

MUNICIPALITY-BASED TOURISM INITIATIVES IN THE PROVINCE OF ILOILO, PHILIPPINES: ASSESSMENT OF ATTRACTIVENESS, SUSTAINABILITY, AND ACCEPTABILITY

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Abstract

The municipalities in the province of Iloilo, Philippines have wide diversification of tourism products and services which produce extensive benefits and influences to domestic and foreign tourists, as well as to the residents. The Municipal Tourism Officers implement regulatory function over tourism-oriented development plans, do research and assessment of tourism-related statistics, and facilitate promotional events. They have a vital role in the development of the tourism features, sustaining its resources for the benefit of the future generation, and making sure that it is acceptable to all tourism stakeholders. To assist the Provincial Tourism Office with its concerns, a descriptive-correlational method of research was utilized for this investigation to ascertain the attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives. The study was conducted in August of 2018 among the tourism officers from five congressional districts of the province. They were selected through a simple random sampling and a two-part self-administered researcher-made questionnaire was validated as data-gathering instruments. The major findings revealed that tourism officers in the province of Iloilo assessed the municipality-based initiatives as attractive, sustainable, and acceptable. Positive and significant relationships existed between attractiveness and sustainability; attractiveness and acceptability; and sustainability and acceptability. There seems to be a consensus that being attractive and sustainable could result in acceptability.

Keywords: municipality-based tourism, Iloilo, attractiveness, sustainability, acceptability.

INTRODUCTION

Local Government Units (LGUs) play a vital role in bringing tourism product development to completion and compel strong current expertise of changing tourists demand, this is because the authority and promotion of tourism enterprises have been entrusted to the LGUs.

Every province, city, or municipality, in which tourism is a significant industry has a permanent or appointed position for a Tourism Officer who is responsible for preparing, implementing, and updating local tourism development plans. A rising number of municipalities are formulating tourism strategies to manage destination stakeholders and to strengthen their tourism industry, but therein lies the vulnerability in most of their plans.

This is tailored to assist tourism decision-makers working for governmental organizations in recognizing tourism potentials. The findings of this study will give substance in the planning, promoting, enhancing, or developing appropriate promotional strategies in every municipality in the province of Iloilo, Philippines.

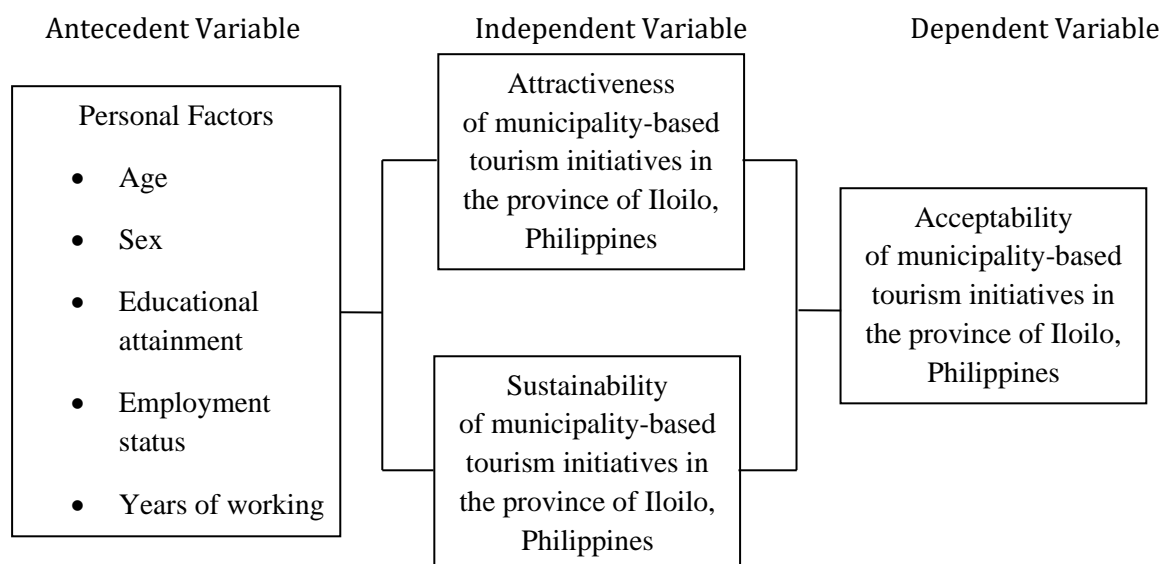
Results could easily trace the areas that need to be improved and immediately find means to develop or resolve the major concerns about the tourism industry of the province. Moreover, it

may provide insights to the Municipal Tourism Officers in the province of Iloilo, Philippines. The results could be used in revising the Tourism Master Plan. These will also provide an understanding of where to focus and review every area of the operation.

