

THE ROLE OF PLACE NAMES IN CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION: FOCUS ON THE PHILIPPINES

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Introduction

Toponymy is interested in the linguistic evolution (etymology) of place names and the reason behind the giving of a name to a place, whether the motive be cultural, historical, or geographical in nature. Toponymy may be studied using taxonomic, epistemic, ideological and semiotic methodological approaches.

Value of Place Names and their Tangible and Ideational Elements

Place names and their tangible and ideational elements provide testimony to the cultural, political, economic, social and religious life of inhabitants--whether these be of the past or the present. Place names also have a psychological-aesthetic value as when the reading and hearing of quaint, polysyllabic, onomatopoeic, iconographic and tonally mellifluous names evoke in people wonderment, interest, inspiration and pleasure.

Objectives

Generally, the paper shows how toponymy can be used to preserve Philippine cultural heritage i.e., the legacy of physical and ideational attributes of a group of people that are inherited from the past generations, transmitted to the present and preserved for future generations. The paper also shows that the most popular place names are religious and heroic names and spatially they are located in the plaza complex or urban core of cities and towns.

Religious and heroic place names, following their psychological-aesthetic value, are imbued with “symbol realism” in the sense that they absorb feelings and abstractions about space and objects. Sonic and visual perception of words can evoke synesthetic subjective sensations and meanings other than the one being literally represented.

Religious place names can be used as stimuli to evoke feelings of piety and veneration that are directed at saints but which can be channeled towards the preservation of the urban care sites and structures that such place names represent. Heroic place names can be used as stimuli to evoke emotions of awe and respect that are rendered to heroes but which can be channeled to the conservation of spaces and structures in the central business district named after national and local heroes.

The Taxonomy of Philippine Provincial Place Names

In a study of the typology of place names of Philippine provinces, it is observed that most (66%) have physical or national characteristics while only about a fifth (22%) have cultural characteristics.

Taxonomy of Place-Names of Philippine Provinces

Characteristics	N	N	%	%
Physical	42		66.0	
Shore/bay/coastal plain/coastal landform/wading on coastal waters/island		5		8.0
Tidal movement/ebbing tide/ocean current		3		5.0
Coastal trading town/strategic maritime trading location/anchorage or port town/far maritime location		4		6.0
River basin/river mouth/river delta/river course inland		9		14.0
Lake/lagoon/dried-up swamp		3		5.0
Natural resource/natural feature		13		20.00
Land/mountain topography/mountain peak		5		8.0
Cultural	22		34.0	
A person's name		7		11.0
Another place		4		6.0
Ethno-linguistic group		6		9.0
Cultural feature/cultural act		5		8.0
Total	64	64	100.0	100.0

The Trend Towards Cultural Place Name Change

There is at present a tendency towards changing place names of settlements and the names being introduced are those of national and local heroes. In a sense, this still involves cultural change that can be associated with cultural heritage preservation.

