

Leveraging Cultural Mapping in Readings in Philippine History: A Pedagogical Approach to Heritage Preservation

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Abstract

Cultural heritage is a cornerstone of community identity, yet its preservation remains challenging amid modernization. This paper explores how the *Readings in Philippine History (RPH)* course at National University Clark enables students to actively engage in heritage preservation and cultivate deeper cultural appreciation through cultural mapping. Nine sections of RPH students from the Architecture and Civil Engineering programs conducted a final requirement involving the identification, documentation, and evaluation of heritage structures within their local communities. Using the Cultural Mapping Toolkit by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), students analyzed the significance of heritage structures and proposed preservation strategies informed by global models. Thematic analysis of student outputs—including heritage churches, ancestral houses, museums, and public buildings—yielded three key findings: (1) students experienced a shift from passive learning to active cultural engagement; (2) students recognized heritage's potential to support local economies and community sustainability through tourism and livelihood generation; and (3) students rediscovered their cultural identity through immersive interaction with heritage sites, prompting greater awareness, pride, and advocacy. These findings were evaluated using a rubric assessing cultural appreciation and suggested preservation methods' feasibility. This pedagogical case study demonstrates how cultural mapping effectively nurtures students' sense of identity, advocacy, and historical consciousness. This approach exemplifies the intersection of education, cultural preservation, and community engagement, providing a strong argument for incorporating heritage education into higher education curricula.

Keywords: cultural mapping, heritage preservation, Philippine history, community engagement

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Introduction

Cultural heritage, encompassing tangible and intangible assets, is a cornerstone of community identity, reflecting historical experiences, collective memory, and cultural continuity (Assumma & Ventura, 2014; Pillai, 2013). However, heritage preservation faces numerous challenges in an era of rapid modernization and globalization. Historic environments frequently suffer from neglect, inadequate management, and a general lack of community awareness about their cultural value (Duxbury et al., 2015; Longley & Duxbury, 2016). These challenges underscore the urgent need for more innovative, community-centered, and educationally embedded approaches to heritage preservation.

In the Philippines, heritage structures embody rich historical narratives and cultural diversity. Recognizing their significance, the State has enacted Republic Act No. 10066, which provides for the protection and conservation of the national cultural heritage. This legislation acknowledges the need to safeguard cultural properties against threats such as neglect, destruction, and the adverse effects of modernization and economic development pressures (Republic Act No. 10066, 2010). Consequently, fostering a broader public consciousness regarding heritage value is essential for preservation and sustainable community development (Duxbury et al., 2015; Pillai, 2013).

Recent scholarship emphasizes cultural mapping as a valuable method for raising community awareness, documenting heritage assets, and supporting strategic planning for sustainable local development (Longley & Duxbury, 2016; NCCA, 2019). Cultural mapping involves systematic identification, documentation, and interpretation of local heritage resources and engages community stakeholders in recognizing and safeguarding their cultural assets (Assumma & Ventura, 2014). Moreover, integrating cultural mapping into education, particularly within history curricula, has provided transformative learning opportunities beyond mere academic knowledge to encompass personal reflection, civic responsibility, and cultural advocacy (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2000).

Recognizing this potential, this study explores how integrating cultural mapping into the tertiary-level course *Readings in Philippine History (RPH)* at National University Clark could facilitate deeper cultural awareness and active preservation advocacy among students. The course was structured around a final requirement involving students from Civil Engineering and Architecture programs identifying and documenting local heritage structures, assessing their cultural significance, and proposing preservation strategies guided by the NCCA's Cultural Mapping Framework.

The rationale behind incorporating cultural mapping into the RPH course aligns closely with transformative educational principles, as articulated by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2000). According to Mezirow, transformative learning involves critical reflection on previously held assumptions, leading learners to experience a perspective transformation characterized by deeper personal meaning and greater civic engagement (Kitchenham, 2008). Through guided reflections and practical cultural mapping experiences, students are expected to develop enhanced cultural appreciation, greater awareness of heritage's role in community identity and livelihood, and a more substantial commitment to preservation efforts.

