

PASCN Discussion Paper No. 2003-04

**Development of a Classification Framework on
Ecotourism Initiatives in the Philippines**

Ramon Benedicto Alampay and Carlos M. Libosada Jr.



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Development of a Classification Framework on Ecotourism Initiatives in the Philippines

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May 2003

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Abstract

Ecotourism's promise of sustained environmental, social and economic gains makes it the preferred type of development for many interest groups. However, the diversity of so-called "ecotourism initiatives" in the country has raised questions about whether each project truly embodies the principles of sustainability, environmental sensitivity and respect for local peoples and cultures.

This paper looks into the current status of ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines and suggests a classification scheme or framework to be followed and adopted by the industry. Building on concepts first proposed by Acott, LaTrobe and Howard (1998) as well as Weaver (2001), the paper defines ecotourism as having three basic elements: a focus on the natural or cultural environment, an emphasis on learning, and a commitment to sustainability. The resulting framework describes ecotourism programs in terms of market scope (mass vs. niche) and intensity of tourist-environment interaction (active vs. passive). Small case studies of Philippine ecotourism offerings are used to illustrate the classification scheme. Implications for policy and for future research are then suggested.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Since its introduction in the late 1980s, ecotourism has been one of the fastest growing tourism niches in the Philippines. Its promise of sustained environmental, social and economic gains make ecotourism the preferred type of development for different tourism organizations. However, the diversity of so-called “ecotourism initiatives” in the country has raised questions about whether each project truly embodies the principles of sustainability, environmental sensitivity and respect for local peoples and cultures. It is therefore necessary to investigate the nature and types of ecotourism programs in the country.

This paper looks into the current status of ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines and suggests a classification scheme or framework to be followed and adopted by the industry. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) to provide an information database on ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines;
- 2) to formulate a set of criteria for classifying the different ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines;
- 3) to outline the indicators of a true ecotourism product by describing various programs in terms of their relative compatibility or incompatibility with the accepted core principles of ecotourism; and
- 4) to identify possible opportunities for improving the management and development of ecotourism in the Philippines.

Review of Related Literature

Because there is no real consensus as to what ecotourism should be, the United Nations described the general characteristics of ecotourism as follows:

1. Nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the appreciation of nature as well as traditional cultures in natural areas.
2. Contains educational and interpretation features

3. Generally, but not exclusively organized for small groups by specialized and small, locally owned businesses.
4. Minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.
5. Supports the protection of natural areas.

In contrast to the more flexible applications of the term by industry, academic definitions of ecotourism tend to be more narrow or strict. This is, in part, due to the fact that many of the definitions have been formulated by environmentalists who emphasize conservation over profit motives — as well as the realities of the business environment.

Acott, Latrobe and Howard (1998) proposed that so-called ecotourism projects could be classified along a shallow-deep continuum, based on the “shallow and deep ecology” principles coined by Arne Naess in 1972. Shallow ecology/ecotourism views humans as separate from the rest of nature where nature’s utility comes from the aesthetic pleasure derived by tourists, or from the economic returns that accrue to the host community. Weaver (2001) went a step beyond Acott et. al. by arguing that ecotourism could be conceived as a form of mass tourism, and not its opposite. Weaver proposed that ecotourism activities could be arranged along a hard-soft continuum.

Table 1. Characteristics of Hard and Soft Ecotourism

Hard (Active)		Soft (Passive)
		
Strong environmental commitment		Moderate environmental commitment
Enhancement sustainability		Steady-state sustainability
Specialized trips		Multi-purpose trips
Long trips		Short trips
Physically active		Physically passive
Few services expected		Services expected
Emphasis on personal experience		Emphasis on interpretation

The review of literature suggested that ecotourism programs have three basic elements: First, the focus of attraction is the natural environment or some specific components of it. Second, an ecotourism initiative should emphasize learning as an outcome of the tourist's interaction with the natural environment. Finally, the initiative should be sustainable, implying a desire to ensure that the integrity of the resources are not undermined. We thus define an ecotourism program as:

Any project that is organized and designed to promote the observation and appreciation of nature through the provision of facilities and opportunities for visitor education in a manner that, where appropriate, fosters community involvement and seeks to ensure and sustain the integrity of the resources around which the tourism activity is based.

