

# Philippine Gabaldon Heritage School

## *Buildings in the New Normal: Safety, Sustainability and Human Development Perspectives*

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### **Abstract**

As the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education, stakeholders find means to return to the New Normal through limited face-to-face learning. The Philippine Gabaldon School Buildings (GSBs) are seen as venues where this can happen. Built from 1908 –1915, GSBs were erected during the American colonial government. Republic Act 11194 mandates these buildings' conservation. Due to its perceived astounding structure and cultural value, a qualitative study was conducted that delved into the existing publicly available documents related to the buildings, for in-depth analysis. The investigation highlights how GSBs potentially address the minimum health standards relevant to the pandemic and limited face-to-face learning. It was also found that safety protocols can be observed in these structures given the spacious perimeter, good ventilation, and high ceiling for classroom acoustics. GSBs could also contribute to sustainability efforts in promoting local tourism. As these GSBs relay narratives over time, local heritage could exert effort to promote sustainability and local cultural community. In other words, the findings reveal that (a) GSB qualifies as a prospect venue for face-to-face learning due to its ventilation and dimension; (b) the building is seen as a sustainable tourism landmark; and (c) the structure contributes to individual and community human development.

**Keywords:** *Heritage, Gabaldon School Buildings, New Normal, COVID-19, Sustainability, Philippines*

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## Introduction

The unimaginable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various societal aspects and transactions has created shifts on how human development and personal lifestyles. With mobility restrictions, even access to food has been under great threat that government institutions were urged to establish policies related to food security (Poudel et al., 2020:221-225). While the nature of the disease is continuously understood and with the presence of vaccines and health interventions, it is undeniable that there exists challenges and significant effects in terms of education, economy, travel and hospitality, and others. Policy makers and government institutions have established approaches to COVID-19 challenges to contribute to uninterrupted Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) responses. According to Rashid et al. (2020:340-343), learners are challenged with their classes as access and financing the emergency learning modalities become an issue. Aside from these, families with children also struggle in terms of mental health and childrearing practices (Prime et al., 2020:631). It is imperative that these inputs become central to COVID-19 recovery roadmap for sustainable development. Amidst the pandemic, social and personal lifestyles that uphold accountability and liability are at the core towards recovery from the pandemic. Altered lifestyle (Mattioli et al., 2021:356-359), as opposed to the usual pre-pandemic routine has been one of the major changes brought about by the health crisis.

Design and implementation of programs and policies on urban planning contribute significant hallmark in the new normal. A study by Rimapradesi and Fajrina (2021:134-144) revealed how Indonesian local government units have contextualized their own policies relative to the national government's mandates in mitigating the impact of the health crisis. Practices rooted on cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural domains on local, national, and global scales reflect efforts of communities, researchers, and stakeholders who pursue sustainable development in their own respective fields. Individuals' interaction and 'activity patterns' have been shaped by various health protocols and measures evident in different policies and programs (Munawar et al., 2021:1276). As communities become busy again with the influx of transactions and engagement among people, cultural continuity and the vibrance of various spaces serve as a reminder of recovery, healing, and (new) normalcy. Noting the possibility that the COVID-19 virus could still be present in the future, Jamaludin et al. (2020:165-170) recognized the significance of the community in observing health protocols and mandates in the New Normal.

The COVID-19 pandemic is indeed a human development crisis. The experience has exposed divide among people in terms of economy, technology, education, among other domains. Various government responses to the health crisis have created a gap on human capacity to be resilient and disruption-proof when it comes to social and economic engagement and interactions. Lloyd – Jones (2021:41-54) argued the crucial need to explore ways and means in the domains of self-care, practices, and approaches to link researchers and practitioners towards the provision of support during the pandemic. Beyond financial and social focus, the shift needs to highlight how individuals can maximize one's capacity to realize potential and personal pursuits amidst the crisis.

The Philippines' Gabaldon School Buildings (GSBs) are structures erected in the public school system built in the early 1900s. These school buildings were the brainchild of Filipino Assemblyman Isauro Gabaldon who in 1907 was instrumental in passing the Gabaldon Law (Act No. 1801) which institutionalized the budget in building these structures. GSBs represent the grand architectural heritage and historical narrative of the Filipino people (Ancho and San Juan, 2021:104-116). While some of these GSBs can still be found across the Philippines, some face threat of deterioration and demise. Thus, in 2019, President Rodrigo Duterte signed Republic Act 11194, known as the Gabaldon School Buildings Conservation Act, which upheld the "policy of the State to conserve and promote the country's historical and cultural heritage resources."