Thus, this study aims to evaluate how the cultural mapping process embedded within the RPH course transforms students' perceptions of heritage, promotes cultural identity, and

encourages advocacy for sustainable community heritage preservation. Drawing upon thematic analyses of student outputs and reflections, the paper highlights transformative outcomes, emphasizing the potential of cultural mapping as an educational strategy for heritage preservation and community engagement.

Problem Statement

Amid rapid modernization and urbanization, local heritage structures in the Philippines are increasingly at risk due to neglect, limited public awareness, and inadequate preservation mechanisms. Despite institutional efforts toward safeguarding cultural heritage, community engagement and youth participation remain insufficient, posing challenges to the sustainability of heritage preservation initiatives. Given the educational sector's potential for fostering heritage awareness and active preservation, there is a pressing need to explore innovative pedagogical approaches. This study addresses this need by integrating cultural mapping into the tertiary-level course *Readings in Philippine History* (RPH), aiming to examine how such an approach can enhance students' cultural appreciation, historical awareness, and preservation advocacy.

To address this problem, the following research questions guide this study:

1. How does integrating cultural mapping in the RPH course influence students' perceptions and appreciation of cultural heritage?
2. In what ways do students' cultural mapping outputs reflect their understanding of heritage as integral to community livelihood and identity?
3. How do students' reflections demonstrate transformative learning experiences, particularly regarding their roles as heritage advocates?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a pedagogical case study design to explore how integrating cultural mapping in the *Readings in Philippine History (RPH)* course influences students' appreciation and advocacy for cultural heritage. A pedagogical case study provides an in-depth exploration of educational innovations within authentic contexts, making it particularly suitable for examining learning processes and academic outcomes (Yin, 2009).

Participants

Participants included undergraduate students enrolled in nine sections of the RPH course at National University, Clark, during the academic year 2024–2025. These sections comprised students from the Civil Engineering and Architecture programs. Heritage structures were deliberately selected to align closely with the professional disciplines of the participants. Each class section was subdivided into three groups, each assigned a specific heritage structure for documentation and analysis.

The cultural mapping project was integrated as the final requirement of the course and consisted of the following phases:

Phase 1: Heritage Structure Assignment

Course instructors selected and assigned specific local heritage structures to student groups, matching each site to the students' disciplines and potential professional interests. Heritage sites included historic churches, ancestral houses, municipal buildings, public markets, schools, and other culturally significant landmarks in Pampanga and surrounding communities.

Phase 2: Heritage Documentation and Assessment

Each student group documented their assigned heritage structure through site visits, historical research, community interviews, and photographic evidence. The groups then evaluated their structures' cultural and historical significance using the Cultural Mapping Toolkit: A Guide for Participatory Cultural Mapping in Local Communities provided by the NCCA (2019).

Phase 3: Preservation Proposal Development

Students developed proposals for sustainable preservation, drawing on international best practices such as UNESCO and ICOMOS guidelines. Proposals considered practical methods, including scientific and traditional conservation, adaptive reuse strategies, environmental sustainability, and community involvement.

Phase 4: Personal and Reflective Narratives

Individually, students produced reflective essays guided by structured questions, describing their learning experiences, shifts in understanding, appreciation of heritage, and emerging sense of cultural responsibility and advocacy.

Data Collection and Sources

Primary data sources included:

- **Group Outputs:** Documentation reports, significance assessments, and preservation proposals.
- **Individual Reflections:** Essays detailing personal insights, shifts in perception, and appreciation developed through cultural mapping activities.

