Mayon Natural Park (MMNP), commonly known as Mayon Volcano, is one of the most celebrated natural heritages in the Province of Albay. It is a classic stratovolcano that rises 2,462 m (8, 189 ft) above sea level. This paper discussed the inherent cultural significance of MMNP by utilizing the cultural mapping approach of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) to map significant natural resources. The informants' articulation of the significant values of the volcano is a manifestation that the site is a significant natural property in the city. However, a lot of significant data are missing to fully provide holistic and comprehensive articulation of the significance of the volcano. From this context, this paper recommends the inclusion of MMNP in the targets for the next cultural mapping exercise of Tabaco City. Moreover, an update on the diversity and distribution assessment of flora and fauna may be considered to provide the Local Government Unit of Tabaco City with the current status of biological status of the volcano as baseline data for future efforts in the conservation and protection of the site.

Keywords: *Cultural mapping, cultural significance, Mt. Mayon Natural Park, natural heritage*

INTRODUCTION

Natural heritage is geological and physiological formations that constitute a habitat of endangered species of flora and fauna (World Heritage Center, 2005). Its physical and biological characteristics demonstrate the importance of science, conservation, and natural beauty (Australian Heritage Commission, 2002). National Park, game refuges, wildlife, bird and fish sanctuary, nature and mangrove reserves, watersheds, wilderness areas, protected areas, and natural and historical landmarks are considered natural properties of cultural significance under the National Integrated Protected Area System (RA 10066) for possessing outstanding values of national scientific significance.

One of the most celebrated natural heritages in the Province of Albay is Mt Mayon Natural Park or Mayon Volcano. It is a classic stratovolcano that rises to 2,462 m above sea level. It is an active volcano that is recognized for its diverse natural resources (Buot, 2009). Mayon Volcano was declared a game refuge

under Presidential Proclamation No. 3915, a forest reserve under Presidential Proclamation No. 341, a National Park under Presidential Proclamation No. 292, and a Natural Park by virtue of NIPAS Act of 1992. On June 22, 2018, Mayon Natural Park was renamed Mt. Mayon Natural Park under Republic Act No. 11038.

Conversely, a cultural property is considered significant if it contributes to an understanding of the cultural or natural history, exhibits rare aspects of the cultural or natural environments and demonstrates aesthetic characteristics of the local area. The cultural significance which comprises aesthetic, historical, social, and scientific value, helps in determining the value of places that helps in understanding the past, enriching the present which will be of value to future generations (ICOMOS, 1999). Further, the assessment and statement of the cultural significance of a heritage item clarifies why the item is essential should be part of heritage management. The cultural significance is attributed to the cultural property by the community members because the cultural significance of a cultural property makes a heritage item profoundly valuable (Borrinaga, et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the historical significance refers to the contribution of the cultural property to an understanding of a historical event. Moreover, social significance is categorized into social, socioeconomic, socio-political, and spiritual. Particularly, a cultural

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property is socially significant if it contributes to the economic life of the community, plays a significant role in binding the people, and demonstrates importance or relevance to a cultural value to the community. A cultural property is likely economically significant if it contributes to the economic life of the community. Furthermore, scientific significance refers to the ability of the cultural property to reveal new scientific knowledge or truth.

Tabaco City, Philippines is one of that cities in the province of Albay that share jurisdiction of Mt. Mayon Natural Park. This paper emphasized the cultural significance of Mt. Mayon Natural Park because understanding of the site's cultural significance will lead to a better understanding of its value.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is part of a cultural mapping project in Tabaco City, Philippines. As defined, cultural mapping is an approach in cultural research that document, record and utilize cultural resources of the communities” (Cook and Taylor, 2013). This paper employed the National Commission for Culture and the Arts’ cultural mapping framework in mapping of Mt. Mayon Natural Park. The framework includes scoping and negotiation, social preparation, local cultural mapping team training, collection/gathering of data, data validation and finalized profile (Borrinaga et al., 2019).

Study Site

The study site is Mt. Mayon Natural Park (MMNP) or Mayon Volcano. It covers the cities of Legazpi, Ligao City, and Tabaco City, and the municipalities of Malilipot, Bacacay, Sto. Domingo, Daraga, Camalig, and Guinobatan.

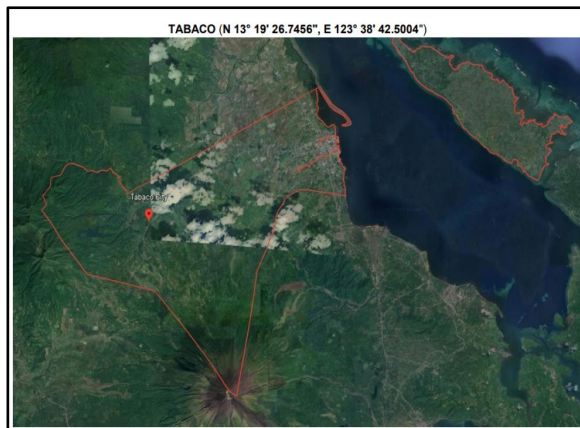


Figure 1. Map of Tabaco City

Key Informants

This paper gathered information from three officials and 10 residents of the Tabaco City. The informants were chosen based on the following criteria; (a) must be native resident of the place, (b) 30 years and above, (c) exhibit knowledge about the cultural heritage and (d) must have experienced the local culture (Luna & Roxas, 2016).

