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Local people's perception on the impacts and importance of
ecotourism in Sabang, Palawan, Philippines

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Abstract

The Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP) was recently renowned as one of the new seven wonders of nature. The Puerto Princesa Underground River is reputed to be the longest navigable underground river in the world. This study examines the effects of ecotourism to the local community in terms of livelihood generation and influx of people. This study likewise examines the views of the local community on the impact of ecotourism and importance of natural resource to the tourism industry. This paper presents results from the systematically and randomly sampled surveyed householders and purposively selected interviewed key informants from sitio Sabang. Sabang is the location of the port where the tourists wait prior to being ferried to the Subterranean River. The result of the study revealed that undoubtedly the tourism industry in the area has been source of income for most of the householders. More establishments were recently established due to the growing number of visitors in the area. Consequently, the development of the ecotourism industry in Sabang led to the change of livelihood among local people due to higher compensation offered by the tourism industry. In addition, it had caused high influx of people because of work opportunity. The local people believed ecotourism in Sabang, Palawan is beneficial. However, environmental protection was seen least of the enumerated positive impacts against work opportunity and city development. Nevertheless, residents of Sabang have a high level of awareness and involvement in the protection of the environment. But because of too much dependence on tourism, most of the respondents became oblivious that the tourism in Subterranean River is a form of ecotourism and the environment is the key tourism resource. The concept of ecotourism is very evident from the local government and park coordinators but does not entirely transcend to all sectors in the community.

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1. Introduction

Ecotourism is one strategy for supporting conservation and providing income for communities in and around protected areas. It can contribute to economic development and conservation of protected areas by: a) generating revenues that can be used to sustainably manage protected areas, b) providing local employment and c) inculcating a sense of community ownership. However, without careful planning and management that balance ecological, social, and economic objectives, it may lead to environmental damage. Furthermore, envisioned as a positive approach towards sustainable development, unplanned or poorly planned and implemented tourism can have serious negative effects, offsetting the benefits it was designed to provide [1]. Even the potential local benefits of ecotourism can lead to environmental damage to a protected area. For example, an increase in employment opportunities, road improvement, technical assistance, or health care can stimulate migration of people into the vicinity of the protected area. Therefore, an understanding of the local residents' attitudes and perceptions toward tourism development and how these perceptions are formed would be valuable knowledge for the tourism industry particularly for regional tourism development projects [2].

The Philippines offers diverse tourism activities and destinations for tourists with various inclinations. As the destinations and activities become more multi-faceted, the Philippine tourism industry is seen to increasingly play a significant role in the country's economic development [3]. The province of Palawan is blessed with rich resource and with its historical and cultural attractions offers ample opportunities for varied activities. The pristine environment setting is excellent for sightseeing, beach holidays, marine sports, adventures etc. The province has a number of world-class spots, noteworthy of which the underground river in St Paul National Park [4]. PPSRNP is one of the most important biodiversity conservation areas in the Philippines. It features a spectacular limestone or karst landscape that contains an 8.2 km long underground river. A distinguishing feature of the river is that it flows directly into the sea, and the lower half portion of the river is brackish and subject to tidal influence. The area also represents a significant habitat for biodiversity conservation. It contains a full mountain to the sea ecosystem and protects forests, which are among the most significant in Asia. The PPSRNP is designated a core area for the Palawan Biosphere Reserve under the Man and Biosphere Program. In recognition of its globally significant natural properties, it was inscribed to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's of (UNESCO) List of Natural World Heritage Sites. Inscription to the list confirms the exceptional and universal value of the Site that deserves to be protected for the benefit of all humanity. In addition, The Puerto Princesa Underground River is reputed to be the longest navigable underground river in the World. It is one of few such rivers which the public can easily experience and appreciate. It is the official entry of the Philippines and is one of the 28 finalists to the Search for the New Seven Wonders of Nature. It is a source of pride and a key element in the identity of the people of Puerto Princesa in particular, and of the Philippines as a whole [5].

This paper seeks to determine the local people's perception on the importance of natural resource to the tourism Industry according to their type of livelihood (ecotourism or non-ecotourism job) and according to their length of stay in Sabang Palawan. This study will enable residents to provide inputs to government programs through shared insights or from a community-based perspective. It will help consider issues on migration, plan monitoring schemes and formulate more appropriate programs as population increases. The program's good practices will be a good benchmark for similar programs. It can also be a source of recommendations to enable further improvement of the program and make it successful.

2. Methodology

The researcher used sample size estimation for true proportions to determine the sample size of the population. A total of 153 households were served as representative respondents for the total population of 255 households. Stratified random sampling with a sample interval of two (2) was applied. Interval of two (2) was determined.

The researcher conducted an ocular inspection in the community of Sabang, Palawan. The researcher met with the community organizer who accompanied him to the community. During the half-day ocular inspection, casual interviews were employed by the researcher to gather feedbacks and overviews of the current situation and issues regarding the ecotourism. Likewise, the ocular inspection paved the way for the researcher to establish rapport with the community and had an opportunity for a

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