Revitalising and representing the endangered intangible cultural heritage of traditional salt making (*asin tibuok*) in Bohol, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Traditional salt making in Bohol, Philippines, is a dying practice. The production of *asin tibuok* involves extracting and processing salt from seawater by boiling enriched brine in earthenware pots to form hardened salt cakes. This intangible cultural heritage (hereafter 'ICH') is now practised by only a handful of salt makers and is the only salt of its kind still produced and used in the Philippines today.

Collaborating with local knowledge holders (i.e. salt makers and potters), researchers, institutional partners in heritage preservation and community advocates, our project sought to document, support, safeguard, revitalise and represent this important cultural heritage. This paper discusses the processes, challenges and accomplishments associated with fostering this engagement and collaboration, as well as with developing initiatives to preserve and represent ICH in a museum exhibition and through public programs.

Keywords

Endangered material culture, heritage preservation, safeguarding, co-production of knowledge, museum representation, traditional salt making, *asin tibuok*, EMKP, anthropology of salt, Bohol, Philippines

Introduction

Traditional salt making once flourished along the southwestern coast of Bohol. However, over the past 20 years, there has been a significant decline in both the production and consumption of locally made salt, known as *asin tibuok*. Many factors have contributed to this decline, including the intensive labour requirements and low profitability, the availability of inexpensive, imported salt, and the government's Asin Law (R.A.8172), which regulates salt production. Additionally, sustainability and environmental issues have further hindered the continuation of this craft and livelihood.

In 2021, the authors initiated a collaborative project with a group of salt makers in Alburquerque, Bohol, Philippines, to document this important intangible heritage and support the safeguarding and revitalisation of this local livelihood. This included public education programs, local partnerships, and material and financial support. For the salt makers, the revitalisation efforts aimed to revive the practice as a viable livelihood and a sustainable craft. Central to these efforts was a commitment to preserving the craft's authenticity, thus ensuring that salt making continues to serve as a meaningful expression of the community's cultural heritage and identity while also

providing the producers with a source of income.

Local community efforts to revive salt making began prior to this, in 2020. During the global COVID-19 pandemic, 26 salt makers from the municipality of Alburquerque formed the *Kapunungan Sa Mang-Asinay Sa Alburquerque* (hereafter 'KASAMA') cooperative. The cooperative was established to combine members' labour, resources and knowledge to revitalise traditional salt making as a livelihood. All the cooperative members grew up in Alburquerque, and most learned the salt-making craft as children from family members. Faced with a lack of work during the pandemic, they saw an opportunity to re-establish their salt-making livelihood; however, at that time, they lacked the financial resources to build a communal workshop.

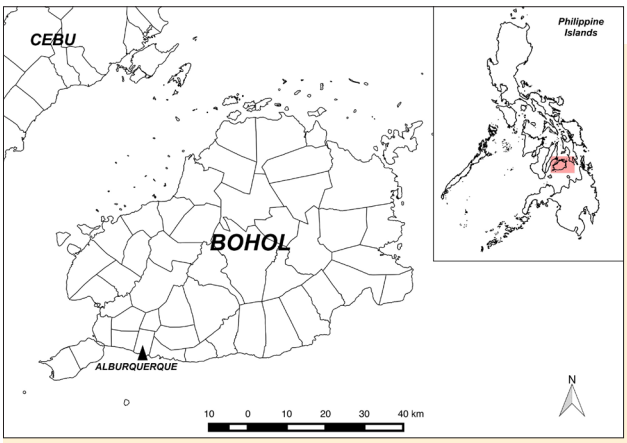


Figure 1
Map of research location in Alburquerque, Bohol, Philippines.
Source: Map by Andrea Yankowski.

In 2021, the authors partnered with KASAMA as part of a documentation project funded by the Endangered Material Knowledge Program (hereafter 'EMKP') of the British Museum to help reestablish a community salt workshop. The project was led by Andrea Yankowski (principal investigator) and Dr. Ana Maria Theresa Labrador (collaborator) in partnership with KASAMA, the Central Visayas Association of Museums and the National Museum Bohol, then headed by Audrey Dawn Tomada. The EMKP project aimed to document the material processes and technical knowledge related to the construction of a traditional salt workshop (*kamalig*) and the production of *asin tibuok*. Concurrently, it provided the salt makers with the funding to build a salt workshop to support their craft.

