

Beyond the Underground River: Cultural and Historical Narratives of Jovellar, Albay

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to rediscover, document, and highlight the heritage landmarks, cultural practices, and local narratives that define Jovellar beyond its natural attraction. By addressing this gap, the study aims to shift the community's and the public's attention toward historical appreciation, strengthen cultural identity, and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Jovellar's meaningful place in Philippine history.

Using the qualitative type of research and utilizing the historical method helped the researcher to investigate, interpret, and communicate past events. The study refers to the 14 key informants who are the primary source. The researcher employs a semi-structured questionnaire and conducts the face-to-face interview wherein the informants can share their own experiences and elaborate the story about the matter.

The cultural and historical places of Jovellar is contextualized and dynamic— combining of its historical structures, religious traditions, local legends, community practices and natural landscapes. The study also illustrates that the development is not merely economic or political in nature but is deeply rooted in the actions and practices of its historical and cultural people. The progress undergone by the residents was driven by the dynamic relationship between the heritage, livelihood and governance, continue to guide the community behavior, shape the identity, social cohesion, and influence policy-making.

Keywords: Cultural and Historical Narratives

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the cultural and historical narratives of Jovellar, moving beyond its well-known natural attraction, the underground river. While previous studies have emphasized the relationship between heritage tourism, community engagement, and local development, rural communities remain underexplored, particularly in terms of lived experiences and identity formation (Ayo & Nepomuceno, 2023).

Culture and history play a crucial role in shaping community identity. heritage plays a crucial role in shaping community identity, social cohesion, and local development. Scholars emphasize that places are not merely physical spaces but are deeply connected to people's sense of identity and belonging, as explained in concepts like *topophilia* (Yi-Fu Tuan). Heritage sites and traditions serve as carriers of collective memory, reflecting social values, historical experiences, and cultural continuity. Studies further show that authenticity and preservation of heritage strengthen community pride and identity, while educational institutions and local initiatives help transmit these values across generations. Similarly, Donnan & Wilson (2021) highlight that border and place's function both as boundaries and bridges of cultural exchange, reinforcing how local settings like Jovellar reflect both distinct identity and shared history. Studies such as Vuković (2022) and Nursanty et al. (2023) further explain that heritage authenticity and historical narratives strengthen community identity and collective memory.

Guided by the Contextualized Cultural Narrative Theory (CCNT), this study draws from three foundational theories. First, Franz Boas (1940) argued through historical particularism that each culture must be understood

within its own historical context. Second, (Assmann, 2011) Cultural Memory Theory explains how societies transmit, preserve, and transform historical knowledge and collective identity across generations. Third, Symbolic Interactionism Theory, (Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C., 2015) is a micro-level theoretical perspective in sociology that addresses the manner in which individuals create and maintain society through face-to-face, repeated, meaningful interactions. These theories collectively support the idea that history, memory, and interaction shape cultural identity.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore and examine more deeply the cultural and historical narrative of Jovellar, Albay, focusing on its cultural and historical heritage. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the famous historical and cultural places of Jovellar, Albay?
2. What are the impacts of the historical and cultural places to the people of Jovellar, Albay along with;
 - a. Social Development
 - b. Economic Development
 - c. Political Development
3. What informational material can be developed based on the findings of the study?

Significance of the Study

The study entitled *Beyond the Underground River: Cultural and Historical Narrative of Jovellar, Albay* will be significant to the following in deepening the understanding of the municipality's cultural and historical heritage. It highlights how local traditions, historical sites, and community practices shape the identity of the Jovellareños. Local Community of Jovellar. Residents, elders, youth, and local families will help them to preserve their cultural identity, stories, and heritage. It promotes community pride and offers opportunities for education and livelihood through heritage tourism. The Local Government Unit (LGU) and Tourism Office, the LGU can use the findings for planning cultural preservation projects, tourism development, and community-based programs. Helps in branding Jovellar not only for its natural wonders but also as a heritage-rich town. Educators, teachers can integrate the findings into Araling Panlipunan or History lessons to promote local content. Doing so will help contextualize the lessons and provide students with clearer, meaningful, and relevant learning experiences. To the students, they can gain a better understanding of their community and roots of development to assess how far the town have improve. To the tourists, they get the chance to explore deeper, meaningful experiences beyond eco-tourism. Enhances cultural appreciation and responsible tourism. Future Researchers and Historians, this study adds to the limited historical documentation of lesser-known Philippine towns. It may serve as a reference for local history, anthropology, or tourism research.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on exploring, documenting, and interpreting the cultural heritage and historical narratives of Jovellar beyond its widely known natural attractions, specifically the underground river. It included the identification of significant historical events, local legends, cultural practices, landmarks, and notable personalities that had shaped the town's identity. The study also investigated the role of oral histories, community narratives, and existing archival records in preserving local history.

