



COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM: EXPLORING COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES IN A RURAL AREA IN MALAY, AKLAN

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Abstract

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has become a key approach for sustainable development in rural areas. Despite its growing prominence, this study offers comprehensive qualitative insights into the local perceptions and challenges that CBT initiatives face in specific rural contexts, particularly Barangay Napaan in Malay, Aklan, which remain underexplored. This exploratory case study investigated these community experiences and sustainability issues of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects in Barangay Napaan. Utilizing a qualitative exploratory case study design, data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten (10) purposively sampled participants. Participants included residents with at least ten years of residency, students aged 18 years old and above, and key Barangay officials actively involved or willing to engage in local CBT initiatives. Thematic analysis revealed several interconnected themes: the crucial role of active community participation for project success, the pursuit of economic opportunities and improved livelihoods, and efforts towards environmental conservation and sustainable practices. Findings indicated that while CBT initiatives fostered economic opportunities and strengthened community relationships, persistent challenges in waste management, equitable benefit distribution, and sustaining consistent community engagement were identified. The study emphasized the importance of effective stakeholder collaboration and sustainable practices for the long-term viability and positive socio-environmental outcomes of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in similar rural settings.

Keywords: *community-based tourism, community involvement, economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, stakeholder collaboration, sustainable development*

Introduction

The tourism sector continues to thrive as a vital industry, making a significant contribution to the Philippines' economic growth and development. Integral to its success is the involvement of communities residing near tourist destinations. In rural areas of the Philippines, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is recognized for its significant impact, bringing about positive changes within rural communities and affecting their sociocultural, ecological, and economic aspects (Setokoe et al., 2020). Initiatives like Community-Based Tourism (CBT) have emerged to accommodate the growing engagement of communities in tourism development. Despite gaining popularity, it is crucial to examine how these initiatives facilitate local community participation and assess the extent to which Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has effectively addressed the unequal distribution of benefits and adverse impacts associated with tourism development in certain areas (Gutierrez, n.d.).

Prominently featured in Cebu, Philippines, the focus is mainly on the local communities along the Bojo River in Aloguinsan, Cebu, and the Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Lapu-Lapu City, as well as Agunid Falls in Samboan, Cebu. It made a significant contribution to economic growth and to uplifting the standard of living. The established tourist destinations in the province of Cebu hold great potential in supporting local development, a trend prevalent in rural areas of developing countries (Buslon-Sia et al., 2019). As community-based tourism (CBT) has gained popularity, it is increasingly being promoted as a means of improving the market and economy, and fostering local community development (Giampiccoli et al., 2018). However, despite this success, the widespread promotion of CBT in the Philippine context reveals issues such as the inequitable distribution of benefits among community members (Gutierrez, 2019). The study further highlights that without genuine local participation, the economic benefits of tourism often fail to reach everyone, thereby hindering overall community well-being.

As it stands, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is essential for filling the gaps that currently exist in rural areas, which are also present

in other municipalities. In the Municipality of Malay, various well-known Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiatives have played a pivotal role in both the town and its seventeen (17) barangays. Notably, established tourist destinations in mainland Malay, such as Malay Ecological Park in Barangay Argao, Malay, Aklan, and the renowned Nabaoy River in Barangay Nabaoy, Malay, Aklan, significantly contribute to the Municipality's allure (Aguirre, 2023). This underscores why Barangay Napaan is an ideal location for Community-Based Tourism (CBT). With a population of 939, as determined by the 2020 Census, representing 1.56% of the total population of Malay, the place has a unique opportunity to foster an environmentally friendly and culturally immersive tourism experience (Zivrali, 2022).

This research aimed to address existing gaps by exploring potential problems associated with Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Barangay Napaan, including infrastructure development, environmental implications, market access, cultural preservation, and socioeconomic stability. Given the significance of these phenomena, the researchers will pursue this study to develop a plan for sustainable Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in a rural area, which will be a profound outcome of the study.

Research Objectives

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How does the CBT project involve and empower local residents in planning and running tourism?
2. How do the community, government, NGOs, and businesses work together to keep the CBT initiative successful and sustainable?
3. What challenges does the CBT project face in balancing income, the environment, and culture, and how are these challenges managed?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a case study to examine the underlying issues in Barangay Napaan related to Community-Based Tourism (CBT). This made sure that different perspectives are used to examine the problem rather than just one, revealing and understanding different aspects of the issue according to Baxter and Jack (2008). An exploratory case study was used to explore situations in which the intervention being evaluated and has no clear single set of outcomes (Yin, 2003). By utilizing an exploratory case study approach, the data gathered would be the basis for an in-depth understanding of how the issues can be resolved.

