

Development through sustainable tourism and effective policy implementation: Practices of Puerto Princesa City, Philippines

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Abstract –Sustainable tourism has been considered by many local governments as part of their initiatives for economic upliftment. It is one of the major sources of income through the use of their tourist attraction without compromising the natural resources situated within. The enactment and effective implementation of the local government's policy have achieved a promising efficient outcome for sustainable tourism.. The city of Puerto Princesa had a long history considering its transformation from an environmentally degraded city into one of the major ecotourism sites around the world. Thus, this paper presents the case of Puerto Princesa and its practices as well as economic development by practicing sustainable tourism and effective policy implementation. The City Ordinance No. 163-91 and 640 has improved the lives of the communities by practicing cleanliness and effective waste management their surrounding and tourist destinations. Economic development and benefits from sustainable tourism reflects the city of Puerto Princesa as a role model for Local Government Units. The passing of City Ordinances on Cleanliness drive have played an important role in effective waste management of the city. The key role of having a strong political will in the local government has strongly maintained its best practices for two decades up to the present.

Keywords –ecotourism, waste management, sustainable tourism, development policy

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines possess many natural areas for attraction in both flora and fauna thus making Tourism as one of its major sources of income. Furthermore, it has many beautiful and undiscovered islands serving as a potential tourist destination in the future. A study conducted by Ashley, *et. al* [1] noticed that there has been an obvious growth in terms of tourism sector contributions in majority of the countries according to industry leaders, policy makers, and even development experts. The Philippine tourism sector has fairly recognized the benefits derived from the arrivals of domestic and foreign tourist in tourist attractions as one of the major sources of income. With the improved management of the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP) has led for its international recognition as one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature by the New 7 Wonders Foundation [2].

In 1981, Palawan became a part of the 74,267 hectares of Mangrove Swamp Forest Reserves under the Proclamation No. 2152 s.1981 [3]. Through its

ecological, scientific, educational and recreational values, including flora and fauna and marine life found therein and other values are some of the important factors for the sustainable tourism in Palawan.

Unfortunately, the relentless self-interests and uncooperative, communities, the City's natural resource have suffered environmental degradation in 1992. This prompted the Local Government to provide proper management and implement policies that will help conserve its natural resources which made the City to a model for Sustainable Development.

One of these initiatives is the implementation of Oplan Linis program upon the enactment of Anti-Littering Ordinance of the Local Government as its legal framework. A success in promoting cleanliness in the City's tourism destinations was largely depends on the positive community adaptive practices. These initiatives have considered the ecotourism definition of Wood [4] as a form of nature-based tourism in the market place which has been studied as a form of

sustainable development. Moreover, Groth [5] associated sustainable tourism as “tourism that respects both local people and the traveler, cultural heritage and the environment.”

In 1996, Puerto Princesa’s development efforts in ecotourism destination have considered in the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) [6] under Executive Order No. 371 [16] which consists of funds for irrigation, roads, water supply, and other development projects.

The Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP) and the Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park (TRNMP) are two of the seven protected areas in Palawan that are located in Puerto Princesa City. But the PPSRNP have gained the special interests for the tourists due to its accessibility in the unique Puerto Princesa Underground River (PPUR). Ecotourism had took place from autonomy of the local government to manage the famous Puerto Princesa Underground River (PPUR) of the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) heritage site declared in 1999. This unwavering success furthermore, conforms to Jayagoda [7] in considering ecotourism as major soft-impact activities and economic upliftment of the local government while taking care of their rich natural resources.

With the resolved issues regarding environmental degradation through strong political will and participation of the people, as well as the implementation of city ordinances particularly City Ordinance No. 163-91, the city of Puerto Princesa slowly reformed from its negative image as a prison and mosquito disease-infested area into one of the famous and major ecotourism sites in the country due to its continuous practices of the city with regards to its policy implementation and cooperative residents.