As the pandemic continues to impact "cultural ecology" (Wang and Du, 2021:187-192), including cultural contents (Vuckovic et al., 2021:379-397), the present study attempts to highlight GSB as a Filipino heritage and arts in the time of COVID-19 pandemic, and how these structures contribute to community well-being, health, safety, and human development. With community quarantines and school closures brought about by the pandemic, GSBs presence in the Philippines maybe considered a thing of the past, but with the gradual implementation of face-to-face classes, these structures become significant towards strict adherence to health and safety protocols in ensuring that no one gets left behind. Silberman (2020:467-475) has recognized how the health crisis breeds effects on safeguarding and highlighting cultural heritage, an event being a major turnout point in the post-war period.

Human development constructs are also highlighted in the present study by emphasizing how capacities of communities and individuals could be improved, making them resilient against disruption, such as the pandemic. Penkler et al. (2020:664-665) concluded that efforts spearheaded by the community as backed by up the government could beef up mechanisms in championing individuals and communities during a crisis. In the context of early childhood education, Egan et al. (2021:925-934) argued that teachers facilitate education based on young learners' pace. The presently experienced crises had emphasized how heritage serves as an ingredient towards achieving community solidarity, progress, and psychological health of individuals (De Luca et al., 2020:119-132).

The efforts of community members through various mechanisms in fighting the spread of the virus show favorable effect in stemming the disease (Lasry et al., 2020:451). As stakeholders find ways to implement limited face-to-face learning in schools in the Philippines, it also reflects efforts to address concerns such as digital divide, access to quality education, and uninterrupted teaching and learning processes. True enough, these steps bring individuals one step ahead in closing the gap in relation to various impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Efforts towards the upkeep of GSBs could be reaped as Filipino students gradually physically return to schools and take classes in these buildings. GSBs as learning facilities provide potential advantageous features relative to health protocols and standards. In the long run, banking on the mandates of RA 11194, GSBs do not

only stand as school buildings, but also as cultural icons of the local communities, as witness of the engagement of time, people, and space. Projecting GSBs at the core of local tourism creates a rediscovery of the past while keeping up with present-day challenges in foreseeing the future. Fernandez et al. (2022:121301) noted the crucial role of cultural heritage being one standard in which tourism competitiveness could be based in the post-pandemic era recovery. How can GSBs address minimum health standards in relation to limited face-to-face learning in the Philippines? How can GSBs contribute to sustainability efforts in promoting local tourism? These inquiries are the central questions of the present study. Overall, this paper highlights GSBs as narratives of culture and arts in pursuit of promoting sustainability and local cultural community. The COVID-19 health crisis has underscored the need to crucially reframe focus in realizing SGDs, especially in the region. Recovery and post-pandemic scenario need careful planning and approaches and culture and heritage also play significant roles in achieving these pursuits.

### Methodology

The present study utilizes qualitative method particularly document analysis. Focusing on the GSBs, the analyzed and interpreted data set came from the following materials which can be publicly accessed online: Republic Act 11194 (Gabaldon School Buildings Conservation Act); DepEd Memorandum No. 071 s. 2021 (Preparations for the Pilot Face-to-Face, Expansion and Transitioning to New Normal); Department of Education – Department of Health Joint Memorandum Circular No. 01, s. 2021 (Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of Limited Face-to-Face Learning Modality; and the Updated Tourism Response and Recovery Plan from the Philippines' Department of Tourism.

With the aim of capturing the emerging themes, the gathered data from the materials were analyzed qualitatively to answer the following research questions: (1) How can GSBs address minimum health standards in relation to limited face-to-face learning in the Philippines? (2) How can GSBs contribute to sustainability efforts in promoting local tourism? Both queries were answered by putting a premium on human development lens. Provisions and mandates serve as data sets of the documents which were eventually analyzed, clustered, and discussed according to established research questions. Furthermore, the study utilized documents which can be accessed publicly; hence, no ethical concerns have been noted on the part of the research. The following principles were observed in the conduct of the analysis: objectivity, fairness, and honesty. Furthermore, the targets of the investigation are to capture these GSBs current status, their place in COVID-19 recovery period, their cultural value, and their epitomes as insights to human development.