It may be beneficial to the residents in every municipality. Residents should have an awareness and deeper understanding regarding the tourism destinations and a deeper engagement in the development and familiarization process. Tourism has the opportunity to bring the local communities together. Hence, support for tourism improvement and promotion is necessary, as well as, genuine community engagement can enrich the visitor experience.

Overall, this study aimed to determine the attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as assessed by the tourism officers. The specific objectives are the following, to determine:

1. The level of attractiveness of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as assessed by tourism officers.
2. The level of sustainability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as assessed by tourism officers.
3. The level of acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as assessed by tourism officers
4. The significant differences in the level of attractiveness of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as assessed by tourism officers classified according to: (a) age, (b) sex, (c) educational attainment, (d) employment status, (e) years of working experience, and (f) congressional district assigned.
5. The significant differences in the level of sustainability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as assessed by tourism officers classified according to: (a) age, (b) sex, (c) educational attainment, (d) employment status, (e) years of working experience, and (f) congressional district assigned.
6. The significant differences in the level of acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as assessed by tourism officers classified according to: (a) age, (b) sex, (c) educational attainment, (d) employment status, (e) years of working experience, and (f) congressional district assigned.
7. The significant relationships between the tourism officers' assessment of the attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of *Figure 1* to show the paradigm of the study.



LITERATURE REVIEW

The investigation of Bertella and Rossi Romanelli (2018) reviewed the methods of preparation and amplifying tourism initiatives, their implementation, and the outcomes on the local communities. Even in the case where such initiatives are not strategically planned and start with limited participation of local actors, the conclusions imply that they can point to substantial advantages for the local communities. The conclusions also propose that these sorts of initiatives can establish a firm groundwork for forthcoming improvements with developing active cooperation by the local officials and community.

Medina-Muñoz (2014) considered that the attractiveness of tourism destinations is a matter of exceptional engagement to researchers including specialists wanting to experience the strength of destinations to entice and fascinate visitors.

As affirmed by Pilapil-Añasco & Lizada (2014), the future usage of the tourism enterprise immediately lies in the tourism laborers which should be equipped completely to manage the visitors professionally and engage them to endure the excellences and prompt them to return and yield it with their colleagues, relatives, and friends. Customary and stringent implementation of the practices and laws should also be ingested by the regulatory organizations from all levels.

The conclusions of the investigation of Amir et al. (2015) proposed that sustainable tourism advancement in a rural district will provide an augmented resiliency within the confined community. Some approaches are necessitated to guarantee the sustainable development of rural tourism and to convey the local community's resiliency.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive-correlational method of research was employed in this study. The respondents in this study were Municipal Tourism Officers from forty-three (43) municipalities in the province of Iloilo: seven (7) municipalities from the First District or The Heritage Destination, eight (8) municipalities from the Second District or The Eco-Cultural Destination, nine (9) municipalities from the Third District or The Eco-Agri Destination, eight (8) municipalities from the Fourth District or The Heritage-Adventure Destination, and lastly, eleven (11) municipalities from Fifth District or The Resort Destination. They were selected using the simple random sampling method.

The researcher crafted a researcher-made questionnaire in gathering the needed data regarding the attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives. The initial draft of the questionnaire was presented to the Provincial Tourism Officer, for suggestions, additional comments, and shared expertise. The data-gathering instrument was validated by three experts prior to the distribution to the respondents. Their suggestions and ideas have been incorporated in the final content of the questionnaire.

To measure the level of attractiveness of the municipality-based tourism initiatives, thirty-three statements related to the possible initiatives in line with the different tourism tangibles and intangibles such as (1) natural features; (2) historical, cultural, and traditions; (3) festivals; (4) foods and crafts; and (5) environment were prepared. Utilizing the 5-point Likert Scale, the tourism officers indicated their responses by putting a (✓) along the strongly disagree to strongly agree continuum.