Major recognitions such as Wetlands of International Importance No. 2084 of the Ramsar Convention and the sensationalized proclamation of the New 7 Wonders Foundation as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature on January 28, 2012 fully transformed the Puerto Princesa City a famous tourist destination and a premier tourist’s vacation spot for the Philippines. These enhancements have catered the development of a Community-Based Sustainable Tourism (CBST) program in several communities initiated by the local government of Puerto Princesa. The park management is national and internationally

known to cater successful community based sustainable ecotourism destination in the villages of Cabayugan and Tagabinet that greatly contributes for revenue generation of local communities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

With the considerable recognitions and contributions of the PPSRNP to the City of Puerto Princesa, the continuous increase in their promotion of ecotourism have contributed to the development in conjunction with the four pillars of the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) of the Philippines. Thus it is imperative that this study will be presented to determine the contribution of the PPC’s ecotourism as part of the socio-economic development of the Country. It will also consider the promotion in dissemination of the solid waste management campaign impact by the local government of the city on sustainable tourism and economic development in the Country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Site

The Puerto Princesa City is located at the heart of Palawan consisting of 66 Barangays 35 of which is urban and the remaining 31 classified as rural.

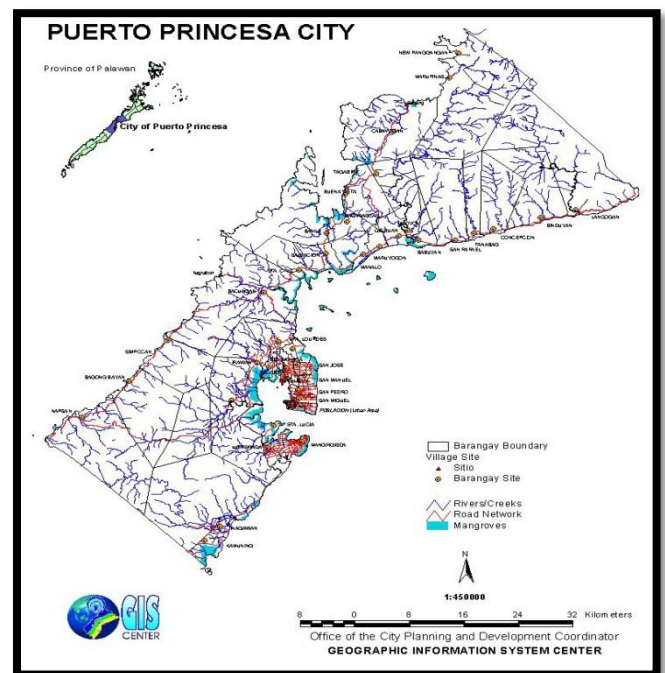


Figure 1. Map of Puerto Princesa City

It has been identified by the Department of Tourism (DOT) as part of the Tourism Development Areas (TDA) comprising 6 strategic clusters in Central Philippines that are composed of 20 strategic thematic Tourism destination clusters within 78 National Tourism Development Areas.

Data Gathering and analysis

Reports and data were derived from peer-reviewed articles, online publications, key informants who are affiliated and working for the city government as well as those who are associated within the Community Bases Sustainable Tourism (CBST) areas in the City, and correspondence from the Local Government of Puerto Princesa City through City Tourism Office, the PPSRNP Protected Area Office, other environmental concerned Non-Government Organizations, and other environmental organizations. Data gathered were compared, correlated, and translated into tourism receipts in the basis of the number of tourism profiles in Puerto Princesa City from 1991-2014 and its contribution to the socio-economic development of the Philippines. The study also provides inputs and impact of the City Ordinance No. 163-91 which gave birth to the City Ordinance No. 640 which implements the effects of the latter to the tourism establishments in the City of Puerto Princesa for the maintenance of tourism establishments as part of the city's major sources of income for economic development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Ordinance No. 163-91

The SangguniangPanglungsod of Puerto Princesa drafted and initiated the implementation of the Ordinance No. 163-91 [8] or otherwise known as "*An ordinance prohibiting the dumping of waste refuse, garbage, non-biodegradable objects and other waste materials in any place in the street and other places no otherwise designated as dumping place and providing penalties thereof*" on June 25, 1991. According to Section 3 of the ordinance, "*it shall be unlawful for any person to dump, place throw or scatter waste refuse, garbage materials, papers, cigarette butts, non-biodegradable objects and other waste materials in any public facilities such as buildings, streets, parks and other places not designed as dumping place.*" However, this behavioral change was not adopted directly by the communities.

