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Local Community Assessment of Ecotourism Industry

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study is to assessed the eco-tourism industry in the identified localities in Cebu City. Based on the findings it can be noted that the tourism industry cannot sustain itself without the help of community and local government units, which were mentioned in the interpretations of sustainable tourism by many local citizens and barangay officials. Hence, ensuring the sustainability of tourism development implies keeping high level of awareness and strong commitment among stakeholders regarding crucial issues like quality assurance and sustainable practices. This indicate that there is a need to elevate the local community's participation and the local officials in order to boost tourism and protect ecotourism in the local settings.

Keywords: Ecotourism, local communities, ecotourism industry, sustainable tourism

1. Introduction

It's well-known that tourism has the ability to disrupt, upset, or harm local communities and natural environments in many ways (Willis et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2021). Rural areas have been known to experience social, ecological, cultural, and economic changes that are difficult for local populations to handle (Belsky 1999; Butler and Hinch 1996; Stonich 1998, 2000). Even Nevertheless, the sector is frequently praised for its potential to improve. In an effort to encourage tour operators to be more mindful of their interactions with local populations and ecosystems, alternative options including ecotourism, volunteer tourism, and agritourism have been developed (Eadington and Smith 1992; De Lima 2015).

One of the most commonly cited options is ecotourism. As a result, it's been credited with the ability to support rural livelihoods (Honey 1999; Higgins-Besbiolles, 2011), spur new development (Weaver 1998), restore cultural pride (Epler Wood 2002), empower local people (Scheyvens 1999), and safeguard biodiversity (Weaver 1998). (Christ, Hillel, Matus and Sweeting 2003).

As an alternative to mass tourism's damaging effects on society, economy, and the environment, ecotourism first emerged in reaction to these issues in the 1980s and 1990s as a subset of alternative tourism (Conway & Timms, 2010). Deforestation, soil erosion, wildlife disturbance, social and cultural deterioration, and profit leakage from host communities to multinational corporations are only some of the negative consequences (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Weaver 1998). "A change in focus" from the well-being of the tourist business to that of the host community is the distinction between mass tourism and alternative tourism, according to this definition (Weaver 1998, 31).

In contrast to mainstream tourism, ecotourism evolved in a wide range of locations and for many different causes. For example, according to Honey (1999), "(1) scientific, conservation, and NGO circles; (2) multilateral assistance agencies; (3) developing nations; and (4) the tourist industry and traveling public" are all historical sources of ecotourism (Honey 1999, 11). As a result of the problem of 'greenwashing,' the tourism sector is a tough one to investigate (Weaver 1998; Ross and Wall 1999). Some tour companies, on the other hand, are genuinely concerned about environmental and social issues (Honey 1999). Ecotourism is being used as an alternative to more traditional development techniques by multilateral assistance organizations and underdeveloped countries.

The ecotourism industry emerged in the 1980s in response to the pressing need for environmentally sound growth (Fennell, 2008). There has been a shift in the focus of the tourism industry from profitability to the well-being of host communities and the conservation of biodiversity, which constitutes the core attractions of tourism destinations. These issues include environmental degradation, cultural degradation, economic leakages, poor linkages, inequitable distributions of benefits, and social disruption of host communities (Wardle et al., 2018). Ecotourism is advertised as offering stronger sectoral links, minimizing benefit leakage, and promoting sustainable development in comparison to mass travel (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Holden, 2008).

Governments and environmentalists have turned to ecotourism's rapid expansion, especially in developing nations' protected areas, in an effort to help preserve ecological and economic growth. This is predicated on the premise that ecotourism encourages economic activity in these outlying regions (Butcher, 2011; Harilal & Tichaawa, 2018; Lonn et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2018). Ecotourism's ability to minimize environmentally detrimental local activities including encroachment, poaching, illegal logging, excessive firewood collecting, and uncontrolled burning justifies its growth. As a result, ecotourism is being developed in these places in an effort to increase local support for conservation efforts while also providing new sources of income for community members (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2018; Lonn et al., 2018).

In recent years, ecotourism has grown in popularity as a way to combine environmental protection with economic growth (Astani, 2019). Consider the ways in which diverse environmental discourses establish this relationship between environmental preservation and development to serve ecological, economic, or human objectives (Gray, 2002). With ecotourism, local communities may satisfy their economic demands while simultaneously preserving and enhancing their sense of place, which is vital in ensuring long-term protection of their natural resources. Ecotourism, for example, has the potential to boost income, create jobs, and enhance the economy.

