

Enabling the Cultural and Heritage Management Practices of the Indigenous Peoples



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Abstract

This research is focused on documenting cultural practices, social and natural resources, conservation practices, cultural legacy, and self-worth of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati as indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines. It also documented the plausible plans and policies for natural and cultural resources conservation and heritage management. A qualitative research design was used to study the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples. Purposive sampling through the set inclusion and exclusion criteria was used in interviewing the nine informants using the three-generation test as a form of data validation. Informed consent was executed in observance of the research ethics. Results showed that the cultural practices and traditions gave the indigenous peoples the distinction of a cultural community. Their heritage management mirrors their way of life through the years. The only way of conserving their culture and traditions is by passing them on to their children through word of mouth and daily practice. The indigenous peoples have instilled in their children to adopt good and beneficial cultural practices and values that maintain their identity and self-worth as a community. For them, their community represents their core. The heart of their culture and identity is found in the home. The narratives of the explicit and tacit knowledge of the indigenous peoples call for the protection and participatory efforts of the multiple stakeholders who may serve as the strong key players in the passing of the unique culture to the next generations while embracing modernity and industrialization.

Keywords: Cultural Knowledge, Heritage Management, Indigenous Peoples, Culture Preservation, Philippines

Introduction

The Philippines is known as the culturally diverse country in Asia, where there is an estimated 10-20% of indigenous peoples comprised the 2022 total population of 102.9 million. United Nations Development Programme. (2013) reported that these indigenous peoples belong to the 112 ethnolinguistic groups, which are mainly concentrated in Northern Luzon (33%) and Mindanao (61%) and with some other groups from Visayas. The indigenous peoples in the Philippines serve as the bearers of the country's aboriginal identity. Cultures and traditions bring every individual to know and understand their distinct cultural

identity. Cut off from people's race's lore, these individuals will be constrained to steal from other cultures or to create their own myths to contrive the illusion of being rooted in something or being a part of a larger whole. Bicular (2014) stated that the loss of documenting and recording the indigenous people's culture and tradition is of national and international concern and has become a concern of the state and the educational system. Social change, however, brought by modernity and globalization, drastically altered the normal functioning of the indigenous people's culture, tradition, and heritage as parts of their

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indigenous knowledge system (IKSP). The advancement in technology and rapid urbanization significantly threatened the existence of indigenous peoples' cultural heritage as they are now relegated to the margin in favor of world-views and practices that support consumerism and the mass production of goods and services. Western Visayas, Philippines, is no exception to these changes brought by urbanization. The provinces cater to the indigenous communities in Capiz, Iloilo, Aklan, Antique, and Guimaras. The hinterlands of these towns in the province are identified as the abode of the Ati and Panay Bukidnon communities. The Ati are a group of indigenous peoples with dark skin, kinky hair, rounded eyes, and shorter height. They use inatè as their archaic language. The Panay Bukidnon, on the other hand, have a fair skin complexion, straight black hair, and dark chestnut eyes, and are also shorter in height. They use ligbok as their archaic indigenous language. These communities are rich in culture, traditions, and knowledge systems that must be documented. However, this cultural heritage is left in oblivion with the young generation's preference for anything foreign and popular. Bicular (2014) reiterated that instead of reaching sustained culture in the 21st century through the mainstream of Filipino urban culture remained vegetated in the mountains and fermented in the basements of the cities. Paranublion is an indigenous language term, specifically from the tribe of indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, meaning "heritage." The documentation of this paranublion or heritage both tangible and intangible is an initiative towards the progress and development of all cultural communities in the region. Documentation of this heritage is a platform for preserving and conserving the Ati and Panay Bukidnon communities' lives, culture, and traditions towards sustained sociocultural and inclusive economic development and resiliency.