It was in 1992, that the Local Government utilized the Anti-littering act as a basis to create the OplanLinis Program, one of the most successful programs that were implemented by the City on waste management. This program was designed to promote awareness on cleanliness and proper waste disposal in classrooms and offices within the city's jurisdiction. The OplanLinis program started in public schools in the City to teach younger generation on the proper garbage disposal or waste segregation in designated areas. The use of reward-system to the students gives them the motivation to reach their achievements and proper behaviour [9], thus positive reinforcement by means of incentive system are conducted which greatly to promote and instil the knowledge on the importance of proper waste disposal.

This initiative in the public schools has been replicated to the entire populace within the city because the local officials realized that it is possible if this could be done at the early stage of academic development. As a result, the administration started to enforce the implementation of the waste management campaign with the cooperation of the citizens. Utilization of waste segregation as well as installation of garbage bins in strategic places was enacted by the City Ordinance No. 163-91 or the "Anti-Littering Ordinance Campaign."It is important that there must be proper garbage bins and trashcans in order to promote not only cleanliness but also the safety in a home or workplace. Although the Ordinance was approved on July 19, 1991 it was fully implemented in 1992 because of the strong political will of the administration which significantly shaped the image of Puerto Princesa City and even making it into a model City for Sustainable Development.

The implementation has been well sustained for the society due to its constant public information and policy review of the local officials. Recently, the City Information Office built and installed signage of the Ordinances in strategically placed in different areas within the city. This brings a direct clear reminder to the citizens about the importance and benefits of a clean city. Notwithstanding the impartiality on behavioral change, an immediate turn out of positive change was fully achieved in short period of time. The City received a hall of fame awards on the "Cleanest and Greenest Component City" from 1994-1996 because of the City's commitment for the continued efforts on its strict policy to promote cleanliness. According to the guidelines set by the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Puerto Princesa City is the first City in the country and in Southeast Asia to be declared carbon-neutral [10].

With the success of the implementation, the city now focuses on promoting its alternate major source of income through the tourism industry and in its sustainability. The residents were aware that the City is a paradise for tourists thus the maintenance of its cleanliness and natural beauty will help to sustain their source of livelihoods and economic development [7].

Relevance in sustainable tourism

Kreag [11] implied that the tourism industry creates the chance to develop new opportunities for improvements and job creation that benefits not only the guests but also the local communities around it. Aside from the fact that the Puerto Princesa Underground River is also found in the area, tourists were enjoying the view of a clean city meaning that cleanliness is a factor for tourist attraction in the city. In the year 2012, the city of Puerto Princesa's major tourist spot: Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP) was declared as one of the new seven wonders of nature [2]. In order to maintain and support the cleanliness in the tourism industry of the city, the SangguniangPanglungsod executed the Ordinance No. 640 [12] or referred to as the "An ordinance mandating the posting of Ordinance No. 163-91 in all tourism related establishments within the jurisdiction of the City."With the beginning of sustainable tourism in the City, the local government implemented the Ordinance No. 640 which applies the effects of the whole Ordinance No. 163-91 to all tourism establishments in the city, whether public or private. The role of this ordinance is to "inculcate in the hearts and minds of the visitors/tourists who sojourn in the City the discipline that the Puerto Princesans have acquired in complying with the subject Ordinance."In order to effectively implement the campaign, the local government increased the provision of garbage receptacles and promoted a local cleanliness competition between each Barangay. A disincentive prize is given to the dirtiest Barangay, and a monetary prize is given to the winner [13].

Tourists are becoming interested in the city due to its environment that is rich, natural, and clean. This has become a reason on why tourists wanted to visit the city and for the locals to have a better understanding for the city's natural environment [7].