Methods

Data collection on the existing or proposed ecotourism programs around the archipelago began with an examination of the outputs of a 1999 workshop co-organized by the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the various regional ecotourism stakeholders. Other modes of data collection included personal interviews, documentary research, and questionnaires mailed to various NGOs and donor agencies known to be involved in resource management and community-enterprise building. Management plans developed by DENR's Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project (CPPAP) for its ten priority areas, also provided additional inputs to the researcher's appreciation of the growing list of ecotourism projects.

The initial classification exercise classified ecotourism programs *a priori* according to the type of natural (or cultural) resource on which the tourist activity is primarily based. While useful as an exploratory description of the state of the art, the purely resource-based framework addressed only half of the issue. It was incomplete without any mention of the *way* or *manner* that the resource is used or enjoyed.

A Proposed Classification Framework for Ecotourism Programs

Using the initial propositions of Acott et. al. and Weaver, a framework for classifying ecotourism programs was developed (See Figure 1). It incorporates the major elements of the “deep-shallow” and “hard-soft” perspectives of the respective authors. For this particular framework, “Active” and “Passive” labels have been placed on either end of the *x*-axis. The active -passive continuum is, essentially, Weaver’s hard-soft framework.

Figure 1. Proposed Classification Framework for Ecotourism Programs

	LARGER SCALE		
A C T I V E	Higher volume; larger groups Emphasis on personal experience Western standard services not essential	Higher volume; larger groups Emphasis on interpretation Services and facilities expected Example: Gardens of Malasag Ecotourism Village	P A S S I V E
	Lower volume; smaller groups Emphasis on personal experience Few, if any, services expected Specialized trips and itineraries Example: Ulugan Bay	Lower volume; smaller groups Emphasis on interpretation Services and facilities expected Example: Olango Birds and Seascape Tour	
	SMALLER SCALE		

An active ecotourism program is one that tends to emphasize the ecotourist’s personal experience of the natural or cultural resource. Passive ecotourism, on the other hand, places an emphasis on interpretation. Larger-scale ecotourism offers destinations and activities that can absorb a greater volume of visitor traffic. Smaller-scale ecotourism, on the other hand, requires visitation by individuals or small travel parties.

Conclusion

Policy-makers, planners and host communities can use this framework as a tool for highlighting the trade-offs between economic benefits and environmental threats that ecotourism can bring. Given the relatively young state of ecotourism in the Philippines today, there is not enough information to develop a full database according to the framework proposed here. For each proposed ecotourism initiative, the following questions need to be asked:

- Does the program have an explicit educational objective? If so, what is the strategy for educating the ecotourist?
- Are there going to be caps on visitor volume? If so, how is visitor volume going to be controlled?
- What facilities and infrastructure do they intend to introduce to the area?

Information may be collected on a consistent basis through the institution of a certification system for ecotourism projects in the Philippines. In the Philippines, the basic certification level could correspond to some locally-adapted variant of the Mohonk principles (Honey and Rome, 2001). There might be an opportunity for environmentally-oriented NGOs and COs to take the lead in establishing these ecotourism certification standards because of the relative weakness of the private sector as well as the lack of LGU capability. An industry or NGO-led system's main attraction would be the potential marketing benefits that a *de facto* stamp of approval would bring. However, DENR's ECC/EIA system should still be in place to ensure compliance with the State's environmental laws.

Future Questions

Some implications for future research were identified. It may be necessary to track programs over time to see if they evolve to the point that programs move from small-scale ecotourism to large-scale — even, mass — ecotourism. Researchers may also want to ask if the reverse is possible — whether a mass ecotourism program can evolve (or devolve) into a smaller, niche-oriented activity. Finally, image studies will also be useful to see if tourists also view ecotourism programs as catering more to mass markets or

niche markets, as well as whether they should be oriented more towards interpretation (passive) or towards personally experiencing (active) the natural environment.