Participants

This research was conducted in Barangay Napaan, Malay, Aklan. The community is primarily located in areas with a focus on agriculture and environmental conservation. Barangay Napaan was specifically chosen as the research setting due to its active engagement in promoting Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiatives, focusing on sustainable practices, economic development, and community involvement that provides tourist experiences. This context presents a valuable opportunity to gain insight into the views and experiences of key stakeholders involved in or affected by CBT. Therefore, a purposive sampling approach was employed to select participants who possess direct knowledge and relevant experiences within this unique community setting. Consequently, to gain in-depth insights into the dynamics of CBT within its setting, the participants of this study consisted of ten (10) individuals selected using a purposive sampling method. This approach involved selecting participants who could provide relevant information based on specific criteria. The inclusion criteria include 10 years or more of residency, students aged 18 years or older, and Barangay Officials who are willing to actively engage in the process of implementing Community-Based Tourism in their locality. Exclusion criteria include individuals under 18 years of age, those with less than 10 years of residency, and individuals with cognitive impairment.

Instruments

This study mainly used a semi-structured interview guide for data collection. The researchers created this guide to gather detailed, qualitative information about community views and sustainability issues in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Barangay Napaan. It aimed to collect data relevant to the study's research questions, focusing on resident participation, collaboration among stakeholders, efforts in environmental conservation, and the balance between economic benefits and socio-cultural and environmental health.

The interview guide included seven questions that used both semi-structured and open-ended questions. This setup allowed for thorough responses and flexible exploration during interviews. To ensure the guide was suitable for the study, content validation was carefully done. Three experts in the field of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) evaluated the clarity, scope, and relevancy of each question. Based on their helpful feedback, minor updates were made to the guide, which helped maintain its validity and effectively guided the data collection and analysis.

Interviews were conducted in person in Barangay Napaan and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour each. To ensure consistency,

a standardized introductory script and questioning process were used, ensuring all participants had similar framing and opportunities to respond.

Procedure

A systematic and ethical procedure conducted the study to ensure the transparency and reliability of the research process. Initially, the researchers underwent thorough validation to ensure the clarity and reliability of the information. Subsequently, a prepared letter of request to seek approval from the Dean of Malay College for institutional clearance, to the Municipal Mayor to conduct the study within the community, and the Barangay Captain of Napaan, and the ten (10) key informants to conduct the study. The letter of request and consent, along with the interview protocol document, was sent personally by the researchers to the concerned barangay. Upon obtaining all necessary approvals, each prospective participant received a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and their inherent right to voluntary participation and withdrawal. Face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were then conducted with each participant who had given their consent, guided by a validated instrument.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participant permission. Throughout this process, strict and legal record-keeping was employed to ensure the safety and privacy of the interviewees, involving the secure storage of all collected data and the anonymization of identifiable and sensitive information. Finally, the qualitative data collected from these interviews were organized and analyzed using thematic analysis. This followed Yin's (2011) steps of data analysis: transcription, data minimization, showing the data, data comparison, drawing conclusions, verifying the data, and creating exploratory case study narratives. This process helped identify key insights related to the research objectives.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis to examine the qualitative data collected. It directly addresses the research questions posed in the problem statement. The analysis followed Yin's (2011) Steps of Data Analysis, which offered a clear framework for the case study approach. According to Yin (2011), the seven phases of data analysis are: interview transcription, data minimization, showing the data, data comparison, drawing conclusions, data verification, and creating exploratory case study narratives. This structured approach ensured careful interpretation of the interview data. It helped identify key themes and patterns related to community perceptions and sustainability challenges in Community-Based Tourism.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered strictly to ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and well-being. This helps maintain research integrity and build trust. Before collecting data, the researchers obtained informed consent from each participant. This process included a clear explanation of the study's goals, methods, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw without penalty, and how the data would be kept confidential. The participants were assured that their identities would be protected and that all collected data would be used solely for research purposes. The researchers ensured confidentiality by giving participants pseudonyms (like Participant 1) and strictly anonymizing the findings. All sensitive data were securely stored in protected digital files and on a dedicated flash drive, which only authorized researchers could access. The researchers will keep the data for two years after the study ends, and then it will be securely destroyed. The researchers recognized potential power dynamics and created a respectful and non-coercive environment during all interactions. The research protocol, which included these ethical steps, received approval from the Malay College Dean prior to the researchers' beginning data collection. This clear outline of ethical procedures supports the study's credibility and commitment to ethical research standards, ensuring transparency and fostering trust in the research process, as noted by Bryman (2016).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings according to the study's research questions.

