

# Las Piñas Historical Corridor: The Heritage and Landmarks of the National Capital Region, Philippines

Cecilia B. Tangian, Ph.D

**Abstract**—The City of Las Piñas has eighteen (18) Historical landmarks located in the old town of the city across “Lumang Bayan” or the old district paralleled Manila Bay, from Zapote in the South to Paranaque in the North. It is the site of the oldest town where the economic, political, religious and social activities during the Spanish colonization (1521-1898) took place. Recent policy makers opted for its preservation despite the fast urbanization.

The paper aim to analyse the factors that laid the foundation towards sustainability of heritage sites while continuing her status as the 1<sup>st</sup> class urban center in Southern Metro Manila. Recent policy makers and planners of the city aimed for urban development goals while promoting the historical and cultural significance of the rising metropolis. The Bamboo organ dated 1825 inside the St. Joseph Church dated 1725 is internationally famous is found in the world’s cultural map.

In addition to the social and religious structures of the place are the landmarks and historic sites are tangible structures are as follows from North to South borders of the old town namely; The Boundary Arc, Bulwagang Ezekiel Moreno and the People’s Park, Police and Fire Station; Public Library; Plaza Quezon, Central Elementary School, Aldana Police Station, Fr. Cera Bridge, Historical and Cultural Museum, Las Piñas Fish Port, Irasan Center, Manpower Building, Zapote Police Station, General Hospital and Trauma Center, Zapote Bridge, Hall of Zapote, Centennial Flyover and Moleno Dam.

The study made use of Archival materials, primary and secondary sources, personal manuscripts of old folks, church records and documents including the oral testimonies of prominent individuals as sources of information.

The findings of the study revealed that there are key factors attributed to the heritage preservation in the Philippines. These are leadership, system of good governance, spirit of patriotism, knowledge in history, economic transparency and social commitment. These core values resulted to the passage of RA No. 8003 provided for the institutionalization of cultural and historical landmarks of the region dubbed as the Las Piñas Tourism Master Plan.

**Index Terms**— Heritage & Landmarks, Historical Corridor, Las Piñas, Tourism Master Plan

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F. A. Author is with the National Institute of Standards and Technology, Boulder, CO 80305 USA

S. B. Author was with Rice University, Houston, TX 77005 USA. He is now with the Department of Physics, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523 USA

## I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

1. What are the barrios of Las Piñas as sites of Heritage and Landmarks?
2. What is LPHC in terms of geographic space, history and nomenclature?
3. What are the government policies on preservation and restoration?
4. What are the challenges of heritage preservation on the recent urban development?
5. How do the LGU, stakeholders, residents view these historical landmarks?

## II. INTRODUCTION

Las Piñas Historical Corridor is a project launched on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1995 to preserve the places of historical and cultural importance; to develop the spirit of nationalism among its citizens and to enhance posterity & identity among locals. The corridor is strategically located along the strip of land at the old district composed of the oldest and original eight (8) barangays. The project is a brainchild of the then Philippine Congress Representative and business tycoon Manuel B. Villar Jr. through the Republic Act No. 8003 which institutionalizes the policy and mandate as Tourism Master Plan [1]

The preservation of historic sites and heritage is a challenge than a solution. One major challenge is the transformation from a humble barrio to cityhood to rapid urbanization. This paper sought to understand the fast paced urbanization of the selected Philippine cities during the 20<sup>th</sup> until the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research study hopes to come up with a scientific inquiry on the process of urban development using primary and archival sources. These sources have been gathered from the libraries of the Philippines. The secondary source materials gathered from different academic institutions and government offices are also taken into account. The interviews from the authorities and architect, engineers, planners & social scientists were conducted to countercheck the existing documents.

The research explored cultural & historical landmarks, structures & superstructure in the Philippines mainly in the city of Las Piñas. This local history has been analysed to be able to provide solutions on the alarming urban development while sustaining the historical identity. Moreover, the paper will also examine the evolution of the people’s responses on the shift of highly agriculture based economy to the wonders of

skyscraper's metropolis in one of the cities of Metro Manila, the National Capital region of the country.

The evolution of traditional societies presents a microscopic example of a city being an agent or product of urbanization [2]. He further interpreted the traditional or transitional societies in Europe as immobile or unchanging in time or in space. In the Philippines tangible changes are evident as colonizers "imposed" while bringing with them their own "superior identity."

Furthermore, the present research work argues that societies change overtime and change is inevitable as colonizers implemented policies pertinent to the creations of pueblos or towns under the Spanish colonial Administration started from the creation of small towns with small population towards the creation of municipalities, the establishment of cities and urban complexes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, the Annales school of thought provides perspective in the interpretation of historical development through wider history on the historical milieu in the context of Longue Durie [3]. Long Duree or long history in explaining the meaning and the context of civilization is noteworthy to evaluate as heritage and urbanization takes place at the same time.