Development of a Classification Framework on Ecotourism Initiatives in the Philippines*

Introduction

Since its introduction in the late 1980s, ecotourism has been one of the fastest growing tourism niches in the Philippines. Its promise of sustained environmental, social and economic gains make ecotourism the preferred type of development for different tourism organizations. However, the diversity of so-called “ecotourism initiatives” in the country has raised questions about whether each project truly embodies the principles of sustainability, environmental sensitivity and respect for local peoples and cultures. It is therefore necessary to investigate the nature and types of ecotourism programs in the country.

This paper looks into the current status of ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines and suggests a classification scheme or framework to be followed and adopted by the industry. This classification framework is intended to allow the description of the different programs in terms of their relative compatibility or incompatibility with the accepted core principles of ecotourism. In doing so, it can help the tourism industry to identify opportunities for improving the management and development of ecotourism in the Philippines.

Objectives

Despite the apparent popularity within the tourism industry of the ecotourism concept, a true consensus on its definition remains elusive. Ecotourism has not been clearly defined and has been confused with many other types of development. Its many definitions address different concerns such as sustainable development, environmental protection, cultural preservation, community empowerment and education. Unfortunately, definitions of ecotourism by tourism groups vary from one group to the other, depending on the priorities of each.

* This paper is based on a study funded by the Philippine-APEC Study Center Network (PASCN)

For example, the ecotourism label has been applied to a variety of tourist activities such as birdwatching, whale and dolphin watching, spelunking, scuba diving, mountaineering as well as various forms of community-based tourism. However, it also not unusual to encounter development projects involving international resort chains, golf courses and cruise lines also claiming to fall under the banner of ecotourism.

This study looks at ecotourism programs and projects in the Philippines and attempts to develop a framework for classifying and evaluating such initiatives that the tourism industry could subsequently adopt. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) to provide an information database on ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines;
- 2) to formulate a set of criteria for classifying the different ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines;
- 3) to outline the indicators of a true ecotourism product by describing various programs in terms of their relative compatibility or incompatibility with the accepted core principles of ecotourism; and
- 4) to identify possible opportunities for improving the management and development of ecotourism in the Philippines.

Review of Related Literature

Perhaps reflective of ecotourism's growing popularity as a specialty tourist activity, the number of articles devoted to it in the leading tourism journals has been increasing. Similarly, international organizations such as the World Tourism Organization and the United Nations have been producing increasing numbers of books, reports and conference proceedings on the topic. The wealth of new material notwithstanding, there still appears to be considerable ground left to cover before academics and practitioners can reach a consensus as to what ecotourism is and should be.

Much of the recent work published in tourism deals with nature tourism or ecotourism. Some authors (Orams, 1996; Steele, 1995) use the terms interchangeably. For example, Whelan's (1991) edited book uses the term "nature tourism" in its title, and "ecotourism" between its covers. Others consider ecotourism as a specialized field within nature tourism as exemplified by the following definition from a recent Market Demand Study of ecotourism in Canada: "Ecotourism is an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem, while respecting the integrity of host communities (Wight, 1996)." Ballantine and Eagles (1994) further qualified that ecotourism differs from other forms of travel in that ecotourism combines specific social (traveling to learn about nature) and attraction (visiting wilderness) motives, as well as requires a specific time commitment (33 percent of one's vacation time is spent in the field).

Moving closer to home, recent pronouncements from the Philippine Department of Tourism (Gabor, 1997) describe a commitment to "Ecotourism". Closer examination of the DOT plan reveals a broad understanding of the term, flexible enough to incorporate even golf under its umbrella.

