

Perceptions of Eco and Agri-Tourism Operators on the Impact of Their Industry in Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to arrived at a strategic development plan for the promotion of eco and agri-tourism industry in Pangasinan. To achieve this purpose, the researcher determined the business profiles of eco and agri-tourism sites in Pangasinan, looked into the difference in the business profiles between public and private eco and agri-tourism sites and looked into the perceptions of public and private eco and agri-tourism site operators and employees on the potential impact of eco and agri-tourism industry in the province. Furthermore, the study determined if there is significant difference between public and private operators and employee's perceptions on this impact along the dimensions of sustainability. All the data and insights derived from this study served as basis for the development of strategic development plan.

The researcher employed the descriptive method of research. Using both parametric and non-parametric statistical tests such as Mann-Whitney test, t-test for independent samples and chi-square test, the researcher quantified the data gathered using the survey questionnaire. Data obtained from the questionnaire were validated using interview, on-site visit and observation.

The researcher concluded that the business profiles eco and agri-tourism site operators in Pangasinan vary across public and private entities. Moreover, public and private eco and agri-tourism sites significantly differ in terms of their business profiles; hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in term so their business profiles is rejected at 0.05 level of significance. The researcher likewise concluded that employees and operators of public and private eco and agri-tourism sites in Pangasinan have a favorable perception as to the impact of their industry in sustainable development as shown by the perceived very high impact along the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Keywords: ecotourism, agri-tourism, sustainable tourism, sustainable business, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

In the international scale, the travel and tourism industry is considered not only as a source of income and revenue but also a driver of employment opportunities. Furthermore, they also serve as a mechanism to promote beneficial and domestically driven development in all domains (Meyer, 2015). In the last few decades, development tourism is considered

as an important economic tool to catalyze the process of development and alleviate poverty in poor countries (Novelli, 2015). UN agencies, the World Bank, civil societies and governments give due importance to the tourism industry as a tool to attain the following goals: poverty alleviation, development, livelihood creation and empowerment in the society. (UNWTO, 2018)

The Philippine economy regards tourism is an indispensable sector. The Tourism Act of 2009 considers tourism as crucial component of the Philippines economy and therefore it is considered one of national interest and significance. The law encourages the State to harness tourism as an engine of growth and cultural affirmation to generate investment, foreign exchange and employment, and to continue to mold an enhanced sense of national pride for all Filipinos (Section 2, Republic Act 9593).

In 2015 alone, 10.6% of the country's GDP is attributable to tourism-related economic activities. From January to October 2017, almost 6 million visitors arrived in the country which increased by around 12% considering the data from the same period in 2016. As a livelihood provider, the sector employs approximately 5 million Filipinos in 2015, enabling the government to gain revenue to as much as P227.62 billion pesos mostly from foreign visitors. Interestingly, a quarter of this revenue came from Boracay. Through its tourism mantra "It's More Fun in the Philippines," in 2015 the country attracted almost 5.5 million foreign tourists. This figure reached the 6.7 million mark in 2017 according to the Department of Tourism.

As more regions and countries develop their tourism industry, it produces significant impacts on natural resources, consumption patterns, pollution and social systems. The need for sustainable/responsible planning and management is imperative for the industry to survive as a whole (Sustaining Tourism, 2019).

Sustainable tourism according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"

Although not everything depends on tourism, tourism depends on almost

everything. Sustainable tourism is about re-focusing and adapting. A balance must be found between limits and usage so that continuous changing, monitoring and planning ensure that tourism can be managed. This requires thinking long-term (10, 20+ years) and realizing that change is often cumulative, gradual and irreversible. Economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development must include the interests of all stakeholders including indigenous people, local communities, visitors, industry and government (Sustaining Tourism, 2019).

The researcher conducted this study for three good reasons: firstly, eco and agri-tourism constitutes a significant portion of the local economy in Pangasinan, specifically the local government units where they are situated. For instance, in the city of Alaminos, the Hundred Islands National Park provides at least around Php 50 million as a form of revenue generation from the operation of the parks. Hence, from the economic perspectives, it is important to look into the potential of eco and agri-tourism industry in the local economy. Secondly, there is a growing trend of embedding sustainable development goals of the international community not only in the national level but also equally important in the local level where the three dimensions of sustainability such as economic, socio-cultural and environmental domains are taken into account in planning and policy-making for eco and agri-tourism. Having said that, it is important that a study be undertaken to look into the perspectives and perceptions of eco and agri-tourism site operators and employees as it this has bearing as to how the dimensions of sustainability are given regard in matters of polity and policy. Finally, there is a dearth of literature about eco and agri-tourism in the local level which makes benchmarking difficult that may provide adequate insights for policy-making purposes. With that said, this study intends to fill that knowledge gap along this field of study.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of eco and agri-tourism site operators and employees in Pangasinan on the impact of their industry in sustainable development