This collaboration has been ongoing, expanding beyond its initial scope to include the development of a museum exhibition, public programs, and engagement and collaboration with national agencies, local government units, public officials and community advocates. It also involves other local knowledge holders, such as the pottery artisans who produce the earthenware pots used to make *asin tibuok*, which is another endangered craft in Bohol. These partnerships are part of ongoing efforts to promote and protect both tangible and intangible local heritage.

Asin Tibuok (unbroken salt): an endangered practice

The practice of making *asin tibuok* is an important part of the local heritage of Alburquerque, Bohol (see Figure 1). Salt making was once a flourishing craft industry in many coastal areas of the Central Philippines, but has now become extinct, except among a small community in Bohol (Yankowski 2007, 2019, 2025). *Asin tibuok* is produced by extracting salt from seawater by boiling enriched brine in earthenware pots until it solidifies into a hard, 'unbroken' salt cake. Traditionally, this product was bartered for rice grown in the interior farmlands, forming part of a vital, interdependent trading network of goods between highland and lowland communities. Today, this intangible cultural heritage is maintained by only a few salt makers in Bohol and remains the only salt of its kind still produced and used in the Philippines.

The importance of salt in early societies, including in small communities like Albuquerque, is often overlooked. Before refrigeration and other mechanical means of preserving food, salt was the main preservative for fish, meat and other perishables. It was also critical for the health of farm animals. Salt was important worldwide to the extent that it was commonly treated as a currency of exchange (Chen 2004; Godelier 1969; Harding 2021; McKillop 2021; Pankhurst 1962). Governments often regulated production and trade, and territories often fought over their rights to salt sources. For example, in Italy, the remnants of government control over salt can be seen in many tobacco shop signs where 'Sali e Tabacchi' were sold. After 1976, only tobacco was regulated, and the shops stopped selling salt. This governmental regulation contributed to cultural discord between the peoples of Florence and Pisa, and the Florentines' refusal to pay taxes on salt led to their bread being unsalted, a tradition that persists to this day (Kurlansky 2010).

Salt in the Philippines was also treated as a commodity of exchange. Anthropologist Alfred E. Jenks (2005) wrote that in Bontoc, the salt producers of Mayinit Pueblo (today's Mainit village) would barter it for other food, baskets and pots. In the Visayas (Central Philippines), salt was historically exchanged for rice and cotton (de Loarca 1911/1582). In Bohol until recently, salt was primarily bartered for agricultural products or transported by boat to trade for goods from other islands (Yankowski 2007). It not only flavoured food and provided essential nutrients but was also used to preserve fish and seafood, often through salt drying or fermentation.

Traditional salt production is time-consuming and labour-intensive work. This is particularly true for making *asin tibuok,* which requires specialised craftsmanship and knowledge gained through years of hands-on experience. The entire process takes three to six months from start to finish. It begins with soaking coconut husks in seawater ponds (*parils*) for three to four months, allowing them to become well saturated with salt. These husks are typically sourced from local coconut oil producers, reflecting a traditional system of labour exchange. The salt makers manually remove the husks from the coconuts and then transport them to the ponds, often on bamboo rafts along local waterways. Approximately 3000 coconut husks are needed to make 120 pots of salt.

After soaking in seawater for several months, the husks are collected, sun-dried and manually cut into narrow segments to undergo a firing process (*daub*), transforming them into salt-enriched ashes (*gasang).* The firing process typically takes three to four days and requires constant monitoring day and night to control the intensity of the fire.

The resulting hard, white ash (*gasang*) is then placed into a hand-crafted, cone-shaped funnel (*sagsag)* with additional seawater to leach the salt into a brine solution. This filtering process is repeated three times to achieve a highly saline solution.

Lastly, this brine is boiled in small earthenware pots (*kun*) placed atop a wood-fuelled furnace (*lagaan).* The pots are heated, and the brine is gradually poured into them. Continuous heating and boiling induces evaporation, producing salt inside the pot. When the bottom of the clay pot cracks, it indicates that the salt has solidified into a hard salt cake. This cooking process typically takes an entire day to complete (see Figure 2).