#### **Heritage and Landmarks of the National Capital Region in the Philippines**

One can easily identify cobbled stones, adobe walls, clay pots, spanish inspired lamp posts, baroque steel arch among others are the legacies of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Castilian architectural designs; century-old rustic but European scenes in Las Piñas starting from the Boundary Arc; Bulwagang Ezekiel Moreno and People's Park; Police and Fire Station; Public Library; Plaza Quezon; Central Elementary School; E. Aldana Police Station; Fr. Diego Cera Bridge; Historical and Cultural Museum; Las Piñas Fish Port; Irasan Center; Manpower Building; Zapote Police Station Las Piñas General Hospital and Satellite Trauma Center; Zapote Bridge; Brgy. Hall of Zapote; Molino Dam and Centennial Flyover [4]. All these structures are Spanish legacies in the country, a genuine historical symbol of the Western influence.

Heritage can be reflected through religious, social, economic and political themes as structures can be identified according to its own story. The Las Piñas Church and Bamboo Organ, the Old District Hospital, the Las Piñas or Cera Bridge, and the Asinan Area or salt beds are the distinctive features of this landmarks. The strip of this corridor covers lumang bayan or the old District of Barangays Manuyo, PulangLupa, Daniel Fajardo E. Aldana, and Zapote while other historic features can also be found in the original barangays of the old district. The Spanish colonial architecture will also be reflected in other sites such as the New District Hospital, Manpower School, Police and Fire Station, Daniel Fajardo Hall, Public Library, Irasan Center, Public Elementary school or the Gabaldon Hall, and the Fr. Diego Cera Bridge and Zapote Bridge [5].

Zapote Bridge is a "war theatre" between the Filipino revolutionaries and the Spanish colonizers. It is included in the restoration project as a reminder of Filipino sense of Nationalism. Zapote Bridge became historic as it was the site of the historic "war" for independence as well as the responses of

the people towards freedom against foreign colonizers. The Plaza Quezon is now converted into people's park is an added landmark. Other Spanish-inspired designs are found along the sidewalks and a fence at the entrance of the city on a thoroughfare of the coastal road along Manila Bay. Las Piñas Local government executives, the Villars of Las Piñas, academicians, engineers and concerned citizens collaborated with Architect and National Artist Francisco Mañosa who worked together to continuously maintained its architectural style and historic identity. Thus, the local executives proudly share to the general public as they announced that The Las Piñas Historical Project truly reflects the glorious past of the Philippines, and is a definite source of pride for all Filipinos [6].

#### **History, Geography and Nomenclature of the Old District**

The Calle Real or the original street of the old district located in the Northern section of Las Piñas adjacent to Manila Bay is a strip of land originally known as "lumang bayan" otherwise referred to as the old district. Also of equal importance is the creation of barrios of Las Piñas as sites of the said corridor. It is associated as a strategic geographic space linking Southern Manila to the provinces of the South like Cavite, Rizal and Batangas provinces.

The barrios are Almanza, Ibaba, Ilaya, Manuyo, Pamplona, Pulanglupa, Talon and Zapote. Although there were already a few scattered settlements in the city's first barrios, the creation of these barrios were attributed to the establishment of the pueblo and the church of St. Joseph brought about by the Spanish policy of reduccion [7]. The policy aimed to encourage residents who were scattered in different areas to settle in a community characterized by a grid-pattern town planning with the church and the plaza as the center of town affairs [8]. This attracted people to establish their settlements and or residences near the church that eventually stimulated the growth of population of Las Piñas. Record shows that the house patterns of ordinary people are made up of bamboo structures for pole and pillars accompanied with nipa or mangrove palm leaves [9]. These light materials are all available in the locality for traditional Filipino housing purposes. Despite those structural designs, people agreed to have a strong defensive wall or foundations such as fort and fortifications in times of invasions, warfare, calamities and other man-made or natural disasters. Significant structures that lasted on its strengths are the building within the corridor provided a constant reminder of its own history.

There is one house structure owned by "Iska Intsik" or Chinese trader in Ilaya which served as fortified strong building also withstood certain circumstances in 1882 earthquake and 1905 typhoon. It is now functional as a public elementary school. Records shows that its importance aside from the very function of an educational facility has been referred to as the administrative building in the 19<sup>th</sup> century governed by the newly Filipino independent nationalists like the Villareals, Piskals, and the Laras as prominent political elite of the area [10].