Specifically, it sought to answer the following sub-problems:

1. What is the business profile of public and private eco and agri-tourism sites in Pangasinan in terms of:
 - a) Length of time in business operations;
 - b) Current number of employees;
 - c) Number of visitors per year;
 - d) Marketing strategies;
2. Is there a significant difference between public and private eco/agri tourism sites along the afore cited business profile variables
3. To what extent is the impact of eco/agri tourism as perceived by the respondents along:
 - a) Economic
 - b) Socio-cultural
 - c) environmental
4. Is there a significant difference between public and private eco/agri tourism sites as to their perception in the impact of their industry along the three domains, to wit economic, socio-cultural environmental aspects?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the business profile and the respondents' perceptions on the impact of agri-tourism?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study made use of the descriptive method of research. Descriptive research can be explained as a statement of affairs as they are at present with the researcher having no control over variable. Moreover, "descriptive studies may be characterised as simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what is, while analytical research attempts to establish why it is that way or how it came to be" (Ethridge, D.E. (2004).

Locale of the Study:

The research areas include:

- Eco Tourism
 - The Hundred Islands National Park
 - Manleluag Hot Spring
 - Balungao Agro-Eco Tourism
 - Tayug Eco-Park
 - Bugallon Eco-Tourism Park
- Agri Tourism
 - Our Farm Republic
 - Paraiso del Valour
 - Pure Green Eco-Farm
 - Roheim Farm and Wellness Resort
 - Sta. Barbara Provincial Nursery and Agricultural Extension

Sampling Design:

This study used purposive sampling. This is the appropriate sampling considering that the focus of the study is on eco and agri-tourism sites in Pangasinan and the goal of the researcher is to come up with an in-depth treatment of an identified portion of a population and to gain insights thereto without necessarily delving into the intention of deriving a generalized empirical observation. A total of 100 respondents from business/establishment operators of the eco-tourism and agri-tourism sites took part in this study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection:

The researcher also made use of questionnaire. Part 1 of the questionnaire explores the demographic profile of the operators of the farm/eco-tourism sites. Part 2 pertains to the perceptions of the respondents as cited.

The researcher likewise used semi-structured interview which focuses on the different sustainable tourism practices in the four cases identified.

The data collected from the questionnaire and semi-structured interview were validated and triangulated using on-site visit and observation.

Statistical methods:

Data were quantified as frequency distribution, average weighted mean and

percentages. Statistical analysis was done using T-test, Chi-square test and Mann-Whitney test to describe the relationship among the variables involved.

Computation and analysis were performed using the SPSS software.

RESULTS

On the Business Profile of the Eco and Agri-Tourism Sites in Pangasinan

The public and private eco and agri-tourism sites in Pangasinan differ in terms of their business profiles.

Table 1: Business Profile of Eco and Agri-Tourism Operators

Length of Time in Business Operations	Frequency		Percentage		Rank
	Public	Private	Public	Private	
1-3 years	0	2	0.00%	40.0%	3.5
4-6 years	1	2	20.0%	40.0%	1.5
7-10 years	2	0	40.0%	00.0%	3.5
more than 10 years	2	1	40.0%	20.0%	1.5
Total	5	5	100%	100 %	
Number of Current Employees/Staff members	Public	Private	Public	Private	Rank
1-5 employees	0	3	0.00%	60.0%	2
6-10 employees	0	1	0.00%	20.0%	4
11-15 employees	0	1	0.00%	20.0%	4
16-20 employees	1	0	20.00%	0.00%	4
more than 20 employees	4	0	80.0%	0.00%	1
Total	5	5	100%	100 %	
Average Number of Visitors Per Month	Public	Private	Public	Private	Rank
less than 500 visitors	2	2	40.0%	40.0%	3
500-1, 999 visitors	0	3	0.00%	60.00%	1.5
more than 2000 visitors	3	0	60.0%	0.00%	1.5
Total	5	5	100 %	100 %	
Marketing Strategies Used	Public	Private	Public	Private	Rank
Internet marketing (blogs, websites, etc.)	8	8	36.36%	27.59%	1
Paid advertisements	1	3	4.54%	10.34%	5
Memberships in trade and professional associations	5	5	22.74%	17.24%	3
Traditional marketing	6	6	27.28%	20.70%	2
Transactional marketing	1	5	4.54%	17.24%	4
Others	1	2	4.54%	6.90%	6
Total	22	29	100 %	100 %	

In terms of the length of business operations, two (2) or 40% of the surveyed public eco and agri-tourism sites have been in the industry for more than 10 years; and another two (2) or 40% have been in operations for 7-10 years. On the other hand, private eco and agri-tourism sites are relatively new. Two (2) or 40% have at least 1-3 years' experience and another two (2) or 40% have been in operations for 4-6 years.