Figure 2
Steps in making *asin tibuok,* as described in the text.
Source: Photos by Andrea Yankowski.



Figure 3
Raw materials, resources and environment: wood, clay and coconut husks.
Source: Photos by Andrea Yankowski.

The production of *asin tibuok* is closely tied to local resources and community practices, both of which are endangered. The production relies on raw materials such as coconut husks and locally made earthenware pots, which have become increasingly difficult and costly to source. For example, until recently, there was only one potter in the community who maintained the knowledge and skills necessary to craft salt pots. This craft requires knowledge of where to source the clay and how to prepare it, and an understanding of the traditional techniques for forming the pots to the correct size and thickness. It also requires having the skills and knowledge to successfully fire them in an open-air fire.

Additionally, traditional building materials, such as native hardwoods like molave, are endangered, now often necessitating the substitution of less durable wood species. Nautilus shells, which were traditionally used as brine ladles, are also now endangered; they are typically replaced with coconut shells or modern materials. Moreover, sourcing firewood has become more difficult and costly, which increases production costs (see Figure 3).

Salt-making landscapes, too, are endangered. The salt workshops are located within fragile mangrove ecosystems, designated as protected coastal areas, yet they remain threatened by both natural and human-induced factors. Recently, a die-off of mangrove trees occurred in a nearby coastal area, raising environmental concerns. Moreover, the recent construction of resorts and other establishments nearby has raised concerns among local salt makers about the risk of pollution, particularly from plastic waste. This situation highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing the preservation of cultural practices with local development and environmental protection, particularly in regions where traditional industries are adapting to modern pressures.

A further ongoing challenge is the impact of rising sea levels in the area due to climate change. The salt makers have observed more frequent flooding at their workshops and surrounding areas. Rising sea levels are likely to continue posing a significant threat to these coastal sites, along with earthquakes, such as the 7.2 magnitude (Mw) earthquake that struck Bohol in 2013. It has been shown that regional seismic activity is causing uplift of local marine terraces, with the potential to impact coastlines and intertidal habitats, alter waterways and cause ground ruptures (Shyu et al. 2025; Rollan et al. 2015). This is in addition to causing the destruction of local infrastructure, significant economic hardships, population displacement and emotional trauma.

Fortunately, the coastal mangrove forests help to

mitigate some of the impacts of rising seas and increased storm activity in the area. They also serve as important habitats for local marine life, many of which are valued as food sources by the community. For instance, while working, the salt makers often set out handmade bamboo traps to catch mud crabs. The crabs forage at night and are collected from the traps each morning. Given the essential role that mangroves play in coastal protection, biodiversity and local livelihoods, it is important to continue to protect the existing mangroves and to replant any that are lost. This effort not only safeguards the environment but also supports local communities, their heritage and their connection to the land.

The ICH related to social practices and spaces associated with salt production is also rapidly being lost. Traditionally, these social practices united the community through shared experiences. This includes the transmission of craft-specific rituals and taboos, shared lexicon for the tools and materials used, and shared cultural land-use practices. Additionally, food memories tied to cooking and eating with *asin tibuok* in family homes are also part of the ICH that is being generationally lost. These aspects of intangible cultural heritage are typically learned through lived experiences, while immersed in the community and shared as part of cultural lifeways.

Salt workshops and salt sites traditionally served as gathering places where work and social activities were shared. All family members would assist with salt-making tasks, allowing for the transmission of the skills and knowledge from one generation to the next. Salt-making practices also encouraged social interaction. For instance, the burning of husks typically extends throughout the night, accompanied by shared food, drinks, stories and camaraderie.

Traditionally, local children would grow up observing or experiencing these practices, as well as the interplay between the community, the natural environment and the salt-making process. Nowadays, the young generation has limited opportunities to experience this first-hand. The KASAMA salt workshop helps to fulfil this need within the community. It was built by community practitioners on traditional salt-making land, with the aim of replicating these cultural experiences within the local community as well as sharing them more broadly with the general public, researchers and tourists.