The study was limited to the municipality of Jovellar, Albay, and did not cover the entire province of Albay or surrounding municipalities. It focused only on the historical and cultural aspects and excluded environmental, geological, or ecological studies of the underground river or other natural sites. The timeframe covered by the study extended from the earliest traceable period up to the modern era, depending on the availability of sources and oral accounts. The study was also limited by the availability and reliability of oral sources, as some historical information may have been lost due to a lack of written records or generational transmission. The key informants of this study included Local Government officials of Jovellar that gave essential sources relevant to the municipality's history and cultural heritage, experience educators particularly retired teachers

who possess extensive knowledge of Jovellar's historical development, significant events and figures, and cultural heritage and long-term residents.

Furthermore, the research did not attempt to validate national historical narratives but rather focused on local and community-based history specific to Jovellar.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research design, utilizing interviews, observation, and document analysis. Fourteen key informants were selected, including local officials, educators, and long-term residents.

Resign Design

This study employed a qualitative method, specifically utilizing the historical research design. Historical methodology is a systematic approach used by historians and researchers to investigate, interpret, and communicate past events. It allows researchers to analyze remnants of the past, evaluate their significance, and reconstruct narratives that reflect both factual accuracy and the perspectives of historical actors (Collingwood, 1946). In the present study, the historical research design was applied to explore the cultural and historical narratives of Jovellar. Data were primarily collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants, including community elders, local historians, municipal officials, experienced educators, and long-term residents. Additional information was gathered from primary and secondary sources such as archival documents, photographs, municipal records, and published literature to strengthen data validation and historical accuracy. The study utilized thematic analysis in interpreting the gathered data. Interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary sources were carefully reviewed and analyzed through open coding. Similar ideas and recurring concepts were grouped into categories and later organized into broader themes related to cultural heritage, social development, economic development, and political development. Repeated examination and comparison of interview responses, observations, and documentary sources were conducted to ensure consistency, credibility, and reliability of the findings.

Informants of the Study

The study involved fourteen (14) purposively selected key informants from Jovellar, including local officials, retired teachers, community elders, long-term residents, and individuals knowledgeable in local historical documentation. Prior to the conduct of the study, permission was secured from the concerned authorities and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data gathering was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. The interviews allowed the informants to freely share their experiences, historical knowledge, and cultural narratives regarding Jovellar. Observation was utilized to examine cultural practices, historical landmarks, and community activities relevant to the study. Documentary sources such as municipal records, photographs, archival materials, and published literature were also reviewed to validate oral narratives and strengthen the reliability of the findings through triangulation.

All gathered data were transcribed, organized, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, categories, and emerging themes related to the cultural and historical narratives of Jovellar.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study involved fourteen (14) purposively selected key informants from Jovellar, Albay, including local officials, retired teachers, and long-term residents, all chosen for their knowledge and ability to provide valuable historical and cultural information.

Interview

The interview served as the primary data collection method in this study. A semi-structured format with open-ended questions was used to allow informants to freely express their ideas and experiences. This approach

treated the interview as a collaborative conversation between the researcher and the participants, ensuring that key themes were addressed while also allowing new insights to emerge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather essential information about the history and culture of Jovellar, Albay.

Preparation of Interview Guide

The interview guide was carefully and systematically developed to ensure the collection of rich and meaningful data. Instead of simply listing questions, the researcher crafted open-ended inquiries designed to encourage in-depth discussions. These questions were refined throughout the process to promote comprehensive and insightful responses from the informants.

Administration and Retrieval of the Instrument

The researcher personally conducted one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured guide to gather firsthand information. This approach allowed informants to share detailed insights about Jovellar's history and culture. After data collection, the responses were organized, analyzed, and interpreted in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Observation

Observation was used as a supplementary method to strengthen the validity and credibility of the data gathered from interviews and documentary sources. This technique enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural practices, historical landmarks, traditions, and social interactions within the community. Through direct observation, the researcher was able to examine how cultural values and historical narratives were reflected in the daily lives of the residents.