To ascertain the level of sustainability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives, twenty-five statements were prepared. It presents the structures through which tourism decision-makers

can work with others, and deal and embrace sustainability for the benefit of the residents and the tourists in the future that are based on the three pillars of sustainable tourism. Utilizing the 5-point Likert Scale, the tourism officers indicated their responses by putting a (✓) along the strongly disagree to strongly agree continuum.

To measure the level of municipality-based tourism initiatives, twenty statements were constructed and divided into four categories, namely: marketing, product development, service delivery, and monitoring, evaluation & continuous improvement. Utilizing the 5-point Likert Scale, the tourism officers indicated their responses by putting a (✓) along the strongly disagree to strongly agree continuum.

The researcher prepared a letter for the Provincial Tourism Officer asking permission to conduct a study. The final draft of the data-gathering instrument was submitted for grammar checking, then it was pilot tested among thirty-one (31) Municipal Tourism Officers of the neighboring provinces to ascertain its reliability in the local setting.

The 10-day survey administration was performed during the month of August 2018 at different municipal halls or respective municipal tourism centers in the province of Iloilo, Philippines. The questionnaires were administered to tourism officers who agreed to support the research project.

To ensure the ethical norms and standards of the investigation, all retrieved questionnaires were secured and coded numerically to maintain confidentiality. Upon retrieval of the accomplished questionnaires, the data were encoded, tallied, and interpreted. All statistical computations were computer-processed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

The following statistical tools were employed in the analysis of the obtained quantitative data: frequency count, percentage analysis, mean, and standard deviation while *t*-test, one-way analysis of variance, and Pearson's *r* all set at .05 alpha level of significance, were utilized as inferential statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Analysis

Level of attractiveness of the municipality-based tourism initiatives. The data revealed that the participants, as an entire group, assessed the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as *attractive* ($M = 4.10$; $SD = 0.47$).

The study of Bertella and Rossi Romanelli (2018) investigated the processes of planning and developing tourism initiatives, their implementation, and the effects on the local communities. Yet in the event where such actions are not strategically designed and begin with insufficient support of local actors, they can drive to significant gains for the society. The findings also suggest that these types of initiatives can constitute a solid basis for future developments with increasing active participation by the local actors.

Moreover, it corroborates with the findings of Medina-Muñoz (2014) that additional investigation on destination attractiveness is nearly associated with the investigation of destination image since the idea of destination image and destination attractiveness are correlated and conceptually interconnected, whereas the level of destination attractiveness is considerably impacted by the destination image and vice versa.

Level of sustainability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives. As revealed, the participants as an entire group, assessed the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo,

Philippines as *sustainable* ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 0.49$).

The study of Amir et al. (2015) validates the findings of this study that some approaches are essential to ensure the sustainable development of rural tourism and to sustain the local community's resiliency. Furthermore, this confirms the study of Shani and Pizam (2012) that community participation is an indispensable component of sustainable tourism development and is a proponent to accomplish both planning-oriented and community-oriented objectives.

Level of acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives. The data revealed that with the exception of the tourism officers from the first congressional district ($M = 4.34$; $SD = 0.51$) who assessed the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as *extremely acceptable*, the rest of the participants assessed the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines as *acceptable*. This was reflected in the obtained mean scores that fell within the 3.41-4.20 scale.

Inferential Analysis

Differences in the level of attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives. The *t*-test and one-way ANOVA results revealed that no significant differences existed in the level of attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines when the participants were classified according to (a) age, (b) sex, (c) educational attainment, (d) employment status, (e) years of working experience, and (f) congressional district assigned.

Relationships among attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability. The data in Table 1 revealed that positive and significant relationships existed between attractiveness and sustainability ($r = .808$, $p = .000$), between attractiveness and acceptability ($r = .726$, $p = .000$), and between sustainability and acceptability ($r = .891$, $p = .000$) of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines.

Table 1. Significant Relationships Among the Different Variables

Variables	1/r	r prob.	2/r	r prob.	3/r	r prob.
1. Attractiveness of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines	-	-	.808 **	.000	.726 **	.000
2. Sustainability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines	.808 **	.000	-	-	.891 **	.000
3. Acceptability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo, Philippines	.726 **	.000	.891 **	.000	-	-

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSIONS

It can be construed that the Municipal Tourism Officers are only exerting a marginal joint effort in establishing a variety of tourism products in their municipalities. The initiatives are somewhat inadequate to bolster their entire tourism industry. Also, initiatives need to be heightened since tourism is considered as one of the primary engines of growth for the local economy. Thus, tourism officers must broaden their plans in different areas of the tourism industry, such as natural attractions, historical and cultural, and traditions, festivals, foods and crafts, and the environment.