The United Nations, in declaring 2002 as the International Year for Ecotourism, acknowledged that "there is not a universal definition of ecotourism. (WTO, 2000)" Nevertheless, it attempted to provide some parameters for ecotourism by describing its general characteristics as:

1. All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
2. It contains educational and interpretation features
3. It is generally, but not exclusively organized for small groups by specialized and small, locally owned businesses. Foreign operators of varying sizes also organize, operate and/or market ecotourism tours, generally for small groups.
4. It minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment
5. It supports the protection of natural areas by

- generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes,
- providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities.
- increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists

Boo (1993) argues that the semantic confusion revolving around the term “ecotourism” results from using the term to describe a wide variety of activities involving travel and the environment. Some people choose to define it in broad terms, i.e. any form of tourism that is friendly to the environment. Some people advocate a more narrow, focused definition — ecotourism is tourism that contributes to the conservation of natural resources.

Two recent Philippine publications provide examples of the fuzzy operationalization of ecotourism today. Libosada (1998), writing in a more scholarly tone, discussed the development of ecotourism in the country and the factors to be considered in ecotourism development. In his book, he focused on six specific ecotourism activities: trekking, bird watching, scuba diving, whale watching, spelunking, and community-based ecotourism. All six activities can generally be described as smaller in scale than conventional modes of mass tourism.

In contrast to Libosada’s work, Guerrero’s (2000) publication is more accurately described as a guidebook. It is interesting to note that he chose to apply a much broader definition of ecotourism in his book. “Ecotourism destinations” according to Guerrero range from largely underdeveloped areas in provinces like Quirino, Romblon and Surigao, to five-star hotels in the heart of Metro Manila.

While the literature on Philippine ecotourism remains severely limited, this contrast between academic and industry or trade perspectives on ecotourism reflects similar tensions in the global ecotourism marketplace. If laid out on a “narrow” versus “broad” spectrum, academic definitions of ecotourism (e.g. Libosada, 1998; Wight, 1996;

Ballantine and Eagles, 1994) tend to fall in the narrow range because of the stricter requirements for definition and operationalization in the scholarly publication process.

People working in the travel and tourism industry, on the other hand, tend to drift towards the broader range of definitions (e.g. Guerrero, 2000; Gabor, 1997). Perhaps a more accurate statement would be that although definitions may be consistently worded, the tourism industry tends to be more flexible in deriving meaning from these definitions.

Marshall (1996) quotes one conference director who describes ecotourism as “a nature-based form of specialty travel, defined as ‘responsible travel to natural areas,’ which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people”. However, ecotourism in practice has often gone opposite of what its advocates claimed it would be. Beeh (1999) notes for example, that one of the largest discrepancies today involves the confusion between ecotourism and adventure travel. Many companies, she writes, use the “eco” label whether they offer truly “green” (environmentally-sensitive) products or not. Whereas ecotourism is supposed to be altruistic, adventure travel insulates tourists from the local environment (and community) and then utilizes its resources. Unfortunately, the “ecotourism” label has apparently lost some of its marketing luster. Thus, more operators are opting for the increasingly popular but higher-impact adventure tours.

One explanation for the more liberal interpretation of ecotourism was suggested by Sirakaya, Sasidharan, and Sönmez (1999). They noted that many of the definitions of ecotourism had been formulated by conservationists and environmentalists. Thus, the definitions strongly emphasized the preservation of tourism’s ecological assets over the profit motives of private enterprise as well as the realities of the business environment.

In order to get a business perspective of ecotourism, they surveyed over 200 tour operators in the United States and asked them to give their personal definitions of ecotourism. Content analysis of the various definitions submitted by the tour operators revealed specific references to 14 underlying themes. In order of the frequency with which these themes were mentioned by the sample, these were:

- Environment-friendly tourism,
- Responsible travel,
- Educational travel,

- Low-impact travel.
- Recreational and romantic trips to natural sites,
- Contribution to local welfare,
- Ecocultural travel,
- Sustainable/ nonconsumptive tourism
- Responsible business approach to travel
- Community involvement
- Tourist involvement in preservation
- Buzzword
- Contribution to conservation

Shallow vs. Deep Ecotourism: Incorporating the Human Factor into the Classification Framework

In 1995, the PATA Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Conference concluded that it would be necessary to limit tour group size and frequency for ecotourism to remain environmentally and socially responsible. This position recognized the threat posed by humans on the very resources on which the ecotourism industry would be founded. Thus, ecotourism should always remain a niche market (Dowling, 1998).