All outputs and reflections were submitted electronically through the university's learning management system (LMS).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved:

1. **Data Familiarization:** Comprehensive review of student submissions.
2. **Initial Coding:** Systematic identification of codes related to shifts in perception, heritage's relation to livelihood and sustainability, and identity formation.
3. **Theme Identification:** Categorizing codes into broad themes reflecting students' experiences, insights, and proposed methods.
4. **Refinement:** Reviewing and refining themes for coherence and alignment with research objectives.

The thematic analysis aimed to systematically illustrate the students' emerging appreciation, community engagement, and cultural advocacy due to their participation in cultural mapping.

Ethical Considerations

The following ethical guidelines were observed:

- **Informed Consent:** Students provided consent through a structured online form (Microsoft Forms), clearly explaining study objectives, voluntary participation, and confidentiality assurance.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Student identities were anonymized in data reporting, using general identifiers (e.g., “student A, [Heritage Structure] Group”).
- **Data Management:** Collected data were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

Findings and Discussion

Shift in Perception – From Passive Learning to Cultural Awareness

A central finding from the thematic analysis was a notable shift in students’ perceptions of cultural heritage. Initially, students expressed limited, often superficial understandings of heritage, primarily viewing it as static historical artifacts or merely old structures. However, active participation in cultural mapping expanded their perspectives significantly, recognizing heritage as dynamic, community-oriented, and integral to their cultural identity.

Analysis of reflective essays revealed repeated patterns of students’ transformative experiences. Many students articulated initial passive understandings of heritage as historical relics disconnected from their daily lives. One student, for example, reflected:

Before starting this project, I believed that cultural heritage was simply about old structures or artifacts... After accomplishing the project, I realized that cultural heritage is much more—it’s a vital part of our identity, connecting us to our roots. (Student A, Museo ning Angeles group)

Similar shifts were echoed across multiple reflections, highlighting a collective journey from passive observers of history to active participants in cultural understanding and advocacy. Another student described their realization:

Initially, I saw cultural heritage just as buildings and monuments preserved for aesthetic purposes. Through the cultural mapping project, I came to see them as important markers of our history, embodying the struggles, triumphs, and stories of our community. (Student B, Holy Rosary Parish Church group)

These personal accounts illustrate that cultural mapping activities challenged students’ assumptions, resulting in deeper insights and broader conceptions of heritage significance. Students actively engaging with heritage sites and local communities triggered meaningful reflection, fostering enhanced awareness of cultural heritage as living, evolving, and deeply intertwined with community identity.

Furthermore, student documentation showed rigorous engagement with both tangible and intangible dimensions of heritage, indicating a thorough reconsideration of what constitutes heritage value. This comprehensive approach allowed students to document structures and capture narratives and emotional connections that communities held toward their heritage assets.

This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting cultural mapping as an effective pedagogical tool for developing active cultural awareness (Duxbury et al., 2015; NCCA, 2019). The active, reflective process embedded within the cultural mapping exercise provided students with practical opportunities to experience firsthand the value of heritage beyond theoretical classroom discussions.

Overall, this key finding underscores the pedagogical value of cultural mapping in transforming passive historical education into an active, reflective, and meaningful cultural learning experience.

Heritage and Livelihood – Linking Heritage to Local Sustainability

Another prominent theme emerging from the thematic analysis of student outputs was the strong recognition of heritage as a vital component for supporting local economies and sustainable community development. Initially, students rarely considered heritage to have practical economic implications. However, throughout the cultural mapping activities and community interactions, students became increasingly aware of heritage's potential as a foundation for economic sustainability, especially through tourism, local businesses, and livelihood generation.