### Results and Discussion

This section discusses the results of the analysis based on the established research questions. It is mainly divided into two parts: GSB and minimum health standards in education; and GSB towards promoting local tourism. The findings are discussed through the human development lens in relation to the New Normal setting.

**Safety: GSBs and Minimum Health Standards in Education**

The need to develop measures in combatting the virus is an imperative step in the New Normal. The protocols need to be revisited as new findings about the COVID-19 arise (Khalifa et al., 2022:1-8). The presence of these policies and guidelines, being the “new order” (Sari et al., 2020:8938-8946), provides directions for individuals in navigating daily transactions and engagement outside the comforts of their homes as usual daily physical contacts are made.

In the light of the implementation of limited face to face classes in the Philippines, students are expected to be back again on school premises after two years on closures of learning facilities. With the onset of physical contacts and transactions, observing minimum health standards becomes a crucial step in ensuring safe, equitable, and secured back to school experience of Filipino students. By instituting protocols, GSBs serve at the forefront of learning in the New Normal. These structures boast features that fit the requirements of the contemporary times. The nature of GSBs reveals how teaching and learning could be continued in these spaces in a safe and secure manner.

GSBs as grand structures carry spacious perimeters, both indoor and outdoor. In the post pandemic scenario, expansive spaces allow room to encourage “meaningful collaboration and innovation” (Papu and Pal, 2020:1-8). The illustration below shows a GSB in Manila highlighting its perimeter space and floor plan. It can be noted how the structure becomes massive in terms of length and width.

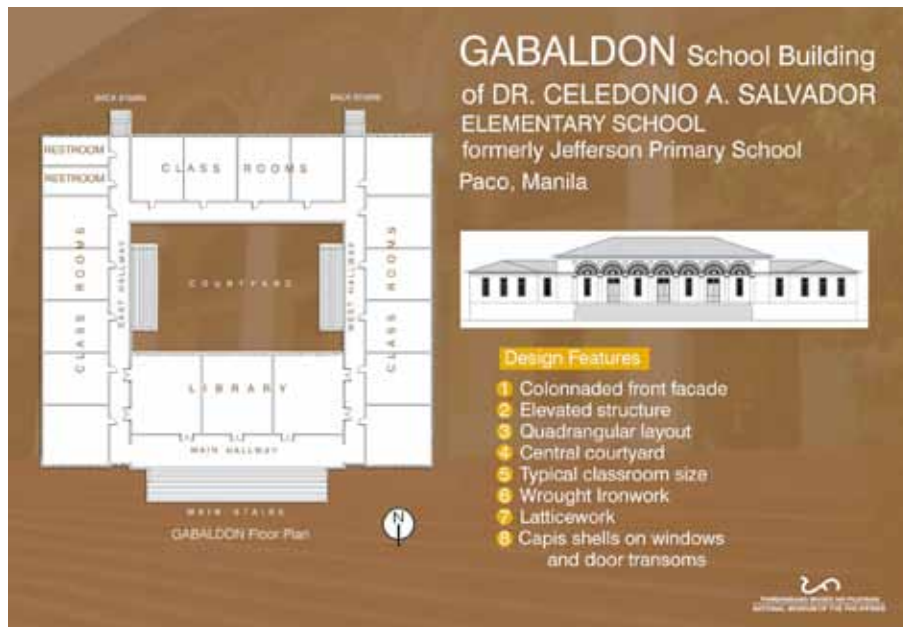


Figure 1. GSB Floor Plan. Source: <https://www.yodisphere.com/2021/06/gabaldon.html>.

The Philippine Department of Education’s mandate on the Preparations for the Pilot Face-to-Face, Expansion and Transitioning to New Normal (DepEd Memorandum No. 7 s. 202) clearly states that in managing school operations under the



classroom layout and structure indicator, seats occupied must not exceed the maximum allowed, being 1 – 2 meters apart. The space must also allow physical distancing equipped with effective management of traffic system.



Figure 2. GSB of Dr. CA Salvador Elementary School in Paco, Manila. Source: <https://www.yodisphere.com/2021/06/gabaldon.html>.



Figure 3. Façade of a GSB in Cebu. Source: <https://verafiles.org/articles/heritage-lessons-saving-gabaldon-schoolhouses>.