However, it also has the potential to exacerbate economic instability by increasing the supply-demand imbalance and widening the gap between businesspeople and locals.

Governments, particularly those in underdeveloped nations, are using global tourism as a development tool (Byczek, 2011). Although mass tourism increases the local economy, many local populations are worried about the negative consequences it will have on the environment and society. This led to the idea of ecotourism, a sort of ecotourism. Although ecotourism is closely connected to natural, cultural, and adventure tourism, small characteristics distinguish it from the other types of tourism. Ecotourism, in its purest form, is a kind of travel to natural and cultural sites that benefits conservation and biodiversity, the well-being of the local population, and educational initiatives for the benefit of both the tourists and the communities they serve (Pinto, 2000).

Community-based ecotourism

According to research, the term "community-based ecotourism ventures" should be used to distinguish those initiatives that are environmentally conscious while also aiming to ensure that local residents have a high degree of control over the activities that take place and receive a significant portion of the benefits (Liu, 1994; Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). Unlike ecotourism firms controlled solely by foreign operators, this is also distinct from situations in which the government reaps the majority of the economic benefits of tourism. (Akama, 1996) Even if the adage "wildlife pays, therefore wildlife survives" (Ziffer, 1989, p. 2) applies to East Africa, it has mostly "paid" for governments, foreign tourism businesses, and local entrepreneurs rather than providing advantages to local communities.

In addition, ecotourism proponents argue that it benefits the local community by including them into the experience. While this is true, previous studies have shown there will be differences in how the tourist industry affects people based on their gender, class, or other traits (Stronza 2001). Ethical tourism has no reason to vary in this regard. Ecology-oriented marketing materials frequently use homogeneous language when talking about "the local people" and "the local community." Conservationists, rather than developers, have a strong effect on local ecotourism efforts, which may account for some of this.

Communities have become more diverse and complicated throughout time, but environmentalists continue to consider them as tiny, homogenous groups with a common social structure and shared norms (Agrawal 2000). Because it is easy to contrast "the state" or "private enterprise," this community picture is appealing, but it is necessary to better comprehend the multitude of people, interests, institutions, and processes that are present in each particular region. There is a need for a comprehensive framework to explain how ecotourism and local populations interact (Avila-Foucat & Rodriguez-Robayo, 2018; Lonn et al., 2018; Vedeld et al., 2012). Using a livelihood framework to study and document the many ways in which ecotourism affects communities is recommended by this research.

2. Purpose of the Study

When considering whether or not a community have been economically empowered by an ecotourism venture, it is necessary to consider opportunities which have arisen in terms of both formal and informal sector employment and business opportunities. While some economic gains are usually experienced by a community, problems may develop if these are periodic and cannot provide a regular, reliable income. This study assessed the effects of the eco-tourism industry in community settings.

3. Research Methodology

The descriptive method of research will be used in this study, which will be describing the descriptive response of the respondent's group and the characteristics of the population under study. The schema of the flow of this study was based on the concept of Input-Process-Output (IPO) model which is a widely used approach in describing the structure of an information processing and for other processes.

This study was conducted the assessment in 10 rural Barangay in Cebu, Philippines. The participants of the study were local communities and local officials. The questionnaire was adapted from the study of Aguila and Ragot (2014). Their study focusses on the effects of ecotourism industry and quality of human experience in Ilijan, Batangas.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 1. Environmental Effects of Ecotourism Industry

| Environmental Effects of Ecotourism Industry | Barangay Officials | | Community Representative | |
|--|---------------------------|----|---------------------------------|----|
| | | | | |
| It enhances the preservation of the ecosystem. | 3.24 | MA | 3.12 | MA |
| It makes people realize the importance of environmental conservation due to their sensitivity to environmental change and abuse. | 3.02 | MA | 4.01 | A |
| It maintains and protects the natural resources through implementing standard rules and regulations such as the leave no trace principles, no to "kaingin system" policy, no littering and no to quarrying, etc. | 3.62 | A | 3.16 | MA |
| It implements programs or projects for proper waste management for local residents and tourists in the City. | 4.02 | A | 3.10 | MA |
| It maintains the outdoor natural environment of Cebu City and increase the health benefit of people who engage in sports activities. | 4.01 | A | 3.04 | MA |
| It provides the tourists fun, relaxing, or invigorating vacation experience without harming the environment. | 3.26 | MA | 3.12 | MA |
| It encourages the local residents to use environmentally friendly materials like paper bags instead of plastic. | 3.12 | MA | 4.02 | A |
| It contributes to the preservation of the environment, and more generally, promote the preservation of nature. | 3.22 | MA | 3.26 | MA |