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1.2 Statement of the Problem

The discussion of this study is focused on the salient points of the documentation of the indigenous peoples' cultural practices, social and natural resources, conservation practices, cultural legacy, and self-worth. Moreover, it documented the plausible plans/policies for natural

and cultural resources conservation and heritage management of the indigenous peoples.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This research study is anchored on the theory of cultural relativism posited by Franz Boas in the 20th century, as cited by Österman (2021). He positioned cultural relativism as the idea of believing one's personal beliefs and practices should be clearly understood based on the person's culture. This means that one's values and culture should not be evaluated based on the perspectives of outsiders' norms and beliefs. Further, Österman (2021) averred that included in the concept of cultural relativism is the 'problem of understanding other cultures' because each outsider has a mixture of philosophical ideas and theoretical worldviews, and anthropological ideas of cultural essence. This may lead to either acceptance or rejection of understanding other cultures due to the personal baggage and orientation of the observer's part. In this study, the concept of cultural relativism is applied based on the perspectives that the narratives of the indigenous peoples under study shall be understood based on their own meaning and context. The correctness and incorrectness shall be understood based on the researcher's cognitive condition that connects the relationships that exist between the world, others, and himself. This further leads us to the realization that there is no less pressing of fighting injustice and cruelty from different forms and angles. What matters most are the narratives of the indigenous people which become the avenue for understanding and persuading others or those who are not of their own form that they have existed and have the rightful responsibility to govern people and manage their own domains.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in this study on the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines. This research design stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, for it focuses on the emergent and purposeful situations as they unfold naturally (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this approach that the subject would have the acceptance of adapting inquiry as their understanding

deepens on the reality of the situations. Cases for studies as individuals or communities are selected because they create rich and illuminative information (Berg, 2012), such as the indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines.

3.2 Research Informants

Every province in the Western Visayas caters to the indigenous peoples' community. However, this study is limited only to the indigenous peoples in Capiz and Antique who have responded to the request of being the subject area for this research. The Panay Bukidnon in Ganzon, Jamindan, Capiz, and the Ati in Igalawagan, Tobias Fornier, Antique, were the two cultural communities covered in this study. The former is located in the most hinterland area of Capiz, while the latter is in hilly terrain amidst rivers and contoured upland rice terraces.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the nine (9) informants through the three (3) generation test (Manuel, 1965). The three oldest members of the communities were identified through the coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) regional and field office in Iloilo, Capiz, and Antique. The other six (6) were identified upon the referral of the older generations whom they have passed on their indigenous knowledge systems. Moreover, the informed consent form was executed upon issuing the permit and information the NCIP Office Region VI granted. The informants agreed and signed the said form before conducting the interviews. Ethical considerations for social science research were fully observed during the conduct of this study.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis



Figure 1. Map of Capiz and Antique (in red) in Western Visayas, Philippines, where the study was conducted in the Indigenous Communities of Ati and Panay Bukidnon

Interviews, observation, and participatory approach were employed through the conduct of informal and semi-structured interview sessions with the informants. This method substantiated and triangulated the data gathered from the informants. The data gathered from the informants were transcribed verbatimly. A general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) was used to make sense of the data transcripts (See figure 2). Thematic analysis was used in extracting the emerging codes and concepts. In vivo coding (Saldana, 2009) was used since folk or indigenous terms are participant-generated words from members of a particular culture, subculture, or microculture. Folk terms extracted indicate the existence of the group's cultural categories (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005). The codes refer to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, "the terms used by [participants] themselves" (Strauss, 1988).

4. Results and Discussions

Culture and identity reflect the lives of people converging in a community. In the case of the indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, various concerns confronted their cultural communities, which may either enhance or challenge their natural and cultural resources conservation and heritage management practices. Unearthing the cultural community stories of the

tural community. It may pave the way for them through the informed choices available to be empowered and emancipated to conserve and manage natural and cultural resources and heritage.

4.1 Cultural practices

The Panay Bukidnon and Ati elders have observed gradual changes in their cultural community. Technology has made an impact on their way of life. The presence of electricity after the onslaughts of Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in 2013 paved the way for electric power installation. The presence of television, cable satellites, and cellular phones exposed them to the convenience of modern life. Concrete roads were gradually constructed, reducing travel time from the town proper to the barangay. They can easily access the market to sell their crops and other produce. The public elementary school was converted into an integrated school to provide opportunities for both Panay Bukidnon and Ati children to receive a quality education in their respective community. Farming remains a significant livelihood with the adoption of some modern ways of growing crops among the Panay Bukidnon while the Ati still practice traditional hunting or locally known as pangangasô. The rearing of livestock is almost negligible. Above all these, cultural practices inherited from their ancestors remained intact. Both the Panay Bukidnon and the Ati tribes are keen on