EMKP documentation project

The EMKP documentation project took place in May and June 2022. Over the course of five weeks, the researchers documented the sourcing of native materials, the construction of a salt workshop and the preparation of potted salt. Concurrently, they had on-site discussions with participants regarding the intangible heritage. They employed ethnoarchaeological research methods, including photographic and video documentation and informal interviews, to capture and record local knowledge, materials and practices. The collected assets are now part of the EMKP digital archives at the British Museum (Yankowski and Labrador 2023).

Collaboration on the project involved ongoing discussions and in-person meetings among the researchers, KASAMA and the National Museum of Bohol. These discussions provided a platform to allow all the participants to have a voice in the design and implementation of the project and the division of work. From these discussions, KASAMA was tasked with selecting project participants and managing the day-to-day work schedules and activities. The researchers were provided with the schedule and were given full access to photograph and video-record activities and interview practitioners. Additional meetings were held periodically to address various ongoing matters.

Ongoing discussions were important for balancing the various participants' objectives. For example, the primary goal for the researchers was to document the traditional methods, materials and practices related to *asin tibuok*. This involved prioritising the use of traditionally sourced native materials and capturing aspects of traditional construction methods. On the other hand, the salt maker's main priority was to re-establish a sustainable salt workshop that would function long-term as a cooperative workspace. These priorities were generally aligned but occasionally required discussion and compromises.

For example, traditionally, a salt workshop is owned and operated by a single nuclear family, which is reflected in the layout of the workspace. However, in this case, the salt workshop was intended to function as a larger community workspace. After discussions, it was mutually decided that a more spacious workshop would better accommodate the salt maker's needs and provide space for public visitations, aligning with long-term plans for heritage tourism. These engaged discussions allowed the researchers to be more



Figure 4
Salt workshop built on traditional lands but atop a platform of limestone rocks and gravel to prevent flooding.
Source: Photo by Andrea Yankowski.

adaptable and socially relevant to community needs.

Environmental concerns were also addressed in these meetings. Rising sea levels have resulted in increased flooding in the coastal areas of Bohol, where many salt workshops are situated. To address this issue, it was collectively agreed that the workshop should be built at the traditional location, but on a stone foundation, elevating it above the high-tide level to ensure usability and sustainability without the risk of flooding (see Figure 4).

Some other minor modifications were made to the workshop to ensure its longevity without compromising its authenticity or cultural practices. Overall, the researchers found that engaging in open and transparent discussions led to improved decisions that could accommodate all the participants.

Furthermore, concerns were raised about the possibility of microplastics in the salt. To address this, in 2022, Dr. Augustine Doronila, a chemist and researcher at the University of Melbourne's Grimwade Centre for Conservation of Cultural Materials, made a preliminary study on the elemental analysis of an *asin tibuok*. He concluded that the ash from the burnt coconut husks would presumably not have microplastics because these are burnt in the process. However, he added that the 'microplastic analysis will be interesting as it really depends on the brine that they make from the coconut ash' and that microplastics might be rehydrated once again (Doronila, personal communication, 5 December 2022). The researchers hope to collaborate further with Dr. Doronila to address these concerns.

Museum exhibition

The production of *asin tibuok* is a process characterised by innovation and the dedication of multiple generations of salt makers and salt potters. To effectively interpret and present this ICH within a museum exhibition, the researchers undertook extensive research and documentation in collaboration with local knowledge holders. This partnership not only enriched the researchers' understanding of the tradition but also empowered community members as project stakeholders, thereby enabling multiple objectives to be achieved.

The initial conceptualisation of the *asin tibuok* exhibition at the National Museum of the Philippines (hereafter 'NMP') in Bohol was spearheaded by Audrey Dawn Tomada, Area Museum Head, in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. This coincided with the planning for the EMKP documentation project, which provided the research and framework for developing the exhibition. At that time, the museum was closed to the public due to ongoing government COVID restrictions. This situation freed up some of the museum staff's time, allowing them to serve as coordinators and facilitators between the researchers and KASAMA. Many of the staff also actively participated in the documentation project, gaining first-hand exposure to the practitioners (the community of salt makers and potters) and their craft. Consequently, this experience provided valuable training, preparing them to contribute to the exhibition's design and serve as knowledgeable museum guides for visitors.