As regards number of employees, public eco and agri-tourism sites appeared to have at least 16 employees compared to private eco and agri-tourism sites operator which operate for no more than 15 employees.

In terms of the average number of visitors monthly, public eco and agri-tourism operators appeared to have more visitors in their sites than their private counterpart. Sixty percent (60%) of the surveyed public eco and agri-tourism

operators entertain more than 2,000 visitors per month compared to private eco and agri-tourism sites where 60% have 500-1, 999 visitors.

Finally, in terms of marketing strategies used, public and private eco and agri-tourism sites likewise differ. Public eco and agri-tourism sites are more inclined to use the following marketing strategies: internet marketing, 8 (36.36%); traditional marketing, 6 (27.28%); membership in professional trade or associations; 5 (22.74%); and paid advertisements and traditional marketing with 1 each (4.54%). On the other hand, private eco and agri-tourism sites listed internet marketing as one of their marketing strategies with 8 (27.595); traditional marketing, 6 (20.70%); membership in professional trade or associations and transactional marketing, each with 5 (17.24%); paid advertisements, 3 (10.34%). Both make use of internet

marketing extensively as a marketing strategy.

On the Difference in the Business Profiles of Public and Private Eco and Agri-Tourism Sites

Over-all there is significant difference between public and private eco and agri-tourism sites in terms of length of

business operations (p-value of 0.007), number of current employees or staff members (p-value of 0.007) and number of visitors per month (p-value of 0.006). On the contrary, there is no significant difference between the two in terms of the marketing strategies used (p-value of 0.069).

Table 2 Difference in the Business Profile Variables of Public and Private Eco and Agri-Tourism Sites in Pangasinan

Business Profile Variables	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Conclusion
Length of business operations	25.0	0.007	Significant
Number of current employees or staff member	25.0	0.007	Significant
Number of visitors per month	2.0	0.006	Significant
Marketing strategies used	15.0	0.69	Not Significant

* At 0.05 level of significance

On the Perception of Public and Private Eco and Agri-Tourism Sites on the Impact of Eco and Agri-tourism Industry

Both public and private eco and agri-tourism sites perceive that their industry have *very high* impact on economic development as evidenced by weighted mean of 4.34 and 4.33 respectively; *very high* impact on socio-cultural development 4.34 (public) and 4.33 (private); and likewise *very high* along the domain of environmental sustainability, with 4.51 and 4.45 respectively.

Table 3 Perceptions of Public and Private Eco and Agri-Tourism Sites on the Potential Impacts of their Industry in Sustainable Development

On the Economic Impacts of Eco/Agri Tourism	AWM		Description	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
1. Eco/agri-tourism can provide additional income to farmers and agricultural households in poor rural communities in the province.	4.60	4.50	Very High	Very High
2. Eco/agri-tourism can provide income opportunities for related business in food supply and agricultural produce sector, accommodation and hospitality sector and other related industries.	4.85	4.73	Very High	Very High
3. Eco/agri-tourism destinations can generate added revenues to the local government unit where it is situated.	4.55	4.52	Very High	Very High
4. Eco/agri-tourism helps promote thriving agricultural and eco-friendly products in the community.	4.10	4.15	High	High
5. Eco/agritourism can help promote agri-business in the province.	3.90	3.40	High	High
6. Eco/agritourism enhances entrepreneurial activities in the farm which encourages innovation in the farm	3.70	4.20	High	Very High
7. Eco/agritourism can promote local development in the local community in particular and the national economy in general	4.75	4.15	Very High	High
Over-all	4.35	4.24	Very High	Very High
On the Socio-Cultural Impacts of Eco/Agri Tourism	Public	Private	Public	Private
1. Eco/agri-tourism can help preserve traditional and regional products; thus, enhancing the identity and branding of the province.	3.50	4.20	High	Very High
2. Eco/agri-tourism can promote social cohesion as it encourages interactions between and among tourists and visitors to the community where the eco/agri-tourism destinations are situated.	4.60	4.55	Very High	Very High
3. Eco/agri-tourism has a ripple effect in the creation of job opportunities for the community residents.	4.85	4.90	Very High	Very High
4. Eco/agri-tourism can help preserve culinary heritage of the province and promote it for public awareness.	4.10	4.15	High	High
5. Eco/agri-tourism can provide recreational and therapeutic benefits for city/urban and rural dwellers alike.	3.95	3.50	High	High
6. Eco/agri-tourism can help the local government units and business entities to find common grounds for collective action and cooperation.	4.85	4.70	Very High	Very High
7. Eco/agri-tourism can help people reconnect with nature and rural lifestyle far removed from their generations and rekindle their connection to food production	4.50	4.30	Very High	Very High
Over-all	4.34	4.33	Very High	Very High
On the Environmental Impacts of Eco/Agri Tourism	Public	Private	Public	Private
1. Eco/agri-tourism can help promote ideals of environmentalism among urban and rural dwellers.	3.45	3.40	High	High
2. Eco/agri-tourism has the potential to help lessen carbon footprint in the atmosphere through promotion of eco-friendly practices.	4.45	4.50	Very High	Very High
3. Eco/agri-tourism can influence businesses to go green in their production and consumption	4.65	4.70	Very High	Very High
4. Eco/agri-tourism can provide an avenue for a more responsive community in preserving biodiversity and natural resources.	4.59	4.63	Very High	Very High
5. Nature lovers are given the opportunity to leverage upon eco and agri-tourism sites to further their environmental advocacies.	4.67	4.70	Very High	Very High
6. Eco/agri-tourism creates environmental awareness to community residents and provides motivation for cooperation.	4.88	4.40	Very High	Very High
7. Eco/agri-tourism helps improve environmental conditions through natural resource management and preservation	4.90	4.80	Very High	Very High
Over-all	4.51	4.45	Very High	Very High