Table 1. The Analysis

Theme	Description	Codes
1. Community Involvement	This theme highlights the need for local community members to actively participate in decision-making for CBT projects. It emphasizes that inclusive engagement helps customize projects to fit local needs, avoid potential drawbacks, and promote unity and cooperation within the community through activities like group chats and meetings. It also acknowledges the importance of sharing knowledge and using cultural resources, reflecting the 'Bayanihan' spirit for preserving cultural heritage and supporting tourism.	Participation, Decision-Making, Knowledge Sharing, Cultural Resources
2. Economic	This theme covers how CBT projects help improve economic stability	Job Opportunities, Financial

Empowerment	and quality of life for community members. It shows the creation of job opportunities, such as with the Bamboo Crafts business, and the provision of financial support, including grants and loans for livelihood projects from organizations like PESO and DSWD. The findings indicate that tourism projects raise the barangay's profile, develop new skills, and foster financial stability.	Support, and Livelihood Projects
3. Environmental Sustainability	This theme focuses on actions taken to reduce negative environmental effects and protect natural resources in CBT initiatives. It covers sustainable practices, such as using gabions to prevent flooding and managing soil erosion, along with the important role of the DENR in supporting tree planting and keeping the environment clean. Regular clean-up drives and reforestation efforts are essential for maintaining ecological balance.	Tree Planting, Waste Management, Sustainable Practices
4. Stakeholder Collaboration	This theme highlights the important role of strong partnerships between different groups for the success of CBT projects. It points out key stakeholders, including government agencies like DENR and DAR, non-governmental organizations such as Aklan Trekkers and the Kalibo organization, and private sector partners like the KAMMANA cooperative. These groups provide essential support, resources, and shared goals for the benefit of the community.	Government Agencies, NGOs, Private Sector, and Community Representatives
5. Environmental Conservation Efforts	This theme describes the steps taken to protect the natural environment in the context of CBT. It emphasizes the importance of tree planting for reforestation and ecological balance. It also points out the ban on harmful activities such as illegal logging and slash-and-burn methods. The presence and role of dedicated forest and river guards are recognized as vital measures for protecting the mountainside and keeping it clean. This helps ensure the long-term sustainability of natural resources.	Tree Planting, Prohibition of Harmful Activities, Forest and River Guards
6. Challenges in Sustainable Practices	This theme highlights ongoing challenges in carrying out sustainable CBT initiatives. It includes problems with regular community involvement, where not all members care about proper waste disposal or the health of planted trees. Waste management is a major issue, especially the improper disposal of trash by locals and newcomers. Furthermore, infrastructure problems, like narrow roads and insufficient parking spaces, create practical difficulties for the success and sustainability of the projects.	Community Engagement, Waste Management, Infrastructure Issues
7. Economic Benefits of Tourism	This theme describes the direct financial benefits that come from tourism activities for the local community. It mainly highlights job creation for locals, which improves their economic stability, and the support for local businesses, such as bamboo crafts. The findings show that while these benefits exist, they are still in the early stages and have not yet had a significant impact on the whole community.	Job Opportunities, Support for Local Businesses
8. Social and Cultural Changes	This theme reflects the changes in the community's social interactions and cultural dynamics caused by tourism. There is more social interaction, with residents becoming more engaged and less reserved with visitors. This helps create a sense of community. We also see skill development, like the rise of artisans and different training programs. Additionally, the theme highlights the need for cultural preservation. It stresses the importance of passing on traditional skills and customs to younger generations and using cultural heritage to support tourism.	Increased Social Interaction, Skill Development, and Cultural Preservation
9. Strategies for Balancing Development with Conservation	This theme outlines proposed ways to ensure a balance between economic growth, protecting the environment, and preserving culture within community-based tourism (CBT). Key strategies include educating the community to raise awareness about the benefits and challenges of development, and the important role of government support, including resources and aid for local progress. Sustainable practices like replanting trees and environmental engineering are also necessary to reduce negative impacts and protect the natural environment for future generations.	Community Education, Government Support, Sustainable Practices

Theme 1: Community Involvement

Community involvement emerged as a fundamental theme in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects. Participants underscored the necessity of active participation from local community members in decision-making processes to ensure that projects align with their needs and aspirations.

Participant 1 emphasized that community involvement is crucial to avoid potential disadvantages and to tailor projects to local needs. Participant 1 also mentioned the use of group chats and assembly meetings to foster unity and cooperation within the community. This practice ensures that everyone is on the same page and can contribute to the project's success.