Numerous students explicitly connected heritage preservation to economic opportunities in their reflective essays. For example, one student group assigned to document the Pampang Public Market emphasized the role heritage plays in economic sustainability, noting:

The Pampang Public Market plays a vital role in promoting sustainable tourism, supporting nearby craftsmanship, and ensuring a thriving local community. Heritage preservation directly contributes to local economic growth and stability. (Student C, Pampang Public Market group)

Such insights illustrate students' growing understanding that heritage preservation extends beyond cultural and historical importance—it actively fosters local economic resilience. Another group working on Our Lady of Grace Parish Church also highlighted the financial dimension of heritage, emphasizing how local festivals and religious events generate income, sustain jobs, and foster economic vitality:

Heritage preservation has a direct impact on economic development through sustainable tourism. Festivals and religious events generate revenue that maintains heritage sites and supports the broader community economy. (Student D, Our Lady of Grace Parish Church group)

Students assigned to ancestral homes and historical landmarks similarly recognized how adaptive reuse of heritage structures could lead to economic revitalization. For instance, students assigned to the Aquino Ancestral House noted:

Heritage sites attract tourists, help local businesses thrive, and create employment. Preservation strategies, like adaptive reuse, can sustain heritage while generating new economic activities and opportunities. (Student E, Aquino Ancestral House group)

These reflections collectively indicate a significant shift in student perception from viewing heritage solely as a historical relic to recognizing it as an active participant in local economic

and community life. The proposals students developed further reinforced this understanding. Recommendations often included strategies to incorporate local artisan skills, tourism initiatives, traditional craftsmanship, and small businesses into preservation efforts, emphasizing the need for heritage management strategies that integrate cultural and economic sustainability.

This theme aligns with literature on cultural mapping and sustainable development, highlighting how effectively heritage preservation can drive economic resilience and sustainability when actively embedded within local development strategies (Assumma & Ventura, 2014; Duxbury et al., 2015). Indeed, students' insights reinforced that sustainable heritage preservation should simultaneously preserve cultural identity and foster local economic well-being.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate how the cultural mapping project successfully guided students toward deeper insights about heritage's multidimensional benefits—cultural, social, and economic—and underscored the importance of integrating economic sustainability within broader heritage advocacy and preservation initiatives.

Heritage and Identity – Rediscovering Identity Through Cultural Immersion

The final key finding emerging from the thematic analysis of student outputs highlights how cultural mapping significantly influenced students' sense of identity, belonging, and pride. Many students reported a deeper connection to their cultural roots and local identities, fostered by immersive experiences during the heritage documentation and community engagement processes.

Initially, many students described feeling disconnected from their local cultural identities, often perceiving heritage as distant or irrelevant to their lives. However, direct immersion in heritage sites and meaningful interactions with local community members prompted powerful reflections on identity, belonging, and pride.

One student assigned to document the Municipal Hall of Concepcion, Tarlac, captured this sentiment succinctly:

Cultural heritage is the heart of our identity, connecting us to our past while shaping our future. Preserving it fosters a sense of belonging and pride, reminding us of our roots and the struggles and achievements of those who came before us. (Student F, Municipal Hall of Concepcion group)

Such reflections were common across multiple groups and illustrated a widespread realization among students that heritage structures serve as powerful symbols of community identity and historical continuity. For example, students who documented the Museo ning Angeles recognized how heritage reflects deeper identity dynamics:

This museum is more than just a preserved structure—it's a source of pride for Kapampangans and a representation of our rich cultural identity. This experience showed me heritage as a living part of our society, not just something remembered but something that shapes our present and future. (Student G, Museo ning Angeles group)

Students who engaged with religious heritage structures, such as the Holy Rosary Parish Church and Our Lady of Grace Parish Church, reported enhanced emotional and spiritual connections, emphasizing these sites' role in community bonding and shared cultural experiences. For instance, one student reflected:

I now see heritage as alive, something that defines us as a community. Visiting the church and engaging with community members gave me pride to say—this is our story. (Student H, Our Lady of Grace Parish Church group)

These personal narratives indicate that cultural mapping increased students' knowledge about heritage and significantly transformed their individual and collective identities. The process helped them rediscover historical roots, community pride, and a stronger sense of local identity, profoundly influencing their understanding of heritage as a fundamental part of their social and cultural fabric.