The Popularity of Religious Place Names

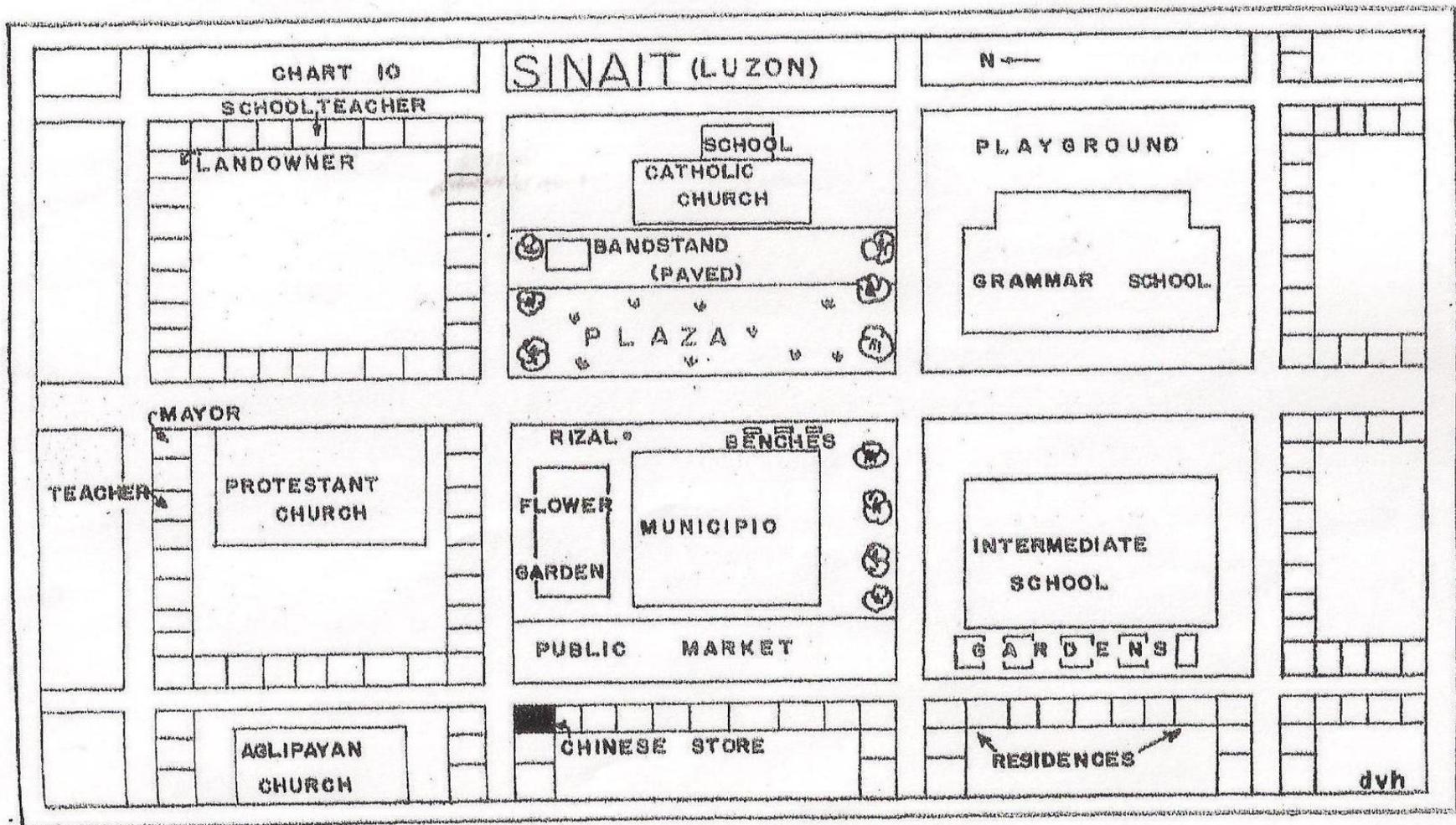
The most popular place names in the Philippines are religious place names that are derived from the names of Saint Mary and the Catholic saints. This reflects the more than 300 years of colonization of the islands by Spain, whose mission was to spread Christianity and Spanish culture.