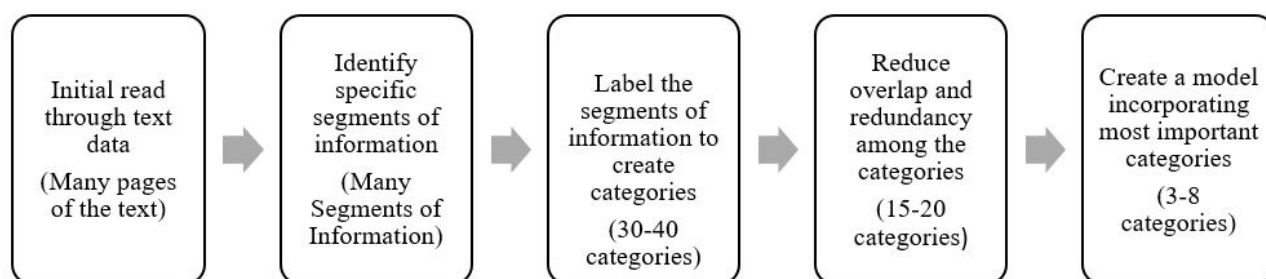


Figure 2. Procedure in the general inductive approach

indigenous peoples of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati put a premium on privileging their voices. This serves as an opportunity to understand the depth and breadth of their rich indigenous cultural fabric. Listening before telling allowed the indigenous peoples to realize their responsible sense of ownership over their lives as an artistic, cul-

ways to preserve the authenticity of their rules. Ligbok, or the Panay Bukidnon's distinct traditional language, is still being used and passed on to the next generation. On the other hand, the inatè, the traditional language of Ati, is used only by most elders. Both tribes give importance to the preservation of their traditional language for

this makes them distinct in their own way. However, the use of the traditional language for both tribes poses a challenge as its popularity tends to dwindle among the youth. To address this concern, the cultural community has decided to integrate the use of ligbok during community and school-related special celebrations of the Panay Bukidnon. Likewise, with the teaching of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education at the elementary level, they felt the need for ligbok to be taught and considered their mother tongue. However, this remains unresolved with the absence of teachers in formal schooling who can fluently teach ligbok. In the case of the Ati, their language is almost dying. Like the case of the Panay Bukidnon, the Ati tribe does not have the venue to institutionalize the passing on of their traditional language to the youth. Its integration into the formal school system is not possible because of the lack of teachers who were capacitated to teach and even speak the language. The only venue of language acquisition among the youth is from their Ati parents – when they converse at home. With the influence of Christianity, both the Panay Bukidnon and Ati were mostly Pentecostal, Baptist, and Roman Catholic. Hence, an annual barangay and religious fiesta are being celebrated. Panay Bukidnon women have the skills of weaving mats, baskets, purses, and bracelets using the vines of nito. Nito (*Lygodium circinnatum*) is an herbaceous vineyard plant that is widely available in the forested areas of the community. The women among the Ati also make mats and other handicrafts, such as decorative glass holders and trays made from nito. In addition, the women of Ati are also making or producing some amulets, in which they use different herbals as the components together with the limestones sealed in a pouch. They sealed it with the prayer that the gods will protect whoever will wear these amulets from misfortunes and accidents. Weaving and making of amulets were considered their alternative livelihood. The finished products were sold to the municipal public market and, in some regions, whenever orders were made through a middleman. With the abundance of abaca (*Musa textilis*) among the Panay Bukidnon community, abaca fiber processing has the potential market with the presence of a donated weaving machine from the