The collected data from observations, interviews, and documentary sources were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and field notes were carefully reviewed through open coding to identify significant ideas, recurring concepts, and meaningful statements. Similar codes were grouped into categories and eventually developed into broader themes that reflected the cultural and historical narratives of Jovellar. Triangulation of oral narratives, observations, archival documents, municipal records, and related literature was conducted to ensure the credibility, consistency, and reliability of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed key ethical principles to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. Informed consent was obtained by ensuring that informants fully understood the purpose, process, risks, and benefits of the study before participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by safeguarding personal information and ensuring that identities were not disclosed. The researcher also minimized any potential harm, including emotional or social risks. Respect for persons and culture was upheld by treating all informants with dignity and valuing their beliefs and traditions. Lastly, accuracy and fair representation were ensured by presenting the findings truthfully and without misinterpretation of the participants' views or the historical context.

RESULTS

The findings of the study reveal that the municipality of Jovellar possesses a diverse range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage sites that collectively shape its historical identity, social cohesion, and community resilience. These heritage resources can be categorized into religious, civic, cultural, educational, natural, and economic landscapes, each contributing uniquely to the lived experiences of the Jovellareños.

a. Religious and Spiritual Heritage

Religious structures and symbols play a central role in shaping the cultural identity of the community. The St. John the Baptist Church serves not only as a place of worship but also as a cultural anchor and disaster refuge, reinforcing faith-based values and communal unity. The church bell functions both as a religious instrument

and an emergency warning system, highlighting its dual social role. Similarly, the Replica of Santo Entierro represents enduring religious devotion and intergenerational cultural transmission, while the Catholic Cemetery (Campo Santo) and Municipal Cemetery reflect evolving burial practices, religious beliefs, and inclusivity in the community.

b. Civic and Political Heritage Structures

Government-related infrastructures reflect the administrative growth and civic identity of Jovellar. The Municipal Building demonstrates institutional development from its early structure to a modern multi-storey facility. The Don Jose N. Ortega Hall, formerly the municipal hall, continues to function as a civic and evacuation center, symbolizing resilience and continuity. The Rizal Monument, dedicated to José Rizal, serves as a site of national memory, civic engagement, and local pride, linking local identity to broader national history.

c. Public and Cultural Spaces

The Town Plaza acts as the heart of community life, functioning as a venue for social gatherings, cultural events, and disaster response. The Ma-uka, Javellar, and Pia Statues embody local legends tied to the Quipia Festival, transforming oral traditions into visible cultural symbols that reinforce collective memory and identity.

d. Economic and Social Centers

The Public Market represents both an economic hub and a cultural space where daily interactions, local products, and traditions are sustained. Its reconstruction after the 1970 fire highlights the resilience and continuity of community livelihood.

e. Natural Heritage and Environmental Resources

Natural landscapes significantly influence both livelihood and cultural identity. The Quipia River and the Jovellar-Donsol River serve as sources of livelihood, transportation, and historical memory, particularly in relation to early settlement, trade, and wartime experiences. The Jovellar Underground River integrates ecological importance with local folklore, enhancing its cultural and tourism value. The Mainit Spring provides essential water resources while symbolizing continuity from wartime to modern development. Meanwhile, Mayanpayan Hills functions as both a scenic viewpoint and a cultural space that fosters community pride and shared identity.

f. Educational Heritage

Educational institutions also serve as cultural and historical landmarks. The Gabaldon Building reflects early 20th-century educational heritage and national identity preservation. The Jovellar Central School and Jovellar National High School highlight the community's commitment to education, social mobility, and civic participation, demonstrating how schools act as agents of cultural transmission.