Acott, Latrobe and Howard (1998) suggested a different perspective. They noted that the term had been used in so many different ways that it no longer referred exclusively to an environmentally benign activity. They recognized that there were variants of ecotourism that verged on forms of mass tourism, as did types of ecotourism that adhered more closely to the ideal model espoused by PATA. Using the “shallow and deep ecology” principles coined by Arne Naess in 1972, they proposed that so-called ecotourism projects could be classified along a similar shallow-deep continuum.

According to Acott, Latrobe and Howard, shallow ecology/ecotourism views humans as separate from the rest of nature. The interest in finding solutions to pollution and resource depletion arises from shallow ecology’s central concern the health and

welfare of humans. Nature is valued for its usefulness to humans. In the case of ecotourism, nature’s utility comes from the aesthetic pleasure derived by tourists, or from the economic returns that accrue to the host community.

In contrast, deep ecology/ecotourism rejects the humans-in-environment image. Instead, deep ecotourism adopts a biocentric philosophy that covers a range of ideas that include “the importance of intrinsic value in nature, emphasis on small-scale and community identity, the importance of community participation, a lack of faith in modern large-scale technology and an underlying assumption that materialism for its own sake is wrong (Acott, LaTrobe and Howard, p. 245).” Table 1 summarizes some of the main differences between shallow and deep ecotourism as described by the authors.

Table 1. A Comparison of Shallow vs Deep Ecotourism

	Shallow Ecotourism	Deep Ecotourism
<i>Experiencing the culture of the host community</i>	Surface understanding of a culture; tourists are spectators of cultural traditions, performances and artifacts	Visitors ask more searching questions about human life and society; tourists gain meaningful understanding of culture by immersion (when appropriate) and/or self-education
<i>Tourist service standards</i>	Western standards of safety, comfort and hygiene are maintained where possible; tourists may want to consume western food and drink.	Tourist does not require western comforts (especially if these put a strain on local resources); tourists may want to try local dishes as part of the cultural learning
<i>Preserving the quality of the natural resource</i>	Preference for “pristine” natural enclaves may result in preservationist policies where humans (including indigenous peoples) are excluded from natural areas	Tourist destination need not be preserved and protected from the influence of humans, as long as human activity is integrated with efforts to maintain biodiversity and ecological integrity of land
<i>The value(s) of nature</i>	Instrumental valuation of nature	Recognition of intrinsic values of all elements of nature (not just those needed by humans)

The shallow-deep model of ecotourism improves on earlier, more resource-based approaches in that it also addresses the manner in which ecotourism resources are used and developed. The model recognizes that the form of development, including the tourist activities conducted on-site, are equally important components of ecotourism as is the site itself. Thus, using this framework, ecotourism programs could also be described in terms of the amenities and facilities introduced to a natural or cultural area. Further, the mode of learning about the natural or cultural resource could also be a source of differentiation between programs.

However, the major difficulty with the model is that, conceptually, it revolves around the tourists and their activities rather than the destination. Although, it suggests what forms of development or tourism services may be introduced to the environment, these follow from the types of trips that visitors seek. The tourists' motivations as well as their attitudes toward both the journey and the destination determine whether the trip will be considered deep or shallow.

It may be possible, in theory, for a site to be visited by both shallow and deep ecotourists.

Hard and Soft Ecotourism

Acott et. al. described shallow ecotourism as a form of ecotourism that *verges* on mass tourism. Weaver (2001) went a step further by arguing that ecotourism, as reality and as ideal, could be conceived as a *form* of mass tourism, and not its opposite. Arguing that ecological or socio-cultural sustainability “*beyond the shadow of a doubt*” is unlikely for any form of tourism (eco- or otherwise), Weaver subscribes to a reasonable intent definition of ecotourism. This means any form of nature-based tourism “that *strives* to be ecologically, socio-culturally and economically sustainable (p. 105)”, while at the same time enabling visitors to appreciate and learn about the natural environment.