The OplanLinis Program through the implementation of City Ordinance No. 163-91, was able to contribute for sustaining the ecotourism of Puerto Princesa City. According to Mercado [14], the city slowly transformed from a known prison-camp and mosquito-infested community into one of the major tourist destinations in the country. As a result, environmental awareness and conservation of natural resources are now being practiced by the citizen due to the changes of their perspectives. The program comprises of several sub-categories that aims to promote and maintain cleanliness in the City. Kreag [11] further notes that there are relevant regulations which must be implemented since tourism can also harm the environment through waste and pollution.

Local ordinance's impact to the City

The implementation of the ordinance led the city of Puerto Princesa was able to receive not only national but also international prestigious awards and recognitions. The first term of the new administration alone shows that the city received a total of 7 awards from 1992-1995, and an additional 5 awards on its second term. The table below reflects the awards received by the City after the implementation of the Anti-Littering Ordinance. In the Span of 7 years, the Puerto Princesa gained a total of 12 awards from 1993-1997.

Initiatives of ecotourism in Puerto Princesa City

With the implementation of the Republic Act 7611 or the Strategic Environmental Plan Law (SEP Law) and the Local Government code of 1991, the Ecotourism sector in Puerto Princesa started to flourish. Dressler et. Al. [15] states that it was used as a legal basis by the City of Puerto Princesa to exercise authority over land and forest management located within its jurisdictional boundaries. This was done because with the Local Government Code decentralization and authority was given to the local government while SEP Law supports sustainable development through development and conservation of natural resources.

The strong political will of the Local Government to resolve the manifestation of environmental degradation, there has been a notable increase in the influx of tourists. Furthermore, in order to achieve sustainable development the City initiated the rehabilitation that abates the widespread environmental degradation in 1992.

Table 1. Awards received by the City

| Year | Award | Given By |
|-----------|--|---|
| 1993 | Earth Day Award | Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) |
| 1994 | Best Tourist Destination in the Philippines | Travel Mart |
| 1994 | Macli-ingDulag Environmental Achievement Award | Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation and Department of Interior and Local Government |
| 1994-1996 | Award of Excellence: Cleanest and Greenest Component City of the Philippines | H.E. Fidel V. Ramos |
| 1995 | Cleanest and Greenest City in Region IV | Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) |
| 1995 | Cleanest Inland Body of Water, Region IV | Department of Interior and Local Government |
| 1995 | GantimpalangPanglino (Galing-Pook) Award For: OplanLinis Program | Asian Institute of Management in coordination with the Local Government Academy, Awarded by H.E. Fidel V. Ramos |
| 1995 | Green Banner Awardee (MIMAROPA) | Department of Interior and Local Government |
| 1996 | Hall of Fame Award – Clean and Green Program | |
| 1996 | LikasYaman Awards For Environmental Excellence | Department of Environment and Natural Resources |
| 1996 | Management Awards of Asia | Asian Institute of Management In cooperation with the Far Eastern Economic Review and Management Association of the Philippines |
| 1996 | Most Active Proponent of Coastal Clean-Up | H.E. President Fidel V. Ramos |
| 1997 | Global 500 Roll of Honour Award (United Nations Environment Programme) | UNEP Executive Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell |

Source: www.puertoprincesa.ph & www.puertoprincesaphilippines.com

Figure 2 shows that within the 7 years of successful program the tourist arrivals have amplified the average annual growth up to 73%. This provides evidence that Puerto Princesa is become one of the most sought-after areas that are endowed with culturally beautiful and pristine natural resources which could boost tourism thus proving Eagles et. al. [16] that tourism can increase jobs and income in a local area or region.

Growth of tourism in terms of tourist arrivals showed that there is a remarkable increase from 1992 to 1998 contributed by the devolution [15] of St. Paul Subterranean River National Park (Figure 2). This foremost and major tourist attraction draws domestic and foreign tourists before it was renamed as Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in 1999. The move to rename the park made a pride for the City by becoming more identifiable with its actual setting and location. This further boosted the development of the City in terms of tourist visits. Other countries became aware of the increasing economic importance of tourism [4].