The Philippine Plaza Complex as the Locus of Cultural Heritage Elements

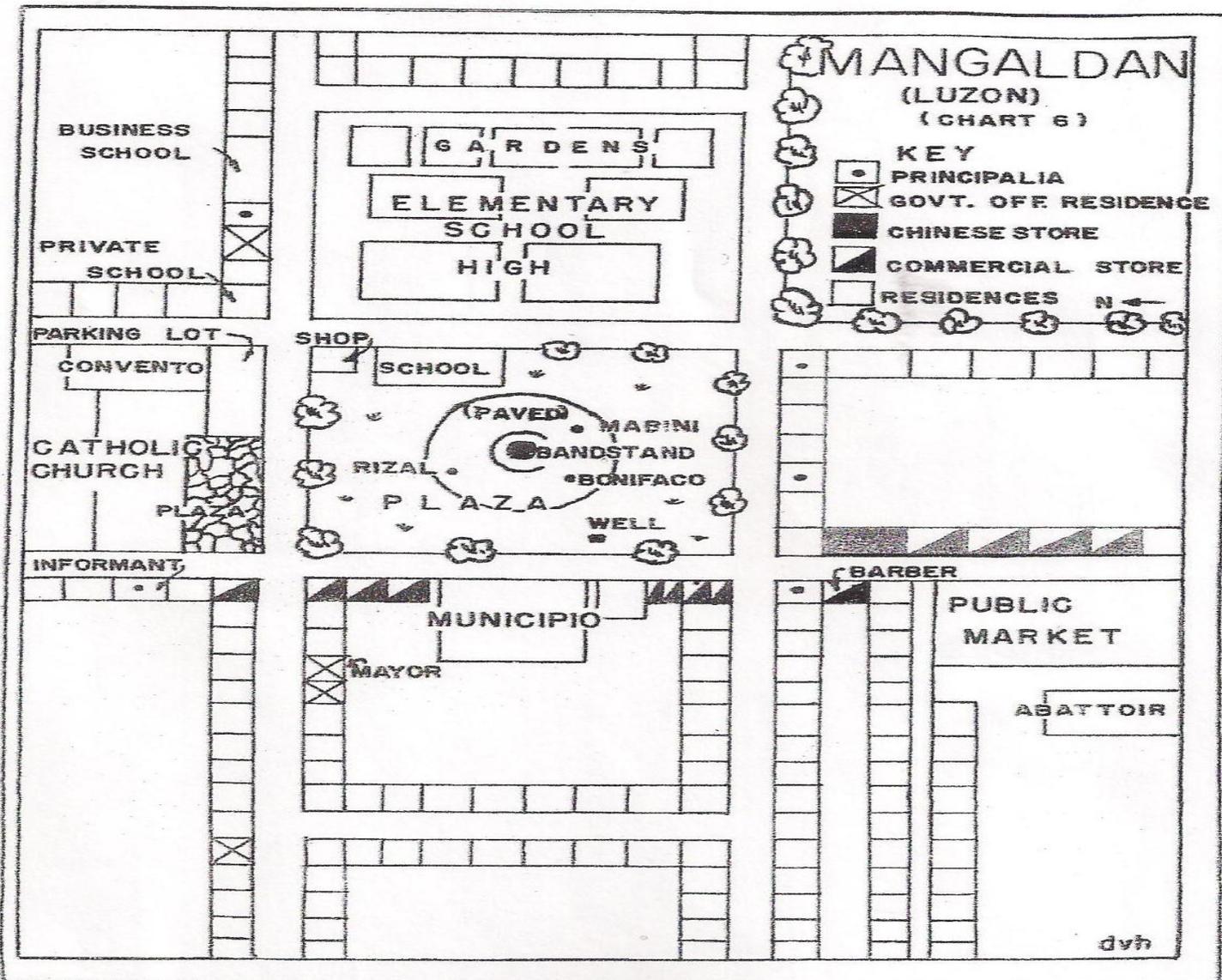
The plaza complex is the urban morphology transmitted by Spain to the country. It is characterized by a square in the middle of the town surrounded by the Catholic church, convent, tribunal, and the public school. Sometimes the public market is located on one side but the politico-religious nature of Spanish colonization did not emphasize pecuniary considerations in the planning of its settlements.

Next to the first layer of structures are the stone houses of the *principalia* or upper class. The plaza complex became the focus of centripetal forces as residents frequent it for religious activities and transactions with the municipal government. Even now, because of its central location, it is attracting intrusive business ventures.