In late 2022, the plans, narrative and layout for the *asin tibuok* exhibition were completed. The exhibition drew heavily on research conducted by the EMKP project, as well as on a previous *asin tibuok* exhibition organised and displayed at the former NMP Bohol by museum researchers Leo Batoon and Charlemagne Tantingco, with assistance from Yankowski (National Museum of the Philippines – Bohol 2013; Republic of the Philippines 2013). The objective was to enhance the original exhibition by incorporating updated information and improved methods of representation.

To achieve this, the exhibition planning involved multiple



Figure 5
Engagements and collaborations with knowledge holders, including intergenerational potters Josephine Sumingit, her daughter and granddaughter (left), and KASAMA Cooperative members (right).
Source: Photos by Andrea Yankowski (left) and Audrey Dawn Tomada (right).

consultations with various knowledge holders and cultural representatives. This resulted in a collaborative exhibition co-created by the cultural bearers (see Figure 5). Involving community members in the curation process ensured that the exhibition reflected their lived experiences and current practices. Like the culture bearers, the exhibition faced challenges in conveying these issues, as it represents a living heritage. It was considered important for everyone involved in making *asin tibuok* to see themselves in the exhibition, identifying their work as a complex product of traditional knowledge and skills. Moreover, overcoming the ethnographic present in museum exhibitions required contextualising and representing relevance.

While organising the exhibition, the National Museum recognised that it could not replace the actual site or substitute for the living heritage itself. Instead, it aimed to function as a supportive platform for raising awareness about an endangered cultural tradition that requires broader recognition and appreciation for both the craft and its practitioners. In addition, the exhibition sought to convey intangible heritage through suitable representations, including video recordings of the salt production process, which were made available to the public in accessible formats. These videos complemented the static displays, allowing visitors to engage with the material in a more dynamic way, thus enhancing their overall experience. Future plans will explore the possibility of encouraging site visits as an extension of the museum experience to provide more context to the relationship between the people, landscape and heritage.

The museum also aimed to acknowledge the role of the broader community in salt making. It is important to recognise that while the production of *asin tibuok* is often viewed as primarily a male activity today, in the past, all family members contributed to the labour. Moreover,



Figure 6
Potter Josephine Sumingit sourcing clay, forming salt pots and firing pots.
Source: Photos by Andrea Yankowski.



Figure 7
Opening of the exhibition, which featured the knowledge holders (salt makers) and the public.
Source: Photos by Neil Gerard Paredes Reyes (left) and Audrey Dawn Tomada (right top and bottom).

women potters play a crucial role in crafting salt pots, typically working from their homes, often outside public view. The pots are handmade, using locally sourced clay and traditional forming techniques, and are open-air fired. Given their important role, the researchers chose to document the intergenerational practices of women salt potters, particularly the family of Josephine Sumingit, the only family currently actively continuing the salt pot-making tradition in Alburquerque (see Figure 6).

The resulting exhibition, titled '*Paglawig*: the Boholano Way of Life' and featuring Bohol's *asin tibuok*, was completed and unveiled to the public on 31 May 2023 as a culmination of the National Heritage Month celebrations (Tomada et al. 2024). The event was attended by the salt makers and salt potters who played a central role in the realisation of the project (Figure 7). Guests were encouraged to learn more about the local salt-making heritage through online materials and public programs, as well as to directly support the salt makers by purchasing *asin tibuok* to experience the artisanal sea salt first-hand.

Public programs, social media and public engagement

The museum has served as an organising institution for public programs that support the salt makers and potters and their revitalisation efforts. This includes hosting webinars, creating social media posts, offering workshops and providing training sessions. The overall goal of the museum's efforts is to create exhibitions and experiences that connect the public to their local heritage through living individuals and practices.

Early on, it was recognised that public education was needed to promote awareness among the general public about the traditional salt-making craft of Alburquerque, Bohol. While many older individuals in Bohol have first-hand experience and memories of *asin tibuok*, the younger generation does not. For this reason, it was important to raise awareness about this local heritage beyond the museum exhibition.