| | | | | |
|--|------|----|------|----|
| It offers environmental activities like planting trees and clean-up programs. | 4.02 | A | 3.12 | MA |
| Income and taxes from these businesses can be used for the conservation of the natural environment of Cebu City. | 4.21 | SA | 3.22 | MA |
| GRAND MEAN | 3.57 | A | 3.31 | MA |

Table 1 highlights the environmental effects of eco-tourism industry. Finding shows that barangay officials rated environmental effects of eco-tourism industry with an overall weighted mean of 3.57 which verbally described as agree. The statement refers to Income and taxes from these businesses can be used for the conservation of the natural environment of Cebu City got the highest weighted mean of 4.21 which verbally described as strongly agree, while the statement makes people realize the importance of environmental conservation due to their sensitivity to environmental change and abuse got the lowest weighted mean of 3.02 which also verbally described as moderately agree. Community respondents on the other hand, environmental effects of eco-tourism industry got a final overall mean of 3.31 which verbally described as moderately agree. The statement refers to it encourages the local residents to use environmentally friendly materials like paper bags instead of plastic garnered the highest weighted mean of 4.02 which verbally described as agree, it maintains the outdoor natural environment of Cebu City and increase the health benefit of people who engage in sports activities got the lowest weighted mean of 3.04 which verbally described as moderately agree. As the respondent groups envision the environmental effect eco-tourism in their barangay, it can be notice that there is a still a need to uplift the connection between community and local officials to preserve and protect our natural resources from danger and abuse. According to Folk (2019), rising tourism puts greater pressure on regions to expand and become more inclusive and resort-like. More housing, companies, and facilities inside these towns and attractions harm and destroy environments. By causing damage to the local ecology, you put more strain on native species. As a result, it is critical to implement policies that keep our environment safe from harm and exploitation.

Table 2. Economic Effects of Ecotourism Industry

| Economic Effects of Ecotourism Industry | Barangay Officials | | Community Representative | |
|---|---------------------------|----|---------------------------------|----|
| It provides employment for local residents in services like accommodation and tour guiding in trekking and hiking activities. | 3.41 | A | 4.24 | SA |
| It constitutes additional revenues such as taxes for the government. | 4.36 | SA | 4.45 | SA |
| It creates business opportunities within the City. | 3.82 | A | 3.89 | A |
| It becomes a tourist attraction and improves socio-economic of local residents. | 4.26 | SA | 4.21 | SA |
| It provides livelihood programs from the donations of tourists. | 4.24 | SA | 3.44 | A |
| It provides more income for drivers and operators of the transportation services with the coming of tourists. | 4.45 | SA | 3.22 | MA |
| It provides avenues for fund raising projects that may help in the economic development of the area. | 3.89 | A | 4.21 | SA |
| It develops more flexible employment conditions by creating small businesses that may help the local residents. | 4.61 | SA | 4.01 | A |

| | | | | |
|---|------|----|------|---|
| It promotes new set of products and services to tourists. | 4.32 | SA | 3.62 | A |
| It boosts the local economy by providing lodging or accommodations to tourists. | 4.41 | SA | 3.68 | A |
| GRAND MEAN | 4.17 | A | 3.90 | A |

Table 2 presents the economic effects of ecotourism industry. Finding shows that barangay officials rated economic effects of ecotourism industry with an overall weighted mean of 4.17 which verbally described as agree. The statement refers to it provides more income for drivers and operators of the transportation services with the coming of tourists got the highest weighted mean of 4.45 which verbally described as strongly agree, while the statement it provides employment for local residents in services like accommodation and tour guiding in trekking and hiking activities got the lowest weighted mean of 3.41 which verbally described as agree. Community respondents on the other hand, economic effects of ecotourism industry got a final overall mean of 3.90 which verbally described as agree. The statement refers to it constitutes additional revenues such as taxes for the government garnered the highest weighted mean of 4.45 which verbally described as agree, while the statement refers to it provides more income for drivers and operators of the transportation services with the coming of tourists got the lowest weighted mean of 3.22 which verbally described as moderately agree. Moreover, findings have shown that there is a positive effect of economic for the respondent groups. It can be noted that based on the data that it generates job opportunities among the residents and gain tax that helps the government sectors especially the local barangays. According to Aguila and Ragot (2014), locals will be able to find work through tourism. They can receive the necessary training for the kind of professions for which they may be qualified, rather than relying solely on farming and fishing, as the majority of people do.