local government unit. Abaca is then combined with silkworm to develop a unique textile. The silkworm is being purchased in Aklan. To sustain the production, the Barangay Council proposed the establishment of an abaca fiber processing center. They look forward to more support from the local government, government agencies, National Government Organizations, and other probable stakeholders in the processing and commercializing their abaca-based products. One of the practices that the Panay Bukidnon regularly performs during harvesting is the hil-o hil-o. It is harvesting rice or any other crops with the help of most of the community members. It promotes unity and cooperation, which is inherent in Filipino culture. After harvesting, the whole family will have lunch or dinner while serving food from the harvested crops. It is called hil-oanay. It is vital to their tradition, which is strictly practiced. The importance of cohesiveness as a family is reflected in this tradition. Nobody should be left out in times of triumph. This is the essence of hil-oanay. On the part of the Ati, they do not have a label on this kind of cultural practice though it can be observed that they also give importance to the oneness and togetherness of each family member, especially during the harvesting of their crops. However, it is inherent in their culture that they have to get out of their community once a year and immerse with the other people in the urban areas to ask for some alms. This culture makes them nomadic, which the government does not want them to be. To the Panay Bukidnon and Ati in the Western Visayas part of the Philippines, their cultural practices and traditions, such as singing and dancing, skills in weaving, and the use of their traditional language, traditional farming, and harvesting practices, gave them that distinction as people – as a cultural community. It mirrors their way of life and how they managed to survive through the years. Their cultural practices generally influenced their families to remain united. They gave high value to their culture and quality education because they believe their children deserve to be successful in life as they carry the rich cultural fabric of being a Panay Bukidnon to the next generation. This, for them, may ensure the sustainability of conserving their cultural practices.

Cultural Practices	Importance and Purpose	Indigenous Peoples	
		Panay Bukidnon	Ati
Use of the Traditional language	Makes them distinct and gives them an identity	<i>ligbok</i>	<i>inatè</i>
Traditional farming Practices	Farming has been the main source of their livelihood	Traditional crops and vegetable farming	<i>Pangangaso</i> or hunting
Skills in weaving and other handicrafts	Alternative sources of livelihood	Mats, purses, and abaca for textiles	Making of amulets
Hil-o hil-o	For cohesiveness among the family ties	celebration	nomadic

Table 1. Themes extracted on the cultural practices of the indigenous people

The future of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati cultures will be challenged since the younger generations are now exposed to life outside the community. The presence of technology makes it more complicated. The importance of emphasizing to the younger generation the value of preserving cultural practices even in modern times is deemed necessary.

4.2 Social Resources

Social resources can be both tangible and intangible either ascribed or built by an individual or by the community. The tangible social resources may include money, personal property, information, goods, and services. Intangible forms of social resources on the other hand may refer to love, affection, and one's status within the society or community (Webel et. al, 2016). In the case of the indigenous peoples under this study, lack these forms of social resources in order for them to be considered healthy or sustainable communities.

4.3 Panay Bukidnon Community

Social structures and services in the Panay Bukidnon cultural community in Ganzon are an integrated school, a barangay hall, and an improvised basketball court. The community lacks a health center which is essential in catering to the health concerns of the people due to the remote distance to the nearest rural health unit in the town proper. Ganzon is the farthest barangay of Ja

mindan, bordering the upland portion of Libacao, Aklan, and San Remegio, Antique. Two hundred households are found in the cultural community within the six sitios. The number of families gradually increases through the years. Pentecost, Baptist, and Roman Catholic are the predominant religious groups found in the community. The barangay is solely home to the Panay Bukidnon, with a few non-members of the cultural community who resided in the area due to marriage. A female-headed families are about 50 households. During planting season, most of the agricultural work is carried out by men while women help harvest and dry the crops. During the off-season, men focused on abaca processing while women found weaving baskets, coin purses, and other home decors as an alternative livelihood. Likewise, engaging or selling goods in mini-stores may also be their source of income. Climate change was identified as the reason for adjusting their additional activities for farming and other natural resources.

4.4 Ati Community

The Ati community is located on the mountain-top in Igcalawagan, Tobias Fornier, Antique of Western Visayas. There are over a hundred and eighty-two (182) members of the Ati in this area or community. In this area, the only social structure of the community is their playground. Schools are located in the lowland about fi e

Social Resources	Indigenous Peoples	
	Panay Bukidnon	Ati
School	available	not available
Barangay Hall	available	not available
Recreational Resource	improvised basketball court	vacant land as playground
Human Resources	200 households	over 182 community members

Table 2. Themes extracted on the availability of social resources of the indigenous people

kilometers from their community. Both the Ati and their children have to wait for the low tide and cross the river to reach the plain where the nearby barangay hosts the elementary school. One of the elders narrated that during typhoon Haiyan, they were not able to avail of food, financial, and even health care assistance from the government because they can hardly be reached in their area due to the hardships of undergoing to cross the river. This led them to depend on their own resources to feed them during the calamity. Moreover, most children are sick because they were not able to avail the health care services of the local government. Traditional alternative medicines such as the use of herbals and other medicinal plants, are the remedies applied by the parents whenever their children get sick.