More significant structure was a Spanish erected & improvised bamboo watchtower right at the center of Ilaya just a few kilometres from Manila bay. This tower serves to prepare

the natives from the intrusions of “Moro pirates” from the Southern Philippines whose purpose was to intrude, govern and captivate the captured natives for service in the south. Thus Ilaya became the “war theatre” and “peace sanctuary” of Philippine revolutionists against Spain for patriotism and freedom for the country. The war-peace circumstance had been summarized by the respondents as a test of faith and a test of service to the little community [11]. Eventual evacuation of the natives to other places in the North of Manila does not prevent the inhabitants of Ilaya from depopulation instead a place of permanent settlement as a response to the incoming “Moros” or natives from Mindanao from the south.

Ilaya played an important role in framing the historical and cultural identity of Las Piñas. The barrio was a hub of economic activities like salt industry, fishing, dye-making, and hand weaving. Likewise, the same place saw the development of Calle Real as link between the town center with St. Joseph church as the heritage site. Also significant is the municipal building and the old market formed part of the town’s traditional center, meeting point of moneyed and ordinary folks [12].

The succeeding barrios were established due to the influx of migrant settlers as the case of Ilaya being the first barrio in the old town. It was to the presence of freshwater. The stories of old folks referred to the abundant supply of freshwater, marine life and accessibility to the coasts of Manila bay. The place has its former name that has of popular importance to them in the vernacular known as “kutkut” or “to dig with a hand.” [13] It was believed that one could tap freshwater by just digging a shallow hole almost anywhere in the area [14]. From then on, series of migrant settlers signified their intention of putting permanent settlement in the area.

Record shows that the original families were prominent local elite who eventually became town leaders. The geographic space of Ilaya has its expanse from the Roman Catholic church in the North to the main road of the old town in the south. The sitios or villages under Ilaya from the west is Rangun where salt, nipa and vinegar as the main source of livelihood. In the East is “pinagbitayan” or hanging due to its legend as infamous “hanging” place for lawless persons ready for execution while sitio balite from a known balite tree was known for the hide out of “tulisanes” or lawless persons [15].

Ilaya then was the place where the town market and the casa real or municipal government during the Spanish period were situated. It was also in this barrio that people gather and listen daily news and ordinances for announcement and consensus.

In the succeeding years of the 1960s Manuyo or known for its traditional name as “Kabilang Dulo” or the “other end of the barrio” as it is the farthest end of the place in the North [19]. Villages such as “Bulor” or flat as well as promontory are features of the place. Traders like the salt magnates and barrio official such as the tenientes lived in this barrio. Significant on this area are salt and ice plants are later transformed into catholic cemeteries.

In the succeeding years of 1800s, the barrios of Pamplona, Almanza, Ibaba and Pulanglupa were created. These barrios were once the dominant farming villages with rice as the main productions. Generally, the inhabitants were farmers while the respondents pointed to the rich resource of the area known to

them as pulanglupa or “red earth.” Red earth is an ingredient or mixture of “tisa” or brick production. The pulanglupa produce considerable bricks for building construction. Among its use are those found in the century old churches and cathedral in the Philippines while other the historic structures are built also from those brick visible alongside the Historical Corridor.

The collective experience of the eight (8) barrios provided the historical and cultural identity of Las Piñas as product of Spanish legacy. The building of the church spurred the growth of the barrios near the town center such as Ilaya and Manuyo while the adjacent barrios provided the population link to the church as well. In finality, historical landmarks serve as symbols of the town’s cultural heritage.

### III. CONCLUSION

Las Piñas has a total land area of approximately 3,298.60 square meters. It is bounded on the North and the Northeast by the city of Paranaque; on the east and southeast by the city of Muntinlupa; on the south and southeast by the municipality of Imus, Cavite; and the northwest by Manila Bay. There are eight original barrios of Las Piñas and is referred to as the old district where the historic corridor is located eventually the barangays multiplied to reach what is now twenty (20) barangays.

Philippine laws on heritage and landmarks favoured “maximum” development for preservation purposes. The government support for restoration is in place. Most of the structures are survivors of natural and man-made calamities but the local government executives invested its time and logistics to restore accordingly. In this regard, the researcher found that the main goal of the local government is to promote the city as a tourist destination through the Las Piñas Historical Corridor. One of the pillars of this historic project is now the Philippine Senator and former Congress Representative of Las Piñas Cynthia A. Villar who explained about the historic project as more than aesthetic value as well as great lessons of history [20]. Respondents of the study said that the initiative of the local government units gave them hope and pride by its unique architecture and the functions it served in the locality. More important than the impact of this work is the concept of collaboration for collaboration. As this paper may provide an aid to the legislators, urban planners and policy makers from the Historian’s point of view; Contributions to the new wealth of knowledge that can add substantial information to the Academe regarding new research findings; The findings of this work may guide the politicians and Local government officials on the actual and evidence-based data as points of consideration of their objective view of their locality and finally, this research can also provide a holistic approach in dealing with the issues on heritage preservation that go hand in hand with urbanization for sustainable development.

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