On the Difference on Perception of Public and Private Eco and Agri-Tourism Sites on the Impact of Eco and Agri-tourism Industry

There is no significant difference in the perceptions of public and private eco and agri-tourism operators and employees on the impacts of their industry in sustainable development as evidenced by the t-value of 0.26 with a p-value of 0.40.

Table 4 Difference in the Perceptions of Public and Private Eco and Agri-Tourism Operators/ Employees Potential Impacts of their Industry in Sustainable Development

Perceptions on Various Dimensions of Sustainable Development	t-value	p-value	Conclusion
Perceptions on economic benefits	0.49	0.32	Not Significant
Perceptions on socio-cultural benefits	0.03	0.49	Not Significant
Perceptions on environmental impact	0.25	0.40	Not Significant
Over-all	0.26	0.40	Not Significant

On the Relationship Between the Business Profiles and Perception of Public and Private Eco and Agri-Tourism Sites on the Impact of Eco and Agri-tourism Industry

There is no significant relationship between the length of business operations and the perceptions of eco and agri-tourism operators and employees on the impact of their industry in sociocultural development as evidenced by the chi square value of 25.32 and p-value of 0.13, and in environmental dimension, with chi square value of 7.51 and p-value of 0.82. But significant relationship exists with the perceptions on economic development, with the chi square value of 92.47 and p-value of 0.00.

The respondents' perceptions along all three dimensions of sustainable development have no significant relationship with the number of employees as shown by the chi square value of 26.0 and p-value of 0.05.

There is significant relationship between the number of visitors and the respondents' perceptions on the economic impact of eco and agri-tourism. However, there exists no significant relationship between the number of visitors per month and the respondents' perceptions on the socio-cultural impact (p-value of 0.60) and environmental impact (p-value of 0.92) of eco and agri-tourism.

Finally, there exists no significant relationship between marketing strategies used and the respondents' perceptions on the economic impact (p-value of 0.21),

sociocultural impact (0.83) and environmental impact (0.65).

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following were the conclusions drawn:

1. The business profiles of eco and agri-tourism site operators in Pangasinan vary across public and private entities.
2. In the main, public and private eco and agri-tourism sites significantly differ in terms of their business profiles; hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in term so their business profiles is rejected at 0.05 level of significance.
3. Employees and operators of public and private eco and agri-tourism sites in Pangasinan have a favorable perception as to the impact of their industry in sustainable development as shown by the perceived *very high* impact along the three dimensions of sustainable development.
4. There is no significant difference between the public and private eco and agri-tourism sites operators and employees of Pangasinan in terms of their perception as to the impact of their industry in sustainable development.
5. In general, there are mixed results on the relationship between business profiles and the perceptions of the eco and agri-tourism sites in Pangasinan. However, it can be argued that majority of the business profiles do not have significant relationship with the perceptions of the

public and eco agri-tourism site operator's and employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions, the following conclusions were advanced:

For executive officials and tourism officers of the local government units, involving the local communities and stakeholders where the eco and agri-tourism sites are situated during the tourism planning process, implementation, execution, evaluation and monitoring so as to instill a sense of ownership and responsibility in carrying out action plans for tourism. Partnership with the private sector more particularly with the private operators promotes knowledge sharing, interoperability, sharing of best practices, etc.

For the private sector, specifically the tourism industry (airline operators, tour organizations, tour providers, etc.) that operates nationally and locally, to assist in identifying points of cooperation and synergy with the national and local governments, the local communities and other relevant stakeholders in the industry to enable multi-sectorial and multi-stakeholder approach in dealing with the challenges in the industry.

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