4.5 Natural Resources

Corn is considered the primary produce of the Ati and Panay Bukidnon communities. The upland areas are mostly covered with cornfields. Root crops like sweet potato and cassava are abundant. Upland rice farming is considered widely practiced; however, its production is not enough to sustain the community's consumption. Livestock raising is minimal. There is a potable water source from springs, rivers, and deep wells. The community water system is still being repaired and reconnected since some pipes were cut off due to road widening and the construction of new school buildings. There is equal access to land among the Panay Bukidnon regardless of sex and socio-economic status. The ground is covered by the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) regarding the ancestral domain. Some portions of the community, especially in peripheral areas, are contested by landowners other

than the cultural community members. However, the Ati in the subject area does not have the same fate as the Panay Bukidnon. The land they occupied was owned by private individuals or capitalists from the lowlands. The government identified their area as their relocation site, though, for the older generations, it was part of their ancestral domains. The Ati becomes the tenants of the farms near their community. August to October is considered the time of the year when food is scarce. The busiest months of the year fall from November to March. These patterns may sometimes vary depending on the occurrence of natural calamities such as typhoons, El Nino, and La Nina.

4.6 Conservation Practices

According to the elder members of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati cultural communities, they know their rights as indigenous peoples, such as their ancestral domains as stipulated in the IPRA (Indigenous Peoples Rights Act 1997 or popularly known as Republic Act No. 8371 of 1997). Ancestral domains are comprised of lands, inland waters, coastal areas, and other natural resources under the ownership of the indigenous peoples, either individually or communal, since time immemorial, that were passed on by their ancestors (Chapter 2, RA 8371 of 1997). Conflict occurs when non-members of the cultural community claim their rights to some portions within or in the peripherals of their land. This contention by outsiders was based on the premise that as prominent families over time, they claimed to have owned lands before the approval of the IPRA Law. As to the preservation of cultural traditions, rituals, and laws, they believe there are no concrete strategies and schemes that they follow to document

on their own both the tacit and explicit knowledge of the Panay Bukidnon. This implicit and explicit knowledge revolves around their cultural practices, encompassing their laws, rituals, and traditions. As to their cultural practices, the only way of conservation they do is by passing it on to their children through word of mouth and daily practice. These, however, are threatened by the gradual lack of interest and diversion of interest to other practices outside the cultural community. This could be attributed to the presence of modern technology to which the younger generations are aptly exposed. As a unique way of protecting natural resources, the elders and the men and women sectors of the Panay Bukidnon proposed to the barangay council that the strategic areas within the community should be allocated for abaca plantations. This is in response to the growing potential of abaca textile production. Demands from local and international markets may further be established. The Ati, on the other hand, had filed the reclamation of their land with the help of the NCIP (National Commission for the Indigenous Peoples) Office in the region. According to one of the elder informants, it's been over a decade since they had filed the case to the government, but until now, there is no movement on their petitions. Various stakeholders' support may serve as a means to protect their natural and cultural resources and heritage. The cultural community, in unison, has high hopes that the local government will further stretch its arms to bring forth essential social services to Panay Bukidnon and Ati people. They likewise look forward that as a cultural community, they will be able to properly document and protect their cultural traditions and practices. Other than concerning institutions or individuals doing it for them, they felt the need to do it themselves. The elders wanted to emphasize the need to inculcate in younger generations a strong sense of responsibility and ownership to protect further and promote their rich natural and cultural heritage. With the growing number of indigenous peoples' children receiving formal education, the elders believed this initiative would be attained in time.

4.7 Heritage Management

As a form of heritage management, the elders and the barangay council have claimed they lack

efforts in this aspect. The local government unit is pooling its resources regarding road construction and other social services. Non-government organizations assisted with rehabilitation after the devastation of Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in November 2013. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts, with the provincial tourism and cultural affairs office of each LGU, initiated local, national, and international programs to showcase the Panay Bukidnon and Ati's cultural heritage in events like the Dayaw Cultural Festival. The Dayaw Festival originated from the indigenous concept of dayaw, which means to be proud of one's culture and identity. This event showcases both the material and material culture, traditions, and practices of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines held in the month of October, along with the celebration of Indigenous Peoples Month worldwide. However, they claimed that heritage management remains a considerable challenge to specific strategies and schemes in the community context. It was pointed out that no organization has given financial assistance and training to the indigenous peoples' cultural communities for natural and cultural conservation and heritage management. Likewise, it was claimed that no evidence was documented to support efforts to conserve cultural heritage. If there were, researchers and organizations conducting fieldwork and immersion in the community would not have furnished them with their outputs.