Thus it is in the plaza complex or urban core where most of the heritage sites, buildings and houses are located and where heritage preservation efforts should be focused on. Sad to say, however, these grand and beautiful vestiges of the country's Spanish and American past are being compromised by the processes of the cycle of urbanization that also transpires in other urban centers of the world.



The Plaza Complex of Sinait, Ilocos Sur (Hart 1961)

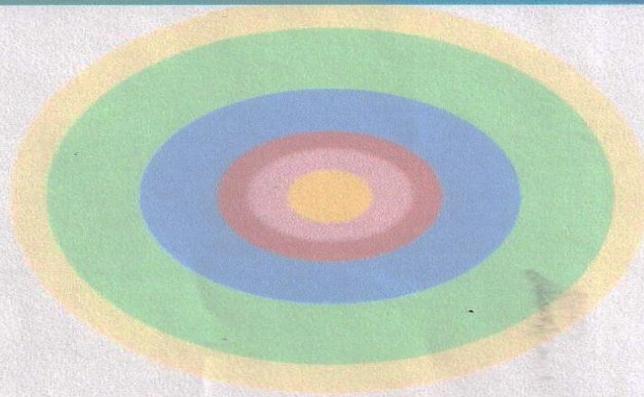


The Plaza Complex of Mangaldan, Pangasinan (Hart 1961)

Conceptual Considerations Related to Cultural Heritage Compromises in the CBD

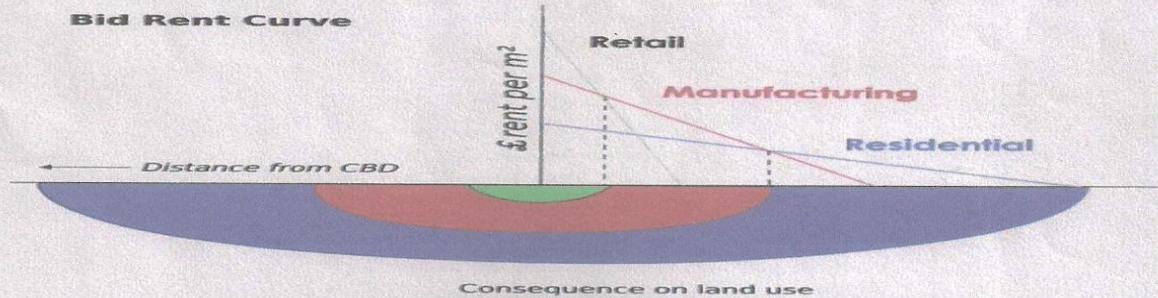
The transformation of the plaza complex to the CBD can be explained by the cycle of urbanization model which includes the four process of : (1)urbanization, (2)suburbanization, (3)counterurbanization, and (4) reurbanization.

It is in the process of reurbanization where damage to heritage sites, structures and objects has transpired. In particular, the kind of reurbanization called gentrification has resulted to the demolition and improper restoration of heritage elements-- all for the attainment of overriding pecuniary goals. "Gentrifiers" conduct questionable urban renewal of the inner city to enhance the bid rents of their real estate properties and to increase the tax base of the city government. They do not even pay attention to the plight of the urban poor whom they dislodge with their high-rise condominiums and commercial buildings.



Description **English:** Concentric Zone Model by Ernest Burgess.

- Commuter zone
- Residential zone
- Working class zone
- Zone of transition
- Factory zone
- CBD



Effects of Reurbanization in Philippine Cities and Towns

The process of reurbanization, particularly the gentrification type of urban redevelopment, has been responsible for the demolition, defacement and remodeling of cultural heritage elements in the CBD. Cultural appreciation, historical perspective and ecological balance have been disregarded by the forces of commerce.