Given such a broad definition, a wide range of ecotourism activities can thus be included. Weaver proposes that these ecotourism activities can be arranged along a hard-soft continuum. Hard (or active) ecotourism closely corresponds to the notion of deep

ecotourism described by Acott et.al. Soft (or passive) ecotourism, on the other hand, appears to be very similar to shallow ecotourism.

Weaver notes that soft ecotourism is usually associated with steady-state sustainability or the idea that visitors should leave a place in the same condition that they found it in. In contrast, hard ecotourism supports a concept of sustainability wherein visitors can “enhance” or improve the natural environment through donations or volunteer activity. Weaver’s hard-soft approach differs slightly from the deep-shallow model in that it can be applied both to the destination (and the form of development taking place on it), as well as to the tourists. Table 2 lists some other characteristics of hard and soft ecotourism.

Table 2. Characteristics of Hard and Soft Ecotourism

Hard (Active)		Soft (Passive)
Strong environmental commitment		Moderate environmental commitment
Enhancement sustainability		Steady-state sustainability
Specialized trips		Multi-purpose trips
Long trips		Short trips
Physically active		Physically passive
Few services expected		Services expected
Emphasis on personal experience		Emphasis on interpretation

Note that Weaver also includes some characteristics that suggest the intensity (active or passive) of the visitors’ interaction with the natural or cultural environment. For purposes of developing a classification framework, the elements that could prove to be difficult would be the measurement of environmental commitment and sustainability. Whether a community or tourist exhibits strong or moderate environmental commitment is a highly subjective proposition — one that is particularly vulnerable to political or ideological controversies. As with Acott et. al.’s deep-shallow take, the visitors’ motivations and attitudes would determine how strongly they feel about using ecotourism to enhance or, at least, sustain the quality of the resource.

An Operational Definition of Ecotourism Programs

The official Philippine definition as adopted by the National Ecotourism Development Council (NEDC, 2000) is that ecotourism is “*a form of sustainable tourism within a natural and cultural heritage area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, culture and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics as well as economic benefits are fostered and*

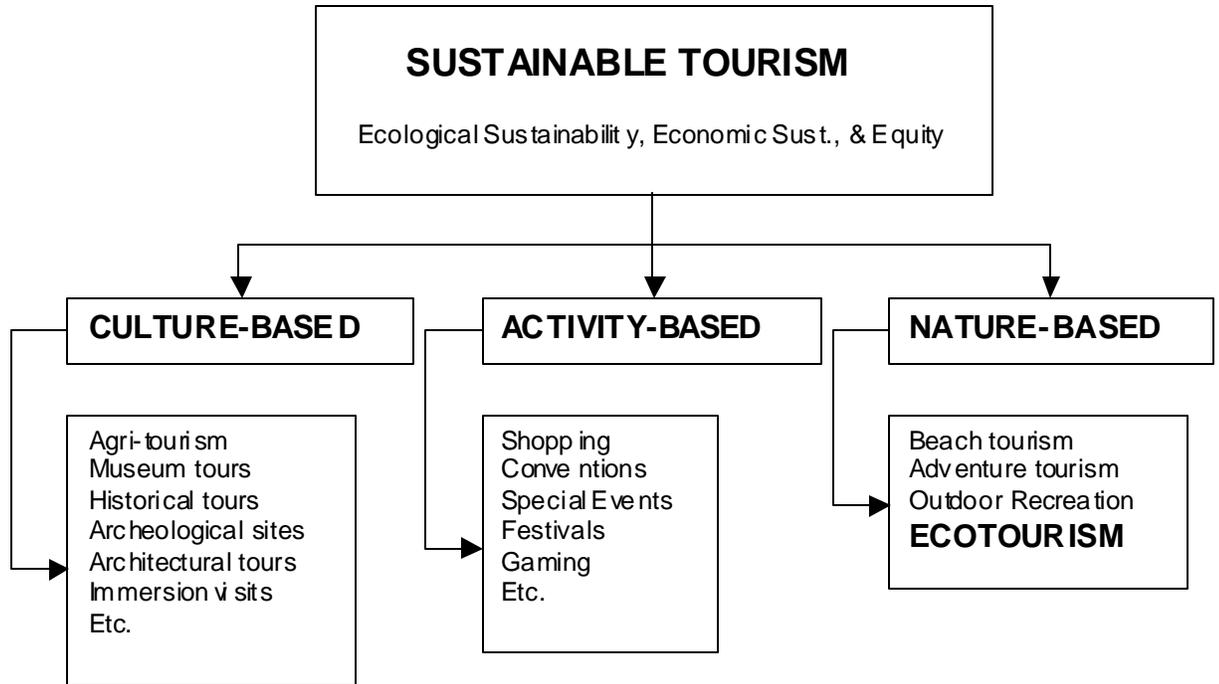
pursued for the enrichment of host communities and satisfaction of visitors.” This definition implies a supply-oriented understanding of ecotourism programs in that they take place within a specific kind of site. Not until the end of the statement is there any mention of benefits to communities and visitors from ecotourism.