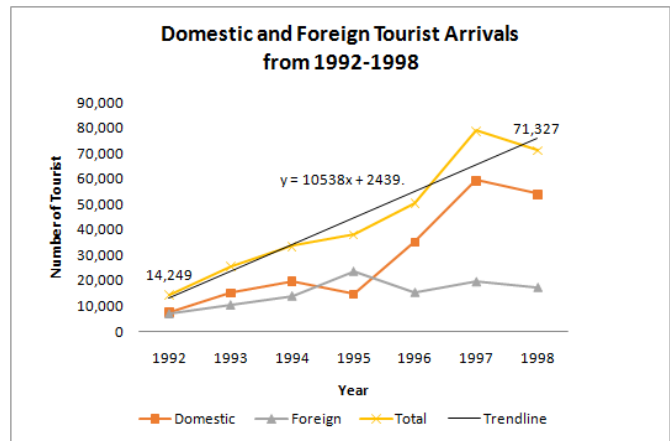


Figure 2. Domestic and foreign tourists arrivals in Puerto Princesa from 1992-1998.

A major ecotourism destination of the City

The Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park is a home of the City's premier ecotourism destination. The underground river is the major ecotourism destination operated by the Park

Management. It is supported by the Ugong Rock Adventure and the Mangrove Paddle Boat Tour being the community-based sustainable ecotourism as well as other ecotourism support activities such as nature/wildlife watching and adventure sports tourism. The transformation of the PPC into an ecotourism has sparked the curiosity of the Filipinos and other foreign visitor.

Globally known as the “world’s longest navigable underground river,” the inscription of the Park in a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997 increased the City’s attractiveness. First explored in 1930, the cave main gallery, branches and tributaries to over 8 km were completely explored in 1973 and in early 80’s. Several other expeditions between 1986, 1992 and 2011 have brought the cave development into 32 km. [17] [18]. The now recognized Puerto Princesa Underground River (PPUR) is a “must-see” tourist destination in the City of Puerto Princesa. Piccini& De Vivo [18] noted that the PPUR had become the most important show cave of the Philippines, with over 150,000 visitors per year in a self-imposed tourism carrying capacity of 500 tourists per day.

The second most visited ecotourism site is the Ugong Rock Adventure Tours being attested by the Philippine Travel Forum in 2013. The destination got its name from the humming sounds of rock while tapping the stalactites inside the cave. It is an alternative tourism destination for the PPUR that is originally part of the City Government’s coastal resource management program, operated under the TagabinetUgong Rock Service Cooperative (TURSCO), a community-based sustainable tourism of the Puerto Princesa City. The number of guests in the last four years is presented started to increase in the later part of 2011 which brings an average daily visitation of 200 persons.

Benefits to the communities

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed between the TURSCO and Barangay Local Government (BLGU) of Brgy. Tagabinet in 2009 have provided 25% of the daily proceeds for the operational management and development of the BLGU. Incomes generated by the community eco-guide indigenous people (Tagbanua) as part of their alternative livelihood were able to send their children to higher education. This benefit was further enhanced by the Cooperative by providing medical assistance upon the request of the community, technical trainings from

Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and most importantly was by granting educational scholarships among the indigenous people member of the Cooperative. Century-old mangroves forest patch in the vicinity of the Park can be observed through the Mangrove Paddleboat Tour. The eco-tour is facilitated by a group of indigenous people living in Brgy. Cabayugan. This community-based sustainable tourism intends to provide a greater appreciation to the ecological contribution of mangrove species and their entire ecosystem. Visitors are also given a chance to contribute to conservation by planting mangrove saplings in designated planting area. Local residents have benefitted in this activity by providing their services as eco-tour interpreters for their alternative livelihood.

Impact of ecotourism and policies implemented

From 1999 to 2014, the tourist arrivals greatly improved and steadily increase from 95,033 to 740,272 being dominated by domestic tourists (Table 2).