Similarly, Participant 2 noted that community input enriches decision-making, making it more inclusive and effective. Knowledge sharing and the utilization of cultural resources were also highlighted as significant aspects of community involvement.

Participant 3 highlighted the concept of "Bayanihan," a Filipino tradition of communal unity and cooperation that plays a vital role in preserving and leveraging the community's cultural heritage for tourism activities.

Theme 2: Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is another critical theme identified in the analysis. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects provide job opportunities and financial support to community members, thereby enhancing their economic stability and quality of life.

Participant 2 discussed how the Bamboo Crafts business, supported by the Public Employment Service Office (PESO), offers employment to senior citizens and mothers without jobs. This initiative not only provides financial support but also helps with skill development.

Participant 5 noted that tourism projects could promote the barangay's name, create job opportunities, and help community members develop new skills.

This sentiment was echoed by Participant 7, who mentioned that the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) provides grants and loans for livelihood projects. These initiatives are crucial for economic empowerment, as they enable community members to achieve financial stability and improve their quality of life.

Theme 3: Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is a priority in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects, as highlighted by the participants. Various measures are taken to minimize negative environmental impacts and ensure the preservation of natural resources.

Participant 1 discussed the use of gabions to mitigate flooding and manage soil erosion, demonstrating a commitment to sustainable practices.

Participant 3 mentioned the role of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in assisting with tree planting and maintaining environmental cleanliness. This initiative helps with reforestation and maintaining ecological balance.

Participant 7 highlighted the importance of replacing trees that are cut down and conducting regular clean-up drives. These activities are essential for maintaining environmental cleanliness and sustainability. These efforts ensure that tourism development does not compromise the natural environment, preserving it for future generations.

Theme 4: Stakeholder Collaboration

Effective stakeholder collaboration is essential for the success of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects. Participants identified various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector partners, who played a crucial role in supporting and implementing Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiatives.

Participant 2 mentioned the involvement of Aklan Trekkers and the Kalibo organization in promoting local livelihoods. These organizations provide the necessary support and resources to ensure the success of CBT projects. Participant 6 noted the role of the DENR and the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) in addressing land issues and promoting sustainable practices. Successful collaborations often result in tangible benefits for the community.

Participant 5 highlighted the development of the KAMMANA cooperative, which started with a few members and has now grown significantly, thanks to support from DAR and other stakeholders. These collaborations ensure that resources are effectively utilized and that goals are aligned to benefit the community.

Theme 5: Environmental Conservation Efforts

Participants consistently highlighted the importance of environmental conservation efforts in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects.

Tree planting was an everyday activity mentioned by Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7. This initiative supports reforestation and helps maintain ecological balance.

The prohibition of harmful activities such as illegal logging and the slash-and-burn method was also emphasized by Participants 2, 4, 5,

and 7. These measures are crucial for protecting the environment and ensuring its sustainability. The presence of forest and river guards was noted as a significant measure to protect the environment.

Participant 5 emphasized the role of forest guards in protecting the mountainside from illegal activities.

Participant 8 mentioned the role of river guards in maintaining cleanliness. These efforts are essential for preserving the natural environment and ensuring its sustainability.

Theme 6: Challenges in Sustainable Practices

Several challenges were identified in implementing sustainable practices in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects. Community engagement was a recurring issue, with Participants 1, 2, and 5 noting that not all community members are concerned about proper waste disposal or the survival of planted trees. This lack of engagement can hinder the success of environmental conservation efforts.

Waste management was another significant challenge, as highlighted by participants 5, 6, and 7. Improper disposal of trash by both locals and newcomers can lead to environmental degradation.

Infrastructure issues, such as narrow roads and inadequate parking spaces, were also noted by Participants 1, 5, and 6. These challenges must be addressed to ensure the success and sustainability of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects.

Theme 7: Economic Benefits of Tourism

The economic benefits derived from tourism were primarily seen in the form of job opportunities and support for local businesses.

Participants 1, 2, and 6 mentioned that tourism projects have created job opportunities for locals, thereby enhancing their economic stability.

Participant 1 noted that local businesses, such as bamboo crafts, have benefited from tourism. However, it was also noted that these benefits are still in the early stages and have not yet had a significant impact on the community.

Theme 8: Social and Cultural Changes

Tourism has led to increased social interaction and skill development within the community.

Participants 2, 3, 7, and 8 observed that people are now more socially active and less aloof from visitors. This increased interaction helps build a sense of community and fosters social cohesion.

