People, Passion, Proficiency: The Cebu Provincial Government's Investments in Heritage Conservation in Cebu, Central Philippines

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The election in 2004 of the first female governor of the central Philippine province of Cebu ushered in a kind of cultural resurgence in that her platform of governance included heritage promotion and conservation. Over a period of eight years thereafter, over 40 towns and cities under the province’s jurisdiction began creating local private-public tourism and heritage conservation councils, establishing public museums and creating heritage tourism packages that have become something of a model for other provinces to follow. This paper looks into the experience of this unique active resource investment, both financial and human, by the provincial government geared towards creating a heritage conservation-conscious constituency. The results of a series of focus group discussions and meetings conducted with the aforesaid tourism and heritage councils in 2012 to assess the results of this program are discussed in this paper. The strengths, weaknesses and opportunities triggered by the program are then discussed with the end in view of developing a sustainable framework for harnessing local government participation in heritage conservation especially in developing countries like the Philippines where limits on meager annual budgets cause cultural programs to take the back seat.