To accomplish this, social media and local partnerships were leveraged to increase awareness. A Facebook page, titled 'Asin Tibuok – Traditional Salt Making in Bohol, Philippines', was created to share updates on the EMKP activities (Yankowski 2022). Concurrently, the National Museum Bohol and the Central Visayas Association of Museums featured various related activities and updates on their respective Facebook pages. The NMP Bohol also organised public lectures and workshops, both online and on-site, focusing on salt making, pottery making and other related crafts.

Workshops were also organised to address specific needs, such as the shortage of skilled salt potters. These training sessions aimed to share knowledge about local pottery making, including hands-on experience with a skilled potter. The goal of these initiatives is to support and revitalise the traditional practices related to *asin tibuok,* particularly among the younger generation, while fostering a greater appreciation for the contributions of all community members involved in this cultural heritage.

The museum and its partners are also advocating for more public education on the traditional salt-making craft in Bohol. This includes educating the public about its history and uniqueness, as well as addressing misconceptions and exoticisations in the public sphere and market. For instance, the term 'dinosaur egg' is frequently used in the marketing of *asin tibuok* online, on social media, in shops, and even by national agencies promoting food and tourism. This term lacks relevance to the cultural history of the product. To counter this and other potential misrepresentations, we have encouraged public education initiatives through visitor engagements, workshops, discussions and demonstrations that highlight the salt's cultural significance as well as its health benefits. This has included local cooking demonstrations, showcasing both traditional and modern uses of *asin tibuok*. These efforts are designed to appeal to many different audiences and to ensure the sustainability of the craft and livelihood for future generations.

Additionally, outreach programs were carried out in collaboration with local chefs, restaurants, tourism personnel and businesses. Notably, a partnership with a local chocolate company led to the development of a specialty salted chocolate product using *asin tibuok*. This business, The Chocolate Chamber, also hosted a public event titled 'Asinfully Chocolate', which included a public lecture and educational materials. Other local businesses are now proudly featuring *asin tibuok* in products such as coffee drinks and local delicacies, contributing to increased public interest and awareness.

In addition to these initiatives, the National Museum of the Philippines has included *asin tibuok* in its product offerings at its museum shops, run by the museum cooperative, at NMP Cebu and the National Museum of Fine Arts in Manila, and through direct consignment at NMP Bohol, to support and promote the craft and salt makers.

The local government has partnered in efforts to protect and promote local salt making. In 2022, the Municipality of Alburquerque designated Sitio Puntod, the area where KASAMA's salt workshop is located, as a recognised cultural heritage site, enhancing its significance within the community. The local government unit (hereafter 'LGU') also sponsored a local pottery training workshop and is actively engaging in community outreach programs and promoting *asin tibuok* as part of its long-term heritage tourism plan.

Furthermore, the Provincial Government of Bohol, through the Center for Culture and Art Development (hereafter 'CCAD') and in partnership with the National Museum Bohol, sponsored a series of pottery-making workshops, lectures and hands-on pottery activities with visual artist and potter Aba Dalena. These initiatives received support from various community stakeholders, including the Bohol Arts and Cultural Heritage Council, the offices of Senator Loren Legarda, Congressman Edgar M. Chatto and Alburquerque Mayor Don Richie Buates, among others (Reyes 2024).

Lastly, a recent joint effort led by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, CCAD, the Provincial Government and the LGU Alburquerque, along with various culture bearers of *asin tibuok* (the salt makers, salt potters and coconut farmers), resulted in the inscription of 'The practice of making *asin tibuok*, the artisanal sea salt of the Boholano of Bohol Island, Philippines' on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list for safeguarding (Manipon 2024). This UNESCO ICH inscription should be viewed as a genuinely collaborative community effort to seek international recognition for this unique craft and the preservation of this traditional knowledge.

Public policy

Until recently, outdated government legislation has hindered the revival of traditional salt making in Bohol. Trade and tariff policies enacted during the 1990s negatively impacted local producers by making it easier and cheaper to import salt. Moreover, the 1995 *Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide* (hereafter 'the Asin Law') mandated the iodisation of all food-grade salt sold in the Philippines. These legislative policies created economic barriers for small-scale salt producers in Bohol and across the country.