Skill development was another positive change, with Participant 5 mentioning the development of artisans and various training programs. These initiatives help enhance the skills of community members and improve their employability. Cultural preservation was also highlighted as an important aspect of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects.

Participants 2, 3, 7, and 8 emphasized the importance of passing on traditional skills and customs to the younger generation. This ensures that the community's cultural heritage is preserved and leveraged for tourism activities.

Theme 9: Strategies for Balancing Development with Conservation

To ensure a balance between economic development, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation, several strategies were identified.

Community education was emphasized by Participants 1, 2, 5, and 7 as a crucial strategy for raising awareness about the benefits and challenges of development. Educating the community about sustainable practices and the importance of environmental conservation helps ensure the success of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects.

Government support was also deemed essential by Participants 4, 5, and 8 for the progress of the barangay. Government agencies should provide the necessary resources and support to ensure the success of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects.

Sustainable practices, such as replanting trees and environmental engineering, were mentioned by Participants 2, 5, and 7 as necessary measures to mitigate the negative impacts of development. These practices ensured that tourism development does not compromise the natural environment, preserving it for future generations.

Conclusion

The analysis enables researchers to conclude that Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a viable alternative for empowering communities and promoting sustainable development. An engaged, active, and interacting community that shares in project decision-making is essential for this to succeed. While still emerging, results are already apparent in the economic benefits, including job creation and support for livelihoods. Tree planting, waste management, and conservation are also integral to the organization's efforts, yielding positive results in environmental sustainability. However, several issues, including community engagement and waste management, remain unresolved. Effective implementation demands the collaboration of stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector. Although these newfound benefits of tourism have also raised concerns about social and cultural impacts on the local population, conservation and preservation remain extremely important.

To maximize the impact of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), ongoing community education, capacity building, and infrastructure development are essential. Through developing partnerships among the government, community, and private sectors, resource allocation can be improved, leading to better project outcomes. Long-term environmental well-being necessitates sustainable practices such as responsible waste disposal and eco-friendly tourism activities in line with this study. Additionally, the community can benefit economically by exploring innovative financing mechanisms, such as enhancing market linkages. If stakeholders adopt these recommendations, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has the potential to become a sustainable force in Barangay Napaan and other rural areas, promoting change. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) significantly boosts the economy of Barangay Napaan. This research underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to Community-Based Tourism (CBT) that prioritizes economic and social growth. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for the community and tourism stakeholders in designing and implementing practical Community-Based Tourism (CBT) programs that promote sustainable development in rural areas, such as Barangay Napaan.

A key recommendation is to set up a Community-Led CBT Council. This council should be formally created within the next three months. It should include a mix of community members, barangay officials, and local tourism operators to oversee CBT initiatives. It can measure its progress by holding monthly meetings with documented attendance and action plans. The goal is to create a feedback system for at least 80% of participating households within six months. This recommendation can be achieved by utilizing existing community structures and leadership for the initial setup. Local government units or non-governmental organizations can provide training. This approach is realistic, as it builds on current local government frameworks and can be initially funded by small community grants or a portion of tourism revenues. The council's first strategic plan should be developed within six months of its establishment.

Next, implement a Local Skills Development and Livelihood Diversification Program. This program aims to create and conduct training workshops in traditional crafts, including bamboo crafts and weaving, as well as organic farming techniques for agritourism. It will also cover guiding skills and basic hospitality services. The implemented program can measure success by aiming to have at least 50 community members complete training and start new tourism-related micro-enterprises, such as homestays and craft stalls, within one year. This is achievable through partnerships with TESDA, local vocational schools, and existing successful community enterprises for curriculum development and mentorship. The program focuses on local resources and potential tourist demand, with initial funding from local government grants or CSR initiatives. The first workshop series is expected to begin within six months, with an assessment of the initial economic impact and participant success scheduled for completion within 1.5 years.

Finally, an Enhanced Waste Management and Reforestation Initiative is recommended. This program involves setting up a barangay-wide segregated waste collection system and initiating weekly community clean-up drives, focusing on tourism sites and critical ecological zones within Barangay Napaan. It can measure outcomes by aiming to reduce visible litter by 70% in key tourism areas within one year and plant 1,000 endemic trees each year in identified conservation sites, with an 80% survival rate monitored over a two-year period. This is feasible by mobilizing community volunteers, partnering with DENR for sapling provision, and integrating environmental education into local schools. This initiative utilizes community volunteer labor and leverages existing local government sanitation services. The segregated collection system is expected to be launched within four months. Weekly clean-up drives are scheduled to occur for the next two years, and annual tree planting initiatives are anticipated to commence within six months.

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