B. Impacts of Cultural and Historical Heritage

Social Development

The findings reveal that social development in Jovellar is deeply rooted in its cultural traditions, religious practices, and collective values, which collectively enhance social cohesion, identity formation, and community resilience.

a. Preservation of Traditions and Cultural Identity

The people of Jovellar actively sustain long-standing traditions that are transmitted across generations. These traditions serve as markers of identity and continuity, enabling residents to maintain a strong connection with

their historical and cultural roots. Practices such as local rituals, festivals, and religious observances demonstrate how cultural heritage remains embedded in everyday life.

b. Community Engagement and Social Cohesion

Community participation is strongly evident through social organizations such as the Bayanihan Club, which historically functioned as a venue for social interaction, reunions, and cultural expression. Despite its temporary discontinuation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, informants expressed a strong desire for its revival, highlighting its importance in strengthening interpersonal relationships, cooperation, and shared identity. More broadly, the enduring practice of bayanihan (mutual aid) reflects a deeply ingrained value system where residents willingly assist one another, especially during calamities, reinforcing trust, unity, and collective responsibility.

c. Cultural Preservation through Festivals

The Quipia Festival serves as a major cultural event that promotes community development and cultural preservation. Through activities such as street dancing, parades, and traditional competitions, the festival reinforces historical consciousness, particularly the narrative of “Qui Pia,” while fostering pride, unity, and active participation among residents. Its expansion from a week-long to a month-long celebration indicates its growing significance as a platform for cultural expression and social integration.

d. Religious Practices and Social Solidarity

Religious traditions play a vital role in shaping social behavior and collective identity. Observances such as Holy Week (Mahal na Araw), the Holy Rosary, Pasyon, Novena sa Campo Santo, and Kristianong Turog function not only as expressions of faith but also as mechanisms for social interaction, moral formation, and intergenerational continuity. These practices bring families and communities together, reinforcing shared beliefs, spiritual resilience, and a strong sense of belonging.

e. Persistence of Indigenous and Syncretic Beliefs

Traditional practices such as Pagpasubang (offering ritual) highlight the استمرار of pre-colonial beliefs integrated with Catholic traditions. This demonstrates a cultural syncretism where spiritual, environmental, and communal values intersect, particularly in rural areas. These practices reinforce the community’s connection to nature, ancestral beliefs, and collective gratitude.

f. Health Practices and Social Adaptation

Traditional healing practices performed by quack doctors remain significant, particularly for residents with limited access to formal healthcare. Methods such as *hilot*, *santiguar*, and herbal remedies illustrate how cultural knowledge continues to influence health-seeking behavior. These practices function as adaptive strategies that integrate spiritual, social, and practical dimensions of well-being.

g. Intergenerational Values and Social Harmony

Respect for elders is a fundamental cultural value in Jovellar, expressed through practices such as *pagmamano* and the use of polite language (*po* and *opo*). This value system, reinforced by family, school, and religious institutions, promotes social harmony, moral development, and the transmission of cultural norms. The active role of elders as mentors further strengthens community cohesion and continuity.

Economic Development

The findings reveal that the economic development of Jovellar is strongly shaped by its natural resources, agricultural base, and emerging tourism industry. The municipality’s environment—characterized by rivers, fertile land, and scenic landscapes—serves as a foundation for livelihood, income generation, and local enterprise.

Tourism, particularly through the Jovellar Underground River, plays a significant role in improving the economic well-being of residents. It has generated employment opportunities such as tour guiding, boat services, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Local products like pili sweets, tabliya, and other delicacies are marketed to tourists, contributing to household income and supporting educational needs of families. These findings align with community-based tourism principles, which emphasize income generation, local participation, and resource sustainability.

In addition, the presence of community-based small businesses including sari-sari stores, refilling stations, and local vendors demonstrates the circulation of goods and services within the municipality. These enterprises not only provide daily necessities but also strengthen local economic activity and promote indigenous products such as pili and cacao.

Agriculture remains the primary economic backbone of Jovellar. Farming activities, particularly the cultivation of rice, coconuts, and root crops, continue to sustain livelihoods and ensure food security. Despite the emergence of professional and overseas employment due to increased educational attainment, agriculture persists as a vital economic and cultural practice.

A key component of this agricultural economy is copra production, which serves as a stable and recurring source of income. The process of drying coconut meat into copra reflects both economic resilience and traditional knowledge among Jovellareños.

Fishing also contributes to the local economy, particularly in areas near the Jovellar–Donsol River. Aquatic resources provide both food and supplementary income, highlighting the community's dependence on and adaptation to natural resources. Although resource abundance has declined over time, fishing remains an essential livelihood.

Overall, the economic development of Jovellar reflects a diversified yet interdependent system, where tourism, agriculture, small businesses, and natural resources collectively support community well-being and sustainability.