For the purposes of this study, a relatively inclusive, as opposed to restrictive, definition of ecotourism programming is preferred. Following Weaver’s suggestion (2001), we will define ecotourism programs as having three basic elements. First, the focus of attraction is the natural environment or some specific components of it. Any natural setting can be a venue for ecotourism. The presence of an endangered or threatened specie in the area may provide additional value or novelty to the program, but it is not an essential characteristic of ecotourism. Similarly, the presence of indigenous communities or traditional cultures within an ecotourism site can enhance the “sense of place” experienced by the visitor. However, a presentation of these cultural assets without any relation to their natural environment cannot be considered ecotourism.

Second, an ecotourism initiative should emphasize learning as an outcome of the tourist’s interaction with the natural environment. Thus, programs that merely use the natural environment as a setting for tourist activity — such as some forms of adventure tourism or the traditional “sun, sand and beach” activities in beach tourism — without any educational objective do not qualify as ecotourism. Finally, the initiative should be sustainable, implying a desire to ensure that the integrity of the resources are not undermined. Given the difficulty in measuring sustainability, this paper subscribes to Weaver’s “reasonable intent” standard wherein the ecotourism proponent makes “every reasonable effort to ensure that its operations are sustainable, in line with current best practice principles (p. 105). ”

Figure 1 illustrates how ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism and distinguishes it from other types of nature-based tourism.

Figure 1. Ecotourism as a Form of Sustainable Tourism



We thus define an ecotourism program as:

Any project that is organized and designed to promote the observation and appreciation of nature through the provision of facilities and opportunities for visitor education in a manner that, where appropriate, fosters community involvement and seeks to ensure and sustain the integrity of the resources around which the tourism activity is based.

The qualification that community involvement is desirable “where appropriate” comes from Honey and Rome (2001) who also argued that local communities should benefit economically, socially and culturally from ecotourism. The definition thus implies that while a community-based approach to ecotourism development would be the ideal

arrangement, programs in private lands or in uninhabited, remote areas can also be considered as ecotourist in nature.

Methods

The bulk of the research activities conducted for this study revolved around the collection of information regarding the various ecotourism programs in the Philippines. These include projects that are already being implemented as well as potential or emerging sites identified by different agencies. The working definition of a “*program*” employed by the research team limited the scope of the study to site- or place-based projects. This is compatible with definitions of ecotourism adopted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the DOT. Both agencies refer to a form of sustainable tourism *within* “...a given natural environment” (Joint DENR-DOT Memo Circular 98-02) or “...a natural and cultural heritage area” (NEDC Resolution No. 2000-01).

Thus, this particular research project looks only at ecotourism products offered by an entity that directly manages or supervises the ecotourist itinerary within the natural destination. This avoids the double counting which may occur if we were to include ecotourism offerings that merely package or link different eco-destinations together to form various tourist products.