Data Gathering

After the scoping and negotiation, social preparation, and training of the local cultural mapping team, the trained cultural mappers were sent to the field to gather data. The mappers collected data in the community guided by Filipino Psychology (Pua & Marcelino, 2000). Individual interviews with the informants were done using form 1-A of the NCCA on mapping significant natural resources in the category of natural geological and physical/land formations. During the interview process, the questions from the research

Form 1-A (January 2008)

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS
 SUBCOMMISSION ON CULTURAL HERITAGE
 CULTURAL MAPPING PROGRAM

Mapping of Significant Natural Resources
 Category: Natural Geological and Physiographical / Land Formations
 NAME OF NATURAL HERITAGE: _____

PHOTO: _____

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. SUB-CATEGORY	<input type="checkbox"/> MOUNTAIN	<input type="checkbox"/> VOLCANO	<input type="checkbox"/> HILL	<input type="checkbox"/> SANDBAR
	<input type="checkbox"/> VALLEY	<input type="checkbox"/> BASIN	<input type="checkbox"/> MARSH/LAND	<input type="checkbox"/> ROCK
	<input type="checkbox"/> SLOPE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUD	<input type="checkbox"/> ROCK/STONE FORMATION	<input type="checkbox"/> PLAINS
	<input type="checkbox"/> SHORE	<input type="checkbox"/> BAY	<input type="checkbox"/> BAY	<input type="checkbox"/> BAY
	<input type="checkbox"/> PLATEAU	<input type="checkbox"/> SANDHOLE	<input type="checkbox"/> CAVE	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

B. LOCATION: _____

C. AREA (in hectares): _____

D. OWNERSHIP/ JURISDICTION: _____

II. DESCRIPTION
 (Describe the physical features of the land formation) _____

III. STORIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LAND FORMATION _____

IV. SIGNIFICANCE
 Indicate type of significance, e.g. historical, aesthetic, scientific, social, socioeconomic, socio-political, spiritual and their explain: _____

V. CONSERVATION
 A. STATUS OF PROTECTION: _____
 B. CONSTRAINTS/THREATS/ ISSUES: _____
 C. CONSERVATION MEASURES: (Describe the conservation measures taken at the level of the community, provincial and/or national) _____

VI. REFERENCES _____

KEY INFORMANT/S: _____
 REFERENCE/S: _____
 NAME OF MAPPER/S: _____

Significant Natural Resources (Land Formations)
 City/Municipality of _____
 Province of _____
 Region _____

Figure 2. Form 1-A of the NCCA on mapping of significant natural resources

instrument were translated into the vernacular for better understanding among the informants. The interviews were documented through paper and pen.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were observed during fieldwork. Inform consent was sought from the participants of the mapping exercise. At the onset of the interview, the mappers discussed the purpose of the

activity. Also, permission was asked from the participants to take photographs or video recordings during the process of the interview.

During the interview, respect for the key informants, local values, and language of informants was observed. The mappers maintained proper behavior all the time. Likewise, the cultural mappers adhered to all health protocols mandated by the IATF and Local Government Unit of Tabaco City to ensure the safety of the participants since the fieldwork was done at the height of Covid 19 pandemic.

Data Analysis Techniques

The results of the interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analyzed through manual coding proposed by Saldana (2009). The researcher carefully read and analyzed the transcripts of the interviews applying codes to the themes that appeared in the responses of the informants. The codes were then organized according to the ideas or concepts that developed from them.

Moreover, the gathered data were presented during the community validation facilitated by the NCCA. Five experts and 21 stakeholders who confirmed the validity of the mapped entries participated in the community validation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Significance of Mt. Mayon Natural Park

MMNP reveals an important historical past in Tabaco City. It was believed that the 1814 volcanic eruption which is considered to be one of the most violent eruptions of the volcano, devastated almost all the building structures in Tabaco City including the first stone church in Barangay Cormidal, Tabaco City. A bigger stone church was constructed using volcanic stones and erected next to the town watch tower.

The eruptions of Mayon Volcano throughout the centuries have developed a culture of resiliency among the residents of Tabaco City. The results of the study have corroborated the findings of Chua (2019) stating that the Mayon volcano's destructive eruptions have contributed to the enrichment of heritage values and become an important symbol of resiliency. The communities near the site have adapted to the drastic change brought about by the adverse effects of the eruptions. The residents continue living after every destructive eruption manifesting their resiliency.

Likewise, MMNP is socially significant. The residents, especially those living at the foot of Mt. Mayon, have developed indigenous beliefs or knowledge about impending threats of the eruption of the volcano. The residents believed that a hermit protected Mayon Volcano Natural Park from

devastating human activities. The residents also believe that if wild animals migrate to the residential areas, when the soil becomes dry, recurrent earthquakes, sharpening of the appearance of the crater of Mayon Volcano, and an alleged apparition of a hermit indicate a looming eruption of the Mayon Volcano. If the residents observe these signs, they start to secure their animals and other properties.