Political Development

The findings indicate that political development in Jovellar is closely linked to cultural values, community participation, and responsive local governance. The Local Government Unit (LGU) plays a central role in integrating traditional practices into formal governance systems, thereby strengthening public service delivery and civic engagement.

One significant initiative is the “Pagmakulog sa Jovellareños” program, which institutionalizes the traditional value of mutual aid. This program provides various forms of assistance, including medical, financial, burial, and educational support, particularly benefiting vulnerable groups such as senior citizens. The program reflects core Filipino values of compassion, solidarity, and collective responsibility, demonstrating how cultural traditions are embedded in governance practices.

Furthermore, the LGU actively promotes community participation through cultural and social programs. Support for events such as the Quipia Festival, Santa Cruzan, and other religious and civic activities encourages barangay involvement and strengthens local identity. Funding and logistical support from the LGU enable inclusive participation and reinforce cultural preservation.

In terms of public service, initiatives such as the three-wheeled vehicle transportation program improve accessibility to healthcare and emergency services. This reflects the LGU's commitment to addressing practical community needs while enhancing the quality of life of residents.

Overall, the political development of Jovellar demonstrates a holistic governance approach, where cultural preservation, social welfare, and community engagement are integrated into local policies and programs. This fosters trust, participation, and cooperation between the government and the people.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that the development of Jovellar is strongly influenced by its rich cultural heritage, which serves as the foundation of its social, economic, and political systems. Cultural resources—both tangible and intangible—shape the identity, values, and daily practices of the Jovellareños, making development deeply rooted in tradition and community life.

In terms of social development, traditions, festivals, and religious practices play a vital role in strengthening social cohesion and identity. Activities such as the Quipia Festival, bayanihan practices, and religious observances promote unity, cooperation, and intergenerational continuity. The persistence of indigenous beliefs and traditional healing practices further reflects cultural adaptability and resilience. Respect for elders and shared values continue to sustain social harmony and community stability.

For economic development, Jovellar exhibits a hybrid system where traditional livelihoods coexist with emerging opportunities. Tourism, particularly through the Jovellar Underground River, provides employment and supports local enterprises, while agriculture and copra production remain the primary sources of income. Small businesses and fishing activities further contribute to livelihood and local economic circulation. This indicates that economic growth is community-driven and largely dependent on natural and cultural resources.

Regarding political development, governance in Jovellar is shaped by cultural values and community participation. Programs such as “Pagmakulog sa Jovellareños” reflect the institutionalization of bayanihan and compassion within local governance. The active support of the LGU in cultural events and public services demonstrates a responsive and participatory governance system that enhances community engagement and welfare.

Overall, the findings highlight that social, economic, and political development in Jovellar are interconnected and culturally embedded. Cultural heritage acts as a unifying force that sustains identity, supports livelihoods, and guides governance. This integrated approach ensures that development remains meaningful, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the community.

CONCLUSION

Key informants, and the community should continue to preserve the cultural and historical places of Jovellar, Albay, as it plays a vital foundation for the town’s identity and development. Through preservation and educating the youth and the future generation will sustain the cultural and historical community development.

The development of Jovellar is deeply connected with the practices, traditions and actions among the active agents in preserving and sustaining their cultural and historical heritage. This emphasizes that the people themselves are the living agents of development, ensuring that the cultural traditions and collective memory continue to inform and passed from generation to generation and sustain the growth of the economy.

The output of this study title, *Jovellar: Sa Ilawom san Suba* should be utilized as a valuable information to the Jovellareños to enhance their understanding of the municipality’s cultural and historical development.

RECOMMENDATION

Collaborative and partnership between the community and institutions such as the LGU, church, school were essential to preserve the cultural and historical history and integral component of the municipality. The preservation is the best method to remember the valuable and importance of this.

To sustain and enhance the development of Jovellar, it is recommended that local institution – such as the LGU, schools, and church – actively collaborate with the residents to preserve and connected with the practices and actions among the historical and cultural people. This emphasizes that the people themselves are the living agents of development, ensuring that the cultural traditions and collective memory continue to inform and passed from generation to generation and sustain the growth of the economy.

It is recommended that the institutions – such as schools, church, LGU promote interactive and positive program that would help strengthen the residents' sense of identity, foster community pride and support the preservation of local traditions for future generations and should utilize the *Jovellar: Sa Ilawom san Suba* as a material in providing information to the people of the community.

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