The tribal leader, elders, barangay captain, barangay council, and constituents make essential decisions for the cultural community. The elders consider participatory ways of deliberating concerns affecting them. Planning activities utilizes both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The tribal leader and the barangay captain of each tribe call for a meeting as the need arises. Information is well-disseminated so that every sector or cultural community member will be aware. Thus, they may signify their intention to attend the meetings and all other activities.

4.8 Cultural Legacy and Self-Worth

Composed of closely knitted families, the Panay Bukidnon beams with pride that their cultural community is still practicing their unique

culture and traditions. Their families serve as a strong bond for them to be assured that the cultural legacy of the Panay Bukidnon will live on and transcend across generations.

The tribal leader narrated that he was one of those pioneers who advocated and supported the cause for their cultural community to be recognized in the whole country as Panay Bukidnon and not any other name. According to him, it was a tedious process, but it paid off, and the province's cultural communities were given due recognition. A middle-aged barangay council member emphasized that times have changed and modernization may take over their community. Still, their culture and identity as Panay Bukidnon remain intact. There might be external influences that will somehow challenge their practices. This, however, may be countered by their strong will to remain faithful to their culture. Through the years, they have remained resilient and hard-working. They wanted their children to carry with them the same disposition towards life. The Panay Bukidnon women consider themselves survivors of many difficulties in life. This trait may have been inherited from their ancestors who practiced the binukot. Binukot is a woman who has been kept at home or in her room to preserve her as the bearer of their culture, traditions, and practices, including oral traditions such as the chants and songs that tell their tales as an indigenous tribe. An elder woman recalls that the location of their community might be remote from the town proper, crossing several mountains and rivers to reach it, but they never considered leaving. Women assume the responsibility of nurturing younger generations by inculcating what it is to be a Panay Bukidnon. Like the Panay Bukidnon, the Ati is also composed of knitted family ties. This is shown in their close relationship with their kin by living together under one roof. The men of Ati bring with them their male children whenever they go farming or hunting. This practice serves as an apprenticeship for the younger men to inherit their culture as stewards of the forests. The chieftain of the Ati community in Antique disclosed that they have experienced being isolated and discriminated against by society because of their skin color and cultural practices. This triggered him along with his tribesmen to be more participative in ev-

ery activity of the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in coordination with the NCIP Office in the region. They also send their children to school to acquire knowledge and education to have better work opportunities with the hope that may uplift their way of living. However, the Ati parents have instilled in their children to adopt the good and beneficial cultural practices and values that maintain their identity and self-worth as indigenous peoples. For them, their community represents their core. The heart of their culture and identity is found in the home.

5. Conclusions

The Panay Bukidnon and Ati as indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines have a unique way of life, rich cultural beliefs, and heritage management practices that recognized them with a distinct identity. Their knowledge systems are the core values of Filipinos who have unique identities and cultures. The documentation of these cultures is a means of preservation and conservation of the unique, but dying Filipino aboriginal identity due to the presence of modernization and technologies. While the indigenous peoples exert their efforts in managing their culture and heritage, they also need the understanding and acceptance of those who are outside of norms and kind. The narratives of the explicit and tacit knowledge of the indigenous peoples call for the protection and participatory efforts of the multiple stakeholders who may serve as the strong key players in the passing of the unique culture to the next generations while embracing modernity and industrialization.

Acknowledgments

The guest editors Michael Chattalas and Bernadett Koles would like to offer special thanks to the Editor of Management Research Review (MRR), Dr. Joe Sarkis; the anonymous reviewers of both the MRR and the International Management Research Academy (IMRA); Michael Chattalas, Michael Cooper, Jatin Pancholi and Paurav Shukla, co-Chairs of the 2014 IMRA – Kean University International Conference; and our research assistants at Kean University, Jonathan Merritt and Erick Solis.

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Recieved: June-13-2023 Revised: Oct-17-2023 Accepted: Nov-20-2023



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