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The Cultural Heritage-Oriented Approach to Economic Development in the Philippines: A Comparative Study of Vigan, Ilocos Sur and Escolta, Manila

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Abstract: Goal 11 of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals prescribes that culture matters. However, the case of Escolta, Manila presents otherwise. This paper investigates the ways how cultural heritage can be a driver for economic development in the Philippines following the Van Der Borg and Russo's (2005) Culture-Oriented Economic Development (COED) framework. It stresses the interrelationship of inner cultural cluster dynamics, economic impacts, and socio-environmental impacts which provides for a cycle composed of culture promoting development and in return development fostering culture, then leading to development. The case of Escolta, Manila was compared to the case of Vigan, Ilocos Sur using the one-off initiative framework provided by UNESCO World Heritage Centre for heritage conservation. The results revealed that it is the lack of interest of property owners in Escolta, Manila as the principal shareholders that makes built-heritage conservation unmanageable. Since most built heritages are privately owned and have not been granted heritage status by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP), efforts to revive Escolta face significant threats. Thus there is a need for concrete legislative frameworks to address such apathy. Interestingly, the results corroborated the findings of Palaña (2015) explaining why it is easy for owners to sell the property or leave it to deteriorate than be burdened by its preservation costs without any definite return of investment. The thrust of Vigan's development framework was anchored on cultural heritage conservation leading to people emancipation as local guardians of cultural heritage resulting to direct and indirect economic benefits. If such framework can be replicated in the revitalization of Escolta, Manila, the Queen of Streets of Manila will rise back, pronouncing once more that cultural heritage can be the driver of economic development and that cultural heritage conservation is not always an obstacle to urban development in the Philippines.