Local officials are committed to ensuring that the sustainability of the municipality-based tourism initiatives is monitored for the benefit of both residents and visitors. However, based on the findings, tourism officers have only sufficient efforts to sustain their tourism initiatives, which means, it is just enough to meet the needs of a situation or a proposed end. They need to strive more to attain an excellent impact on the different areas, such as socio-cultural sustainability, economic sustainability, and concerned with environmental sustainability. These sustained efforts could be beneficial in the future.

It can be deduced that the initiatives of the tourism officers have not met the highest standard in developing the tourism products, monitoring tourists' experiences, and even the expectations of the visitors to guarantee that the services offered in their respective municipalities are consistent. Moreover, it can be figured out that there is a lack of full support and/or tourism is not a top priority in their municipality. There should be a presence of continuous investment when it comes to promoting the tourism industry since it is also considered as one of the sources of income in their town's economy.

Sex, age, educational attainment, employment status, years of working experience, and the congressional district assigned were factors not to significantly influence one's assessment of the level of attractiveness, sustainability, and acceptability. This seems to imply that regardless of whether the tourism office is a male or female; aged 20-30 years old, 31-40 years old, 41-50 years old, or 51 years old and above; a college-level, college graduate, or post-graduate; permanent or job order employee; has a working experience of less than a year, 1-3 years, 4-6 years or more than 6 years; assigned in the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth congressional district, the assessment of the attractiveness of the municipality-based tourism initiatives in the province of Iloilo remains comparable.

There seems to be a consensus that being attractive and sustainable could bring about acceptability. The attractiveness of a certain destination is already present since it provides an abundant and variety of tourism resources, it also enables the place to become a vacation industry. The local officials, specifically the assigned tourism officers are tasked to develop certain plans, policies, and guides for their tourism industry just to make it more sustainable and beneficial for future use. Thus, with proper tourism planning, acceptability could be attained. In other words, all these three features could be tantamount to municipality-based tourism initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this investigation will serve as a basis or blueprint for the long-term tourism planning of the Municipal and Provincial Tourism Officer. The gathered findings should be added in monitoring and updating their Tourism Master Plan that will serve as direction and scope of their goals. This is an effective way to attain their plans for the development of their tourism industry. They must utilize the available resources just to make it more attractive in all

aspects.

Tourism officers should expand their sustainability initiatives in certain areas of tourism by making sure that the economic growth and sustainable tourism livelihoods for the youth, poor, women, indigenous tribes, etc., are secured and attained. Also, as part of tourism sustainability, they should alleviate poverty, protect the national culture, traditions, and other socio-cultural concerns. Lastly, the conservation of natural resources and counteract environmental degradation must be given additional attention so that everyone could benefit especially the future generation.

Private sectors such as tour operators, tour guides, and tourism establishment owners should strengthen their joint efforts in rendering a better service for their tourists/visitors. A strong private-public partnership in tourism development should be emulated so that these councils may help in organizing the local tourism industry into a cohesive organization that fosters the growth of the sector and their town. Private sectors should also abide by the rules of the LGUs in terms of submission of the requirements, permits, and other documents.

Residents of host communities should be involved in every tourism development plan of the Local Government Units (LGUs). A proper consultation before the policy-making and decision-making processes must be initiated since they are also acknowledged as legitimate tourism stakeholders. Locals need to be knowledgeable and may serve as a voice in the development concerns of their municipality to enable them to preserve community interests, increase transparency, and accountability.

Replication of this study at a wider scope is highly recommended. Aside from the tourism officers, who previously served as the research participants, it is also suggested to incorporate various local officials from the five congressional districts, tourism practitioners, travel-related providers (i.e. travel agencies, tour operators, tour guides, and other related tourism services), lodging/tourism establishment owners, food establishments, as well as the residents. This will provide a comprehensive examination of the extent to which tourism is consolidated into the local government plans and it would be interesting to see how these tourism stakeholders perceive on LGUs' engagement in the tourism industry. In addition, they may also include in their investigation the variety of tourism problems or concerns of their municipality.

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