These findings align with existing literature suggesting cultural mapping's potential as an educational approach to actively reconnect younger generations with their cultural heritage and enhance their cultural identities (Longley & Duxbury, 2016; NCCA, 2019). Such immersive educational practices foster deeper personal meaning and motivate long-term community advocacy and preservation commitments.

This key finding underscores the transformative potential of cultural mapping in heritage education, highlighting how direct immersion, documentation, and reflective practices can empower students to reclaim and advocate for their cultural identity, heritage, and community.

Synthesis and Analysis of Findings

This study examined how integrating cultural mapping into the *Readings in Philippine History (RPH)* course shaped students' cultural perceptions, appreciation of heritage, and development as heritage advocates. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of cultural mapping as an innovative pedagogical approach in addressing the challenges of limited public awareness and engagement in heritage preservation.

A central finding from students' reflections revealed a significant shift in their perceptions of heritage, from passive and superficial understandings to active, engaged cultural awareness. Initially viewing heritage predominantly as historical relics, students transformed their views through immersive participation and reflective practices. They began recognizing heritage as dynamic, meaningful, and interconnected with community life and contemporary identity. Reflections like “After accomplishing the project, I realized cultural heritage is much more—it connects us deeply to our roots,” illustrate how experiential learning encouraged meaningful reconsideration and active cultural appreciation among students.

Students' outputs further revealed a comprehensive understanding of heritage as integral to community livelihood and sustainable development. Through cultural mapping, they acknowledged that heritage preservation goes beyond historical and cultural value—it actively supports local economic sustainability, community resilience, and livelihood generation, particularly through tourism, crafts, and adaptive reuse initiatives. Students demonstrated nuanced awareness of heritage's multidimensional importance by emphasizing its practical economic roles.

Additionally, the study showed how cultural mapping significantly influenced students' sense of cultural identity and community belonging. Immersive interaction with local heritage sites allowed students to rediscover personal and collective identities, fostering pride, a more profound sense of belonging, and an advocacy mindset. Reflections repeatedly emphasized heritage as essential to community identity, such as, "*Preserving cultural heritage fosters a sense of pride and identity, reminding us who we are and where we come from.*" These transformative insights demonstrate cultural mapping's potential to empower students as proactive, culturally aware citizens.

These findings directly address the identified gaps in heritage education, illustrating cultural mapping as a valuable pedagogical strategy. By actively engaging students with heritage, fostering practical appreciation of its community significance, and encouraging transformative identity formation, cultural mapping enriches students' educational experiences. It cultivates sustained advocacy and responsible heritage stewardship.

Implications

This study reveals several essential implications based on the three key findings of the cultural mapping project implemented within the *Readings in Philippine History (RPH)* course:

Educational Implications – Active Cultural Engagement

The apparent shift in student perceptions—from passive observers to active participants—highlights the effectiveness of experiential and reflective pedagogical approaches. Cultural mapping significantly enhances students' cultural awareness and critical engagement with heritage, suggesting that active and immersive learning methods can transform how history and culture are taught at the tertiary level.

Economic and Community Sustainability

Students' recognition of heritage's role in supporting local economies emphasizes the necessity of framing heritage education within broader community and sustainable development contexts. By explicitly connecting heritage preservation to livelihood opportunities, educational institutions can foster practical, economically relevant perspectives among students, promoting heritage as both culturally valuable and economically viable.

Identity and Community Belonging

The powerful transformations in students' sense of identity and belonging demonstrate the deeper potential of heritage education to foster community cohesion, personal pride, and cultural advocacy. Educational initiatives rooted in direct engagement with community heritage can significantly strengthen individual and collective cultural identities, cultivating students' long-term commitment to heritage preservation.

Recommendations

Grounded in the implications from the key findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Integration of Cultural Mapping Into General Education

Given the demonstrated effectiveness in transforming students' cultural awareness, educational institutions should institutionalize cultural mapping as a key component of general education history courses. This systematic integration would ensure that more students experience meaningful interactions with heritage and develop deeper appreciation, identity formation, and advocacy skills.