The Joint Memorandum Circular issued by the Philippine Department of Health and Department of Education (Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1, s. 2021) outlines how other facilities and large spaces could also be used as learning areas. These include the school grounds, and other facilities. Megahed and Ehab (2021:110471) stressed in their study how building designs could contribute to combating the spread of the virus. Given GSBs' lay-out, safety protocols could be observed most especially with the spacious perimeter of the area.



Figure 4. Hallway of a GSB. Source: <http://photos1.blogger.com/blogger/7662/1454/1600/4487scd.jpg>.

Good ventilation is also one aspect that can be attributed as a merit of GSB. The Philippines, being a tropical country is home to structures and building with good ventilation, and GSBs are designed to allow the flow of fresh air. Foster and Kinzel (2021:021904) noted that learning spaces that are ventilated with moderate filters contribute to lessening the infection transmission. Coupled with social distancing, ventilation has been regarded as contributory in controlling the virus (Sun and Zhai, 2020:102390). Enhanced ventilation is regarded as a factor that could reduce virus transmission (Morawska et al., 2020:105832).



Figure 5. Inside the rehabilitated GSB. Source: <http://www.balungao.gov.ph/?p=1534>.

With limited face-to-face sessions, teachers are expected to conduct actual classes, and this poses the risks of transmission through saliva and droplets. As COVID-19 passes on from one person to another by talking, sneezing, or coughing (Valenzuela – Fonseca et al., 2022:529), it could be assumed that the risk is higher as teachers conduct classes, especially with exerting efforts to be heard by the students. GSBs as structures with high ceilings (Senate of the Philippines Press Release, 2015), serve to enhance “freedom of speech and engagement” (Study International, 2019). High ceiling improves the possibilities for optimum classroom acoustics. With this set up, noise level inside the classroom is decreased and speech recognition becomes favorable (Culling et al., 2020:223-228). Teachers and students alike do not need to raise their voices to be heard or understood.



Figure 6. GSBs presented in the tourism website of a local government. Source: <https://www.ragaycam-sur.gov.ph/tourism/gabaldon-building/>.

#### **Sustainability: GSBs Towards Promoting Local Tourism in the New Normal**

Tourism and hospitality industry has suffered undeniable impact of the health crisis. The pandemic has created chaos on a global scale as individuals lost their jobs owing to lockdown, restrictions, and quarantine measures. Small enterprises related to travel were affected and struggle to keep afloat. A study by Rech and Migliorati (2021:6301) concluded that due to COVID-19, people had decreased cultural activities and travel activities. The way people consume cultural contents has also shifted from the usual physical contact to online and virtual tours and experience, which can also be considered as another challenge and competition faced during the pandemic.

Being one of the hardest hits by the health crisis (Franczuk et al., 2022:e00217), the onset of the return of face-to-face interactions and lifting of travel bans seems to be a promising development in the industry. Innovative options have been practiced fulfilling the absence of physical tourism activities (Jeon and Yang, 2020, 3324-3338). Given the realizations during the pandemic, the tourism industry is



posed as a period to devise mechanisms that advance sustainable tourism and hospitality practices, highlighting disruptive-free plans and programs.

GSBs as community icons could be tapped to emphasize local tourism. Aside from being a heritage site, GSBs could potentially contribute to enriching community capacity emphasizing history, community engagement, and a sense of national pride. With the participation of various stakeholders, GSBs position could give a boost on local communities, thereby allowing sustainable tourism to emerge. The grandeur structure and historical past of these structures will not only fill the minds of the learners and teachers who occupy the buildings, but tourists could also witness how GSBs stood the test of time: educating the Filipino people through teaching and learning and standing as a reminder of the country's glorious past towards sustainability. Lee and Leung (2022:76-93) recognized the need to advance tourism forms that are more sustainable leading to the enhancement of tourism at the localities. Indeed, tourism positively affects the locals of the community where it belongs (Yoopetch, 2022:3-22).