To illustrate, we recognize the Olango Birds and Seascape Tour as a valid ecotourism program to be included in our study because it refers to the birdwatching tour specifically developed and managed by a community-based cooperative on Olango Island. However, a birdwatching tour package offered by a Manila-based tour operator, which just happens to include Olango as a destination would no longer be considered as a distinct ecotourism program.

In other words, this study generally focuses on programs offered by primary suppliers such as communities, local government units, parks, etc. Offerings from tour operators would only be included if these packages are specific to a particular natural destination and if the ecotourism activity within the site is an exclusive offering of the tour agency.

For example, an ecotour developed by a private operator utilizing the resources of Marinduque's Tres Reyes Islands would be considered a distinct program if no other programs like it are being offered by other operators, the community or the government agencies overseeing the islands.

Data collection on the existing or proposed ecotourism programs around the archipelago began with an examination of the outputs of a 1999 workshop co-organized by the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the various regional ecotourism stakeholders. Different government offices and non-government organizations (NGO) were then surveyed to validate as well as to supplement the initial list of identified ecotourism programs. This phase of the project employed various modes of data collection, including personal interviews, documentary research, and questionnaires mailed to various NGOs and donor agencies known to be involved in resource management and community-enterprise building. These NGOs were identified through a snowballing technique wherein respondents or interviewees were asked to refer other NGOs or agencies that they knew as being involved in ecotourism.

The respondents from the various offices were also queried regarding their understanding of the term, ecotourism. This question referred to official working definitions adopted by their respective offices, as well as top-of-mind definitions of the concept based on their personal experiences and beliefs.

Five respondents from the NGOs and government offices that we contacted submitted their respective definitions of ecotourism. These ranged from very broad to more detailed definitions. One respondent simply described ecotourism as a "*community enterprise that is environmentally friendly.*" Another took the position that ecotourism "*generates conservation and livelihood benefits.*"

One NGO, the Kitanglad Integrated NGOs, Inc., reported that they had a working definition of ecotourism projects wherein these initiatives "*should provide benefits to conservation, and also provide benefits to the local or host community.*" The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) adopted the official definition of ecotourism used by DOT-DENR. The definition provided by a respondent from the Alliance of Volunteers

in Development Foundation, Inc. (AVDFI) was interesting in its incorporation of visitor benefits. It said that ecotourism involves “*linking with nature, deriving pleasure while protecting it, conserving natural resources for the use and enjoyment, tourism for future generations.*”

The management plans developed by DENR’s Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project (CPPAP) for its ten priority areas, also provided additional inputs to the researcher’s appreciation of the growing list of ecotourism projects. In almost all of the CPPAP management plans, ecotourism was identified as a key component of the plan for protecting and managing the various resource areas.

A Resource-Based Classification of Ecotourism Destinations

Below is a summary of the ecotourism programs the team was able to identify through a combination of primary and secondary data collection methods. It should be noted that these are programs identified or nominated by different government and non-government organizations as being “ecotourism” programs or projects. It can be observed that the proponents tended to recognize or nominate ecotourism sites mainly through the type of natural or cultural resource around which a destination hoped to build its ecotourist offering.

Building on this observation, the team’s initial classification exercise involved a summary of the various initiatives in terms of their location, as well as by the type of natural or cultural resource on which the ecotourism activity is based. The researchers classified the various programs collected according to the type of natural (or cultural) resource on which the tourist activity is primarily based. This was done *a priori* based primarily on the program name, as well as whatever limited information about the project may have been provided by our sources. This was a purely deskbound classification exercise.

Given the limitations of the project, the different programs in the inventory could only be evaluated on a very cursory basis. Short of actual ocular inspections of each program, it is impossible to determine the form of tourism development that has taken

place in each site on the list. Nor was it feasible to determine the manner in which ecotourism plan was formulated and implemented.

Table 3 provides a summary of the database in terms of the programs' geographic location, as well as the tourism asset or resource on which the program was based. The complete listing of the specific projects is attached as an appendix to this report.

Table 3. Summary