Table 3. Socio-cultural Effects of Ecotourism Industry

| Socio-cultural Effects of Ecotourism Industry | Barangay Officials | | Community Representative | |
|--|---------------------------|----|---------------------------------|----|
| It involves the local community in planning and decision-making. | 4.05 | A | 3.21 | MA |
| It promotes local experiences through learning about activities | 4.28 | SA | 3.27 | MA |
| It promotes local experiences through learning about the physical attributes of place within the local community. | 4.02 | A | 3.46 | A |
| It builds a sense of pride and ownership for residents. | 4.10 | A | 3.28 | MA |
| It builds healthier communities by encouraging local culture, food, and recreation choices. | 4.49 | SA | 3.24 | MA |
| It promotes the sustainability of ecotourism attractions in the City through the participation of residents in programs. | 4.25 | SA | 3.29 | MA |
| It gives opportunity to the local community to interact with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. | 4.20 | A | 3.62 | A |
| It encourages respect between tourists and residents. | 4.64 | SA | 3.81 | |
| It creates a welcoming atmosphere for visitors. | 4.83 | SA | 3.56 | A |
| It provides a greater understanding of local cultural, social, and environmental issues to residents and tourists. | 4.28 | SA | 3.43 | A |
| GRAND MEAN | 4.31 | SA | 3.42 | A |

Table 3 presents the socio-cultural effects of ecotourism industry. Data shows that barangay officials rated socio-cultural effects of ecotourism industry with an overall weighted mean of 4.31 which verbally described as strongly agree. The statement refers to it creates a welcoming atmosphere for visitors got the highest weighted mean of 4.83 which verbally described as strongly agree, while the statement it promotes local experiences through learning about the physical attributes of place within the local community got the lowest weighted mean of 4.02 which verbally described as agree.

Community respondents on the other hand, socio-cultural effects of ecotourism industry got a final overall mean of 3.81 which verbally described as agree. The statement refers to it encourages respect between tourists and residents garnered the highest weighted mean of 4.45 which verbally described as agree, while the statement refers to it involves the local community in planning and decision-making got the lowest weighted mean of 3.21 which verbally described as moderately agree. This indicates that respondent groups perceived socio-cultural that promotes and builds healthier communities by encouraging local and community to participate on the tourism programs in the localities. Tourism, according to Zhuang et al. (2019), is a globalized corporate activity that provides significant obstacles in terms of traditional social culture. Traditional social life at many Worlds Heritage sites has altered considerably as the tourism industry has grown (WHSs). Furthermore, the rising reliance of many regions' economy on tourism has resulted in an irreversible shift in the mindset of many rural people. The influence of tourist development and its economic efficiency on people' traditional values, lifestyles, and interpersonal relationships in historic villages designated as WHSs is one example of these modifications. As a result, communities and barangay authorities must collaborate to develop their links in order to boost the eco-tourism business.

Table 4. Development and Marketing

| Development and Marketing | Barangay Officials | | Community Representative | |
|--|---------------------------|----|---------------------------------|---|
| | | | | |
| Implement marketing promotions | 4.28 | SA | 3.82 | A |
| Facilitate investments and lower business cost | 4.05 | A | 3.65 | A |
| Safeguarding and develop natural and cultural resources, and vulnerable groups | 4.02 | A | 4.01 | A |
| GRAND MEAN | 4.12 | A | 3.83 | A |

Table 4 highlights the development and marketing of the local tourists' spot. All items were assessed as important and implement marketing promotions got the highest weighted mean of 4.28 which verbally described as strongly agree. In the point of view of the respondents, the local government should focus first with the implementation of the marketing promotion of the ecotourism. It was followed by facilitating investments and lower business cost with a weighted mean of 4.04 which verbally described as agree and safeguarding and develop natural and cultural resources, and vulnerable groups with a weighted mean of 4.02 which verbally described as agree. Community on the other hands, implement marketing promotions got the highest weighted mean of 3.82 which verbally described as agree, while facilitate investments and lower business cost got the lowest weighted mean of 3.65 which verbally described as agree. According to Aguila and Ragot (2014) the economic potential of tourism is substantial and following marketing and

promotional strategy intends to maximize the benefits tourism can generate. The promotion aims to work alongside a dedicated and professional tourism industry sector to ensure the community maintains and grows its share of the lucrative tourism market