Table 2. Tourist Arrivals and Receipts of Puerto Princesa City from 1999-2014

| Year | Tourist Arrival | Tourist Receipts* |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1999 | 95,033 | 836,760,148 |
| 2000 | 106,103 | 934,230,867 |
| 2001 | 78,455 | 690,791,803 |
| 2002 | 79,203 | 697,377,900 |
| 2003 | 98,118 | 863,923,397 |
| 2004 | 120,674 | 1,062,527,692 |
| 2005 | 134,824 | 1,187,117,635 |
| 2006 | 147,806 | 1,301,423,405 |
| 2007 | 176,347 | 1,552,725,283 |
| 2008 | 221,736 | 1,952,372,841 |
| 2009 | 268,942 | 2,368,018,980 |
| 2010 | 417,593 | 3,676,882,562 |
| 2011 | 515,148 | 4,535,848,777 |
| 2012 | 654,033 | 5,758,723,285 |
| 2013 | 692,982 | 6,101,667,010 |
| 2014 | 740,272 | 6,518,052,764 |
| TOTAL | 4,547,269 | 40,038,444,351 |

National Date for Expenditures

* *Average expenditure per day = Php 2759.22 with average length of stay of 3.15 nights*

(Source: DOT- National Tourism Development Plan 2011-2016)

According to Wood [4], the number of international tourist arrivals has reached about 10% of the world's population in 1999. But Puerto Princesa was not spared for national political unrest, the isolated case of kidnapping had resulted into a sudden decrease in the number of foreign guest in 2001-2002. International arrivals recovered in a much slower pace in succeeding years [19]. With the strong determination of the domestic tourism stakeholders and the enjoined people's participation suppresses the decline for only two years. Subsequent increase from 2003-2014 were then recorded which contributed to the overall tourism receipts of 40 Billion pesos in 16 years. Eagles et. al. [16] recognized that Governments often use tourism for economic development because it is relatively inexpensive to create a tourism job compared to one in manufacturing.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) reports that receipts from international tourism grew by an average annual rate of 9% between 1988 and 1997 [4]. Outcomes on tourist expenditures have provided support for the implementation of local government's tourism related programs.

Utilization of minor forest product with high economic value for domestic and international use such as: almaciga, honey, ferns and orchids, beeswax, rattan or sika and cotton tree. In order to secure these forest resources from over extraction and abuse, the City government implemented the Bantay Puerto Program (Puerto Watch) in July 1992. City government has also invested in agriculture, health services, trade and commerce, road development, comprehensive housing, and education programs.

The City government also ensures that other potential ecotourism sites are included in the ecotourism framework plan. They have issued a several resolutions requesting the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to strongly recommend the declaration of the Olangoan Waterfalls in Brgy. Binduyan as a Nature Park (Resolution No. 632-2007), set aside the Salakot Waterfalls in favor of the City government of Puerto Princesa (Resolutions No. 694-97), set aside 10 ha. of public land in Brgy. Simpocan to be developed as Public Resort (Resolution No. 527-97) and set aside 600-hectare parcel of land, classified as Timberland to be established as a City Wilderness Park located at Talaudyong, Barangay Bacungan (Resolution No. 527-97).

As a result of their commitment in environmental preservation with sustainable development, it has been dubbed as "The City in a Forest." The City was then transformed from a laid-back into a "Highly Urbanized City." At present the City is known also as the "Ecotourism Capital of the Philippines."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The effort of the Puerto Princesa on the preservation of natural resources through sustainable ecotourism have demonstrated its mere potential in generating local employment and economic growth. Continued promotion of the ecotourism destination and unearthing more potential destinations are paving its way for wealth distribution in rural areas. The City have benefitted in their local taxation from the growth of tourism small medium enterprise. This economic growth, however, might lead to some adverse environmental effects like land conversion for urbanization of rural areas due to increasing human migrant population. The Local Government of Puerto Princesa City was also able to effectively implement its local ordinance which resulted to the recognition of the city and the different awards that the city received. The evident practices and consistent implementation of the both City Ordinance No. 163-91 and 640 resulted to the spark of interest of the tourist to visit the City other than its ecotourism sector which became a major contribution to the economic sector of the city.

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