

## **Urbanization and Heritagization: Makati City's Initiatives in Restoring Identity Along With Sustainable Development**

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### **Abstract**

Makati City, one of the most highly urbanized areas in the Philippines, serves as a hub for the country's major economic activities. Defined by a fast-paced lifestyle and rapid modernization, much of the city's space has been transformed for commercial use. As contemporary structures and developments continue to rise, the cultural identity of its residents has been increasingly overshadowed. This rapid urbanization has presented significant challenges in identifying and preserving the city's cultural heritage, with many historically significant sites being neglected or forgotten—issues that this study seeks to address. Anchored in Muñoz-Viñas' Cultural Heritage Theory—which highlights the intangible meanings embedded in tangible heritage—this research explores the strategies employed to identify and conserve heritage assets in Makati through urban cultural mapping as a qualitative framework. It also examines the challenges of reconciling past identities with present urban realities. Using archival research, key informant interviews, and participatory mapping, the study investigates how cultural heritage can be thoughtfully integrated into Makati's ongoing urban development. Additionally, it explores how the city's cultural blueprint contributes to sustainable development through adaptive reuse, local history education, identity-building, and the application of augmented reality (AR) to visualize lost or inaccessible heritage sites for future generations.

*Keywords:* heritagization, cultural mapping, sustainable development

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## Introduction

With the emergence of Makati City as the financial and economic hub of the Philippines, rapid industrialization and residential conversion have taken place. With a wide population distance from daytime to nighttime, Makati City's demographics show fast-paced movements affecting its identity aside from being a cultural melting pot. This rapid urbanization has presented significant challenges in identifying and preserving the city's cultural heritage, with many historically significant sites being neglected or forgotten—issues that this study seeks to address. This paper navigates on the initiatives of the local government to regain its identity and to determine what heritage assets are important for its populace through heritagization.

The concept of heritagization refers to the process of designating an object, structure, landscape, or cultural practice such as a traditional recipe or community festival as officially recognized “heritage” (Sustainability Directory, 2025). It serves as a way of reviving the meaning and value of heritage assets, ensuring that they are not only preserved but also reintroduced into contemporary cultural life. Heritagization has been connected with the field of tourism, but its methods, like cultural mapping, adaptive reuse, and legacy studies, strengthen the search for identity through community empowerment and participatory governance. However, heritagization's theoretical grounding is still underdeveloped due to failure to determine the base of cultural expression, especially in countries with both Eastern and Western influences or contexts (Hanif, Riza: 2025). Nevertheless, the call for identity building in the Philippines especially with the passage of Republic Act 11961 also known as “An Act Strengthening the Conservation and Protection of Philippine Cultural Heritage through Cultural Mapping and Enhanced Cultural Heritage Education Program” and Makati City's initiative for cultural heritage preservation, adopted heritagization to document heritage assets, build identity, and make these assets useful for sustainable development initiatives.

Makati City has long been known as the business capital of the Philippines, with almost all major multinational corporations and business establishments occupying the city. Population of the city drastically changes from daytime with about 3.7 million to a nighttime with only 309,770 which also reflects the actual residents. More areas in the city are being converted to commercial and industrial properties that displaces some residents and old structure are being demolished. With this rapid urban scheme, Makati is losing its identity as a community and its heritage assets that defines its history and social landscape. This dilemma paved way for the city to make an inventory of heritage assets that will be determined by the community not just as a compliance for RA 11961, but also to help the city government to formulate mechanisms to protect and make them functional for both the community and the city's economy.

## Cultural Mapping

Cultural mapping is one of the first steps initiated by the City Government of Makati. As a systematic approach, cultural mapping and resource profiling identify, record, and classify all existing cultural properties within a particular community to describe, visualize, and understand them. It is an ongoing process, and many of its benefits are achieved through sustained efforts in generating and updating a cultural database over time (Jaime, 2014). The project was officially implemented in 2023 through a collaboration between the City Government of Makati and the University of Makati as an extension research endeavor. University mappers were trained to conduct fieldwork, interviewing community members about tangible and intangible properties that are important to them. One hundred fifty (150)

assets were identified and included in the registry for enlistment to National Commission for Culture and Arts (NCCA).

The process of cultural mapping was not easy. Mappers experienced several challenges that somehow affected the timeline. Owners of identified heritage assets were not keen of being interviewed and even asked to delist their properties since they believe that the government may take over their belongings. There is also miscommunication between the city government through Museums and Cultural Affairs Office (MCAO) and the community on what exactly is the purpose of cultural mapping. Some exclusive villages like Forbes Park, Dasmaringas Village, and Urdaneta Village do not allow cultural mappers to do the fieldwork for security reasons. Lastly, there were identified heritage assets that have been transferred to a different place or no longer exist.

The successfully mapped assets were validated by the community and were exhibited at the Museo ng Makati (Makati Museum) through technological breakthrough, Augmented Reality (AR). The AR exhibit at Makati Museum showcased the moving images of the mapped assets and aimed at bringing them more closer to Makati residents especially for the school children.

The outcome of cultural mapping also led to the curriculum design for Makati Heritage Studies for all college students of the University of Makati. This course intends to give the college students a sense of home and identity since they are all residents of Makati City.

Adaptive reuse of old houses identified as heritage assets was encouraged. Since in the context of heritagization protection does not mean renovation, owners were encouraged to use old structures as restaurants, museums, cafes, among others, so that in this way they can preserve these property at the same time generate economic activities. Some mapped houses like the Tolentino Mansion has now a restaurant on its ground floor and the La Casitas de Mercedes which is now a house converted into a bed and breakfast place.

### **Conclusion**

Despite these initiatives, there were problems that transpired. Private owners of sites were reluctant that privacy and entitlements may affect their ownership. Many cultural properties and heritage sites are under private ownership, which limits public access and complicates preservation efforts. There were public misconceptions about mapping. There is a widespread misunderstanding of what cultural mapping entails. Some view it merely as documentation, rather than a process of safeguarding and promoting cultural identity. Lastly, coordination challenges. Weak coordination between the city government and barangay (village) officials hinders effective implementation of cultural mapping initiatives.

Makati City's initiatives for identity building through heritagization efforts enables the community to be part of the heritage design. It boosts tourism in the city and even helps in the preservation of treasured assets adaptive reuse of properties. However, the city also faces many challenges, especially in the intention of some owners of private heritage assets to sell and/or demolish those assets.

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