Similarly, local myths attributed to Mayon Volcano also flourished in Tabaco City. A folk narrative said that the early inhabitants of Tabaco City were the "Pagcamootans" who thrived in "Barangay Pagcamoot". These people considered Mayon Volcano sacred because they believed that their ancestors were born out of one of the major eruptions of Mayon Volcano.

MMNP is also spiritually significant; the volcano is believed to be the dwelling place of the early gods of Bicolanos, "Mayong" and "Gugurang". Currently, the foot of Mt Mayon Natural Park in Tabaco City has become a pilgrimage site for "Alay Lakad sa Mayon" or "Penitensya sa Mayon" held every Holy Week.

Further, the eruption of the Mayon volcano paved the way for the creation of various religious traditions and prayers such as "Perdon", "Kristiyanong Turog" and "Oratio Imperata". Mt Mayon Natural Park is a testament to how merciful and loving God is. He will always protect His people against the devastation of any natural calamities especially the devastating eruption of Mayon Volcano.

On the other hand, the residents of Tabaco City also articulated that MMNP is economically significant. The fertile soil in the volcano makes the land an ideal site for agriculture thus, becoming a source of livelihood for the community and economic development.

Conversely, the cone shape of Mt Mayon Natural Park makes the volcano aesthetically significant. The whole Province of Albay considers Mt. Mayon Natural Park as a perfect coned volcano that gives almost all of Albay Province the most beautiful sight and picturesque view of the Volcano.

A popular folk legend associated with its aesthetic qualities is famous throughout the whole province. It is said that the volcano mysteriously appeared where "Daragang Magayon", a beautiful maiden, was buried. The legend also explained that the volcano was named after "Daragang Magayon" translated as beautiful maiden; thus, it is called "Mayon". The perfect cone shaped Mayon Volcano is associated with the physical beauty of the legendary character, "Daragang Magayon".

Moreover, there are numerous artworks, and photographs showcasing the volcano's impeccable beauty that reflect the community's appreciation for its aesthetic qualities and have inspired local artists, which developed the culture and arts in the community.

In addition to the volcano's aesthetic qualities, it also possesses biological characteristics. It is home to 83 species of trees, including the critically endangered dipterocarp species, the Gisók-gisók (*Hopea philippinensis*). There are 104 species of land vertebrates including 57 species of birds, 10 species of amphibians, 24 species of reptiles, and 13 species of mammals; and 34 herpetofaunal species including the Bicol false gecko (*Pseudogekko sumiklab*), a new discovered Philippine endemic species in the site. It also has a total of 71 woody species that belong 49 genera and 33 families, along with an altitudinal range of 500 - 2200 meters above sea level on the northwestern side of Mt. Mayon, Bicol Peninsula, Albay, Philippines (Buot, 2009).

For the water supply, the average annual rainfall in Mayon is about 2,716 millimeters more than the estimated average rainfall of the Philippines which falls at 2,400mm (DENR, 2000). Thus, the protected area is abundant with water resources found in the surface or groundwater that can be used for domestic consumption irrigation, and other purposes. More recently, MMNP is on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites for its outstanding universal value as a natural property of cultural significance and as Biosphere Reserve of the Province of Albay (Chua, 2019). Likewise, Mt. Mayon Natural Park contributed to the evolving science of volcanoes, contributing to a better scientific understanding of the volcanoes worldwide (Jimenez, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The residents of Tabaco City recognized the cultural significance of Mt. Mayon Natural Park (MMNP). The informants have articulated the volcano's significant values which is a manifestation that the site is a significant natural property in the city. The inherent cultural significance of the volcano makes the community value and protect the site since it has become a natural symbol of their heritage and culture. However, a lot of significant data are missing to fully provide holistic and comprehensive articulation of the significance of the volcano. From this context, this paper recommends including Mt. Mayon Natural Park in the targets for the next cultural mapping exercise of Tabaco City. Moreover, for a better understanding of the scientific significance of MMNP, it is therefore recommended that further scientific research such as diversity and distribution assessment of flora and fauna must be done to provide an updated status of biological resources of the site which will serve as baseline statistics for future efforts in the conservation and protection of the site.

Additionally, the series of volcanic eruptions which is an important part of the heritage of Tabaco City

and other parts of the Albay Province though it can no longer be captured, can be further studied through old photographs, stories, and damage reports among others to provide a comprehensive data regarding the historical past of the city.

Further, a cultural mapping activity that will document the heritage values of the volcano along with other cities and municipalities covered by the volcano must be done so that the greater public will raise their awareness of the heritage values of the volcano which will lead to improved protection, conservation, and promotional initiatives.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms sole responsibility for the whole manuscript and study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This investigation holds no conflict of interest across and between the samples of the investigation, institution where it was conducted, and other affiliations.

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