While some GSBs are currently pipelined to be projected as historical sites, the present study argues that more attention and provision should be given to materialize these ideals. On a positive note, Brouder et al., (2020:735-746) noted how the presently-experienced crisis could lead people to appreciate and express support for local business and tourist spots that are "lesser known." Stakeholders and government and non-government entities need to put premium on the potential of GSBs to contribute to sustainability efforts in promoting local tourism (Saleh et al., 2022:48-63). Encouraging local tourists could remain a trend despite scrapping travel bans at larger scales (Flew and Kirkwood, 2021:16-20). In the tourism website of Laoag City, one GSB in the community is listed as a potential destination for visitors. The description states that:

"Constructed in 1929 as part of the implementation of the Gabaldon Act 1801. The Act was sponsored by then Assemblyman Isauro Gabaldon, which explains why the law is more commonly known as the "Gabaldon Law." Gabaldon Law's main objective was to promote that education was for all, which explains why the "Gabaldon" type schools can be found all over the country to provide basic education – literacy to all Filipinos. The school, located in the heart of Laoag City, seems to have existed forever in the minds and hearts of every Laoagueño, not just an institution of learning but a historical and cultural heritage." Source: <https://laoagcity.gov.ph/tourism/cultural.html>

The presence of GSBs all over the Philippines could also be tapped as a springboard for contextualized learning in various learning areas such as history, values education, and others. As the Department of Education mandates the contextualization of learning, students and teachers no longer depend on theoretical concepts but GSBs stand as evident artifact. As these GSBs relay different narrative overs time, local heritage could be given emphasis as an effort to promote sustainability and local cultural community while delivering quality and accessible education.



Figure 7. GSB of Laoag Central School. Source: <https://laoagcity.gov.ph/tourism/cultural.html>.

### Human Development: Perspectives and Impact

The documents analyzed in the present study revealed strong connections among stakeholders in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. DepEd Memorandum No. 071 s. 2021 clearly states how individuals and the community could work hand in hand in ensuring the safety and security of school children during the conduct of limited face to face classes. As a study that looks through the lens of human development, GSBs in the time of pandemic contributes to describing the colorful past of the Filipino people while making it meaningful by highlighting historical and social significance. GSBs as potentials agents towards sustainable tourism contribute not just to individual growth and meaning, but also of the development of the community, the country, and beyond.

Significant facets of human development have been witnesses to the ravage of the COVID-19 crisis. Enterprises have closed leaving people jobless with economic transactions paralyzed, physical and mental well-being were at threat as death toll continues to escalate, and while limited face to face classes are underway, it is no doubt that the education landscape has been shaped and altered in unexpected directions. Technology has played a crucial role in most interactions initiated by people: commerce, education, socialization. This trend seemingly creates layered challenges as access to the internet and technological device has caused digital divide and inequality between and among users.

### Conclusion

The present study goes beyond school buildings and limited face to face classes. The argument manifests over and above safety, sustainability, and human development perspectives. These three constructs, when viewed together echo a discourse that calls to examine and reexamine the currently experienced pandemic through the lens of equity and equitability. The health crisis may have posed challenges, but it is undeniable that opportunities also come along it. Stakeholders, especially those in the local communities should be provided with support that

genuinely showcase their potential and capacity: the post-pandemic scenario is a period to revive the localities: the past, the present, and the future.

More than equipping individuals to be resilient and be able to transact disruption-free activities, it is argued that people's capabilities be improved and given attention to create meaningful experiences in the present that is anchored on their colorful past. This way, a future anchored on one's total way of life can be imagined.

The chronicles of GSBs as heritage structures pose significant narrative in the new normal era. As issues on safety is addressed, sustainability also surfaces as a priority. With all these constructs, human development positions at the core of the entire efforts towards healing and recovery in the post – pandemic period. It is about time to redefine the shift towards local communities together with individuals to champion heritage and culture that make up one's local identity. By doing so, the foundation of a country's basic unit becomes a solid representation of the totality of individual experiences.

### Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited on the researcher's firsthand personal observation and/or experience, and the existing documents publicly available online. The arguments and conclusions on the applicability of GSBs structure for ventilation and acoustics due to high ceiling are all based on the triangulation of the aforementioned former and latter limits. Hence, future researchers are suggested to further examine these GSBs on the perspective of in-depth engineering and architecture since the study's scope solely covers the layers of educational and cultural point of view. Furthermore, though there are some historical episodes related to the buildings, the investigation is limited to the GSBs present-day descriptions, its place in this era of recovery, and its present-day cultural value and relevance to human development. Thus, future researchers are encouraged to delve deeper on the buildings historical past to put them on record for further studies.

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