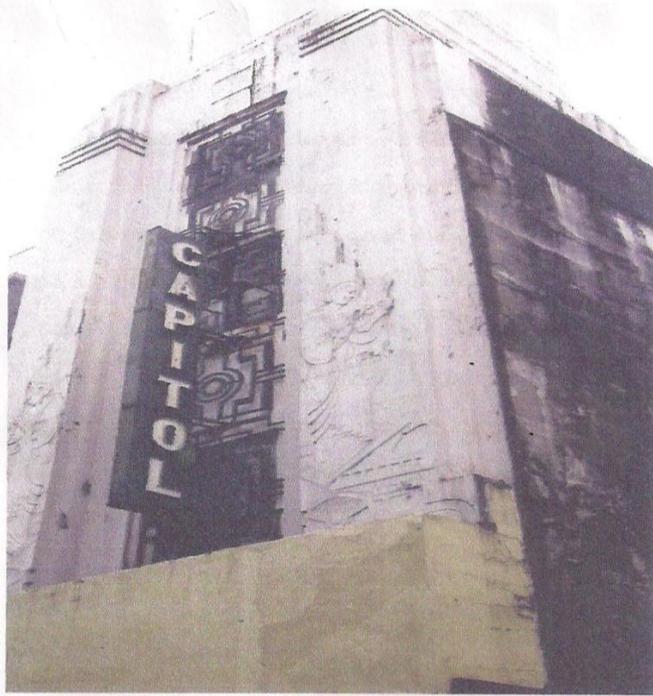
However, it must be mentioned that heritage conservation and business profitability can coexist in the city center. Adaptive reuse of old structures as business establishments can be practiced without changing the look and architecture of the old buildings and houses. Also, maintaining the old structures has a reinforcing effect through historical association and semiotic attachments to a place--that once a history, a significance or a meaning is attached to a structure or site, its value as a landmark is enhanced.

But city officials and real estate developers have not fully realized the import of the above observation. We see in Philippine cities and towns today cases of demolition and remodeling of, as well as compromising threats to, heritage elements. These can be seen in Metro Manila and in many cities and towns of the archipelago. Even then, in fairness to the heritage conservationists and the government, there are also many cases of preservation and reuse as the most desirable methods for keeping Philippine heritage alive.









The now defunct and sordid-looking Capitol Theater (2011)



The Entrance of Escolta with the Regina Building and the First United Building Corporation (2011).

INTRAMUROS

HISTORY TOWN PHILIPPINES



MAP LEGEND:

-  INFO KIOSK
-  REST ROOM
-  LOST & FOUND
-  OFF THE STREET PARKING AREA
-  PHONE BOOTH
-  FIRST AID STATION

MAIN VISITORS ENTRANCE

MANILA HOTEL

P. BURGOS STREET
MA. OROSA ST.
RIZAL PARK

FORT SANTIAGO

NORTH HARBOR

TAFT AVENUE

TO PASAY CITY

TO SOUTH HARBOR



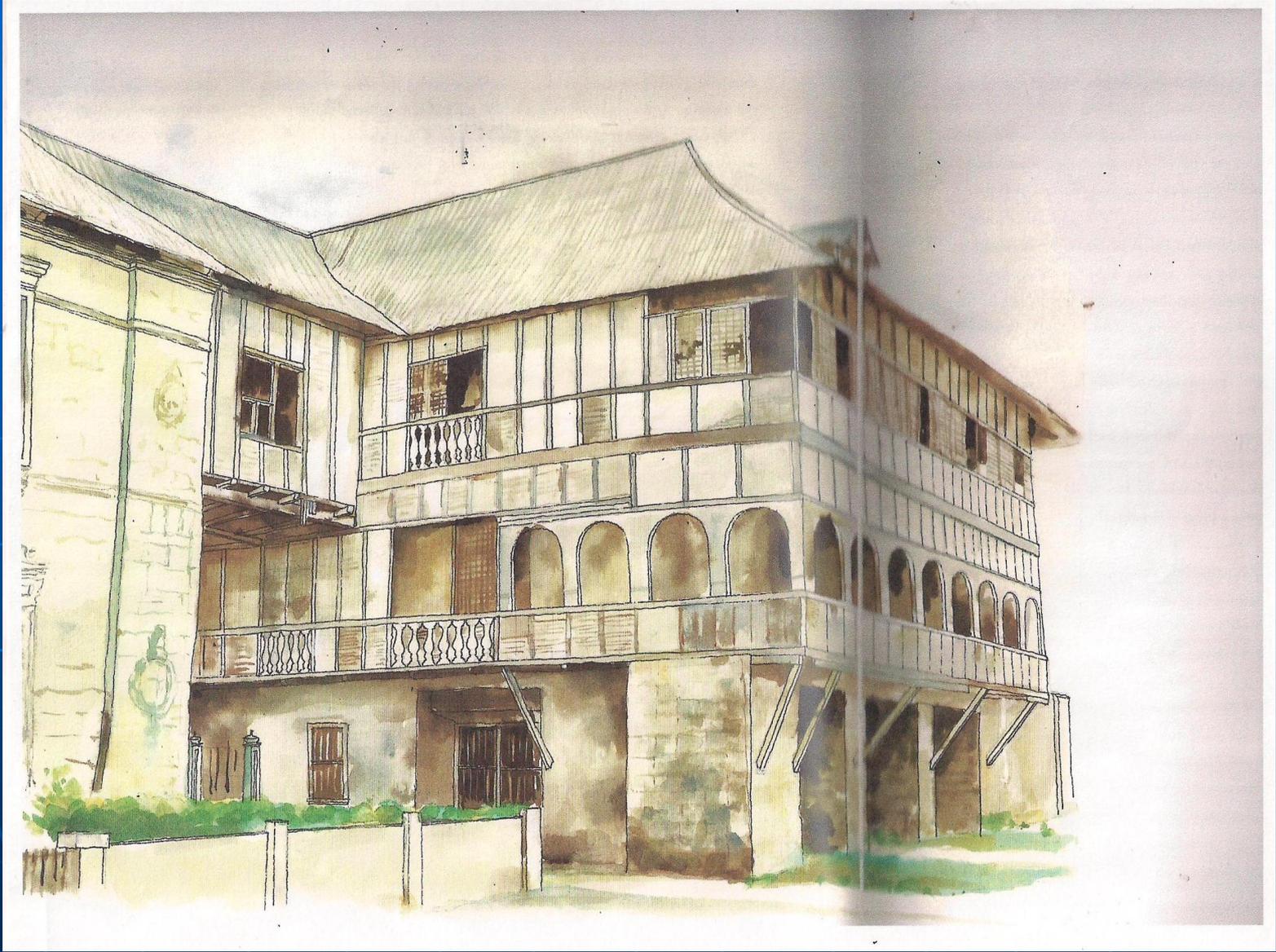












Advocacy Strategies for Cultural Heritage Preservation

There is a need for intensified information, education and communication (IEC) campaign for preserving cultural heritage elements. But more than intensified IEC campaign programs and projects, there is a need to elevate the campaign to a more engaged level through unorthodox advocacy strategies such as those espoused by David Alinsky. His philosophy of conflict pragmatics involves conflict confrontation and the setting up of People's Organizations. In these advocacy activities, religious and heroic place names can be used as rallying cries that will conscientize heritage destroyers to think of their acts as desecratory and disrespectful of religious shrines and heroic figures, respectively.

Cautionary Parting Words

There is a need to realize that cultural heritage preservation is a complex undertaking. Urban space is not a simple container of neutral social processes but a condensation of often contentions group interactions with disparate interests. Urban space is an outcome of semiotic production of disparate urban images by such contending groups as decision-makers, real estate developers, conservation experts and stakeholders. Conservation advocates have to understand this dynamics, such that they have to be very creative and courageous in employing religious and heroic place names as semiotic stimuli in attaining their noble goal.