Emphasis on Economic and Sustainable Community Heritage

Curricula and cultural mapping projects should highlight heritage's economic and community sustainability. By integrating these practical dimensions into teaching, educators can enhance students' appreciation of heritage's multifaceted importance, equipping them to recognize and advocate for heritage preservation as a pathway to community resilience and economic growth.

Support for Identity-Based Educational Initiatives

Educational programs should prioritize activities that deepen students' cultural identities and community connections. Initiatives such as heritage site immersion, storytelling workshops, community dialogues, and reflective exercises should be regularly embedded within courses. These identity-based approaches will cultivate personal meaning and sustained heritage advocacy among students.

Collaboration With Local Heritage Stakeholders

Educational institutions are encouraged to actively collaborate with local heritage groups, community leaders, and cultural institutions. These partnerships will help ground cultural mapping activities within authentic community contexts, ensuring students' learning experiences are meaningful, community-oriented, and mutually beneficial.

Long-Term Evaluation of Cultural Impact

Future research should assess the long-term impacts of cultural mapping on students' cultural attitudes, professional paths, and community engagement. Such longitudinal studies would provide comprehensive evidence of the sustained effectiveness of cultural mapping in fostering heritage awareness, identity formation, and advocacy.

By adopting these recommendations, educational institutions can optimize the transformative potential of cultural mapping, significantly enhancing student learning experiences, community identity, and sustainable heritage preservation efforts.

Conclusion

This pedagogical case study examined how integrating cultural mapping into the tertiary-level course *Readings in Philippine History* effectively enhanced students' cultural awareness, appreciation, and advocacy for heritage preservation. Through active engagement, documentation, and critical reflection on heritage sites, students experienced a meaningful shift from passive recipients of historical knowledge to proactive, culturally-aware advocates.

Three significant findings emerged from this research. First, students transitioned from passive learning to active cultural engagement, revealing cultural mapping as a powerful experiential teaching tool. Second, students recognized heritage preservation's integral role in promoting community economic sustainability and livelihood, thus appreciating heritage's multidimensional importance. Third, immersive experiences allowed students to rediscover and articulate their cultural identities, strengthening their sense of community belonging and personal advocacy.

These insights have broader educational and community implications. They illustrate the effectiveness of cultural mapping in fostering a deeper connection between students and their heritage, supporting educational strategies that emphasize active learning, sustainable community development, and identity formation. Consequently, the study strongly recommends institutionalizing cultural mapping within history curricula, enhancing economic and community dimensions of heritage education, prioritizing identity-focused educational approaches, and forging stronger community partnerships.

In conclusion, cultural mapping has proven to be a transformative educational strategy. It empowers students to engage with heritage meaningfully, strengthens community ties, and ensures heritage education's relevance in contemporary society. By immersing students in their local culture, they gain an awareness of their heritage, which plays a vital role in the bigger picture of heritage preservation. As students transition from passive learners to committed stewards of cultural heritage, educational institutions play a crucial role in nurturing responsible, culturally engaged citizens prepared to advocate for sustainable community heritage preservation.

Declaration of Assistance and Ethical Use of AI and Digital Tools

This study acknowledges the use of AI language models, specifically OpenAI's ChatGPT, to assist in refining and improving the clarity, readability, and academic tone of the manuscript. Additionally, Grammarly software was employed to check for grammar, spelling, and style consistency throughout the manuscript.

All AI and digital assistance was carefully reviewed and critically integrated by the researchers to ensure alignment with academic integrity standards and the authentic voice of the study. No content was generated by AI without verification by the researchers. Student reflections and outputs were anonymized, and the research team conducted all data analysis. This statement affirms that while digital tools facilitated certain aspects of the writing and presentation process, the intellectual analysis, interpretations, and final decisions remain with the authors.

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