Table 5. Test of Significant Difference in terms of Environmental effects on sustainable eco-tourism

| | <i>Variable 1</i> | <i>Variable 2</i> |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Mean | 3.574 | 3.317 |
| Variance | 0.204782 | 0.139112 |
| Observations | 10 | 10 |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 18 | |
| t Stat | 1.385864 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 1.734064 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 0.18272 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 2.100922 | |

Table 5 shows the significant difference between the group respondents statistically significant difference in terms of environmental effect. The data shows that the p- value P (T<=t) two tail (0.18272) gives us the probability that a value of the t-statistic (1.385864) would be observed that it is larger than in absolute value than t Critical two tail (2.100922). Since the p-value more than our alpha 0.05, hence the data does not reject the null hypothesis and there is significant difference between group respondent's perception on the environmental effect of sustainable development. Table 5 shows the significant difference between the group respondents statistically significant difference in terms of economic effect. The data shows that the p- value P (T<=t) two tail (0.116985) gives us the probability that a value of the t-statistic (1.646609) would be observed that it is larger than in absolute value than t Critical two tail (2.100922).

Table 6. Test of Significant Difference in terms of economic effects on sustainable eco-tourism

| | <i>Variable 1</i> | <i>Variable 2</i> |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Mean | 4.177 | 3.897 |
| Variance | 0.131023 | 0.158134 |
| Observations | 10 | 10 |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 18 | |
| t Stat | 1.646609 | |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 0.058493 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 0.116985 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 2.100922 | |

Since the p-value more than our alpha 0.05, hence the data does not reject the null hypothesis and there is significant difference between group respondent's perception on the economic effect of sustainable development.

Table 7. Test of Significant Difference in terms of socio-cultural effects on sustainable eco-tourism

| | <i>Variable 1</i> | <i>Variable 2</i> |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Mean | 4.314 | 3.417 |
| Variance | 0.069427 | 0.038757 |
| Observations | 10 | 10 |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 18 | |
| t Stat | 8.62407 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 8.27E-08 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 2.100922 | |

Table 7 shows the significant difference between the group respondents statistically significant difference in terms of socio-cultural effect of eco-tourism. The data shows that the p- value P (T<=t) two tail (0.00000008) gives us the probability that a value of the t-statistic (8.62407) would be observed that it is larger than in absolute value than t Critical two tail (2.100922). Since the p-value is less than our alpha 0.05, hence the data reject the null hypothesis and there is no significant difference between group respondent's perception on the socio-cultural effect of sustainable development.

Table 8. Test of Significant Difference in terms of Development and Marketing

| | <i>Variable 1</i> | <i>Variable 2</i> |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Mean | 4.116667 | 3.826667 |
| Variance | 0.020233 | 0.032433 |
| Observations | 3 | 3 |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 4 | |
| t Stat | 2.188723 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 2.131847 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 0.093826 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 2.776445 | |

Table 8 shows the significant difference between the group respondents statistically significant difference in terms of development and marketing. The data shows that the p- value P (T<=t) two tail (0.093826) gives us the probability that a value of the t-statistic (2.188723) would be observed that it is larger than in absolute value than t Critical two tail (2.776445). Since the p-value more than our alpha 0.05, hence the data does not reject the null hypothesis and there is significant difference between group respondent's perception on the development and marketing.

5. Conclusion

Ecotourism means many things to different individuals, especially in local communities. According to the findings, the tourist sector cannot maintain itself without the assistance of community and local government units, which were cited in many local people' and barangay officials' interpretations of sustainable tourism. As a result, guaranteeing the long-term viability of tourist growth necessitates maintaining a high level of knowledge and strong commitment among stakeholders on critical topics such as quality assurance and sustainable practices. The local government may help the growth of ecotourism by allocating a budget for promotion and preservation of the tourist attraction. Local citizens' participation in the execution of the tourism development plan may be requested in the same way that it is with their local government.

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