Recently, there has been public support for repealing

Project Initiatives, Activities, and Outcomes

Initiative	Activities	Impact/Results
EMKP Project	Collaborated with KASAMA to construct a community salt workshop; photo and video documentation of knowledge and materials. Participated in a local training workshop for salt potters and a community-led launch celebration.	KASAMA has been producing artisanal salt at the workshop since its launch in 2022. Visibility of project and workshop within the community.
Museum Exhibition and Public Education	Researched, designed, and created a museum exhibition and educational programs such as pottery workshops, webinars, public lectures, and social media content.	Increased public awareness of local salt-making heritage and enhanced community engagement and appreciation for artisanal sea salt.
Product Promotion	Formed local business partnerships; hosted community events, tourism initiatives, and cooking demonstrations.	Product visibility; increased product sales and distribution. KASAMA participated in national craft/food fairs.
Public Policy	Outreach and support for local land/heritage ordinances and repeal of national 'Asin Law'.	Local land/heritage ordinances updated to protect salt heritage lands. Legislative support for salt makers, including RA 119851 'An act strengthening and revitalizing the salt industry in the Philippines.'
Academic Research	Depository of EMKP project assets at British Museum; international journal publications; international conference presentations; webinars; social media content.	Contributes to the regional and global knowledge base on salt research and Philippine salt heritage. Archival database of EMKP project assets at British Museum.
Other Community- Led Initiatives	Application for UNESCO ICH nomination; 2016 Slow Food Ark of Taste.	UNESCO ICH inscription; Global recognition to help protect and sustain the traditional practice of salt making in Alburquerque, Bohol.

Figure 8
Summary of project initiatives, activities and results discussed in the text.
Source: Visual representation of data was created using mylens.ai.

the Asin Law and revitalising the Philippines' domestic salt industry. This support was bolstered by a series of news articles published in national newspapers and journals throughout 2022 that highlighted the decline of the domestic salt industry in the Philippines (Aning and Lagare 2022; Chi 2023; Lalu 2022; Romauldez-Valtos 2022; Sotelo 2022). Notably, these articles pointed out that salt importation reached a record high of over 92% in the archipelago, primarily imported from Australia and China, to the detriment of domestic producers.

Fortunately, public policy actions have been taken to reverse these outdated laws and encourage greater domestic salt production. House Bill 1976 was drafted in 2022 to promote government investment in domestic salt production. Consequently, this led to the amendment of the aforementioned laws through RA 119851, titled *An Act Strengthening and Revitalizing the Salt Industry in the Philippines*. This new legislation aims to support and enhance the local salt industry, potentially helping small-scale producers across the country and revitalising traditional salt-making practices (Chi 2023; De Leon 2024).

The authors of this paper recognise the importance of continuing to advocate for changes in public policies. In both 2022 and 2023, they reached out to senators and members of the House of Representatives through written correspondence and in-person meetings to advocate for the repeal of the Asin Law and to secure their support for salt makers in Bohol and elsewhere. They are continuing to leverage their positions to support this and other legislative measures that help to shape public policy on their behalf.

Revitalisation

One of the overarching and ongoing goals of our project is to support the community's efforts to revitalise local salt production. The community is committed to reviving the artisanal salt-making craft as a financially viable and environmentally sustainable business while simultaneously maintaining its authenticity and safeguarding its traditions. The salt makers express great pride in their forefathers' legacy and do not want the tradition to disappear. Some modernisation initiatives have been introduced to improve sustainability and efficiency, but their foremost commitment is to the craft and tradition. This is demonstrated by their practice, at times, of seeking

approval from their ancestors before introducing any changes. This permission is a sign of respect for those who upheld the traditions before them, a reaffirmation of their own role and responsibility within their lineage, and recognition of their role as intergenerational stewards of the community's heritage. KASAMA president Dennis Bitoy shared a recent example of the importance of maintaining these traditions. He noted that a number of *asin tibuok* pots broke recently during production because the makers did not follow certain rituals in their rush to keep up with demand. This was a reminder that adhering to their ancestors' traditions is vital to their success. 'Lesson learned,' he added (Bitoy, personal communication, 27 February 2026).

The establishment of the KASAMA salt cooperative and the building of a community salt workshop were major steps towards the launch of revitalisation efforts. This was further supported by our research and public outreach, as well as by support from the local community. Moreover, ongoing viral videos and social media posts continue to spread the word about this unique artisanal salt made only in Bohol. This attention has contributed to their self-conscious awareness that their salt-making practice is important. There are currently five active salt workshops in the community, each typically producing between 200 and 400 pots of salt per month, with output variability often dependent on weather conditions and resource availability. *Asin tibuok* is now regularly sold at retail outlets in Bohol, Cebu and Manila. Some international orders are also fulfilled, and demand consistently exceeds supply.

New potters have also been trained to make salt pots to meet the increasing orders. During a dinner get-together in late February 2026, the researchers observed that more intergenerational family members are now involved in pottery production, including sisters, aunts and adult children. Currently, there are nine trained potters, one of whom also serves as the group's spokesperson, handling matters related to business transactions and interactions with researchers and journalists.

The success of the revitalisation effort can also be measured by the frequency of site visits and requests for visits from school groups, tour groups, researchers, and local and international organisations. At times, multiple groups are accommodated in one day. Largely because of this public presence, the salt makers have taken it upon themselves to act as environmental stewards. KASAMA recently organised a coastal cleanup initiative to remove plastic and other debris from the coastline. These endeavours are acts of pride in their craft and their community.

Overall, the Boholano community has expressed a strong sense of pride in the local revitalisation efforts and the safeguarding of this traditional heritage. The international recognition brought about by the EMKP grant and the UNESCO ICH designation, in particular, has cultivated this pride, strengthening their sense of identity with their local heritage. Moreover, with the UNESCO ICH designation, a four-year safeguarding plan was established. It emphasises activities that strengthen community engagement and participation, advance habitat restoration and conservation, secure environmental resources, revitalise intergenerational knowledge transmission and enhance economic sustainability. Planned activities include educational programs and apprenticeships, community engagement and awareness forums, waste management and pollution control activities, habitat conservation programs, the formation of monitoring committees, and the creation of culinary heritage events and festivals. Additionally, there are plans to establish a School of Living Traditions for *asin tibuok* and to further promote it within the Slow Food movement.

Conclusion

Thanks to the efforts of many individuals and institutions, local awareness of Bohol's traditional salt-making craft has grown significantly, contributing to efforts to safeguard and revitalise it. However, for long-term sustainability, the authors recognise the ongoing need to educate and actively involve the younger generation of Boholanos in learning more about their rich heritage. This includes instilling a sense of cultural pride in and ownership of *asin tibuok,* empowering them as future stewards of this intangible cultural heritage. The authors' continued interest in and research on artisanal salt making has heightened awareness among community members, particularly young people, that their practice is worth the attention of scholars and the mainstream public. Continual reinforcement of these ideas is needed.

To achieve this goal, the researchers remain actively involved in community discussions focused on revitalising, representing and safeguarding this important local heritage. This includes recognising that it may be

necessary to promote *asin tibuok* in innovative ways and to reimagine aspects of this tradition to make it more appealing to younger generations. For example, in the past, pieces of salt were typically broken off and stirred into traditional foods such as *lugaw* (rice porridge) or used for salt-drying or salt-fermenting fish. Nowadays, it is often recommended to grate *asin tibuok* on to foods as a finishing salt, or to break off pieces and pulverise them with a mortar and pestle to use as a granular cooking salt.

Many contemporary chefs and food producers, including Raquel Choa of The Chocolate Chamber, have noted that the mild flavour of *asin tibuok* appeals to the Filipino palate, making it ideal for incorporating into a variety of their dishes and ideal for pairing with chocolate (Choa, personal communication, 24 March 2024). Others recommend using it in specialty desserts and novelty coffee drinks for a mix of salty and sweet flavors and subtle smokiness (Bracamonte 2024; Cua 2025; Espinosa and Fornell 2023). These modern approaches to using *asin tibuok* are rooted in tradition while simultaneously encouraging its integration into the contemporary cultural food movement, bridging the past with the present.

The researchers continue to seek new and innovative ways to engage younger generations in learning the hands-on skills and related intangible knowledge of salt making and pottery making, ensuring they can become future knowledge holders and caretakers of this craft. These efforts include highlighting the artisanal aspects of the craft and the sustainability of locally produced goods, and nurturing the growing appreciation for handmade, small-batch products, all while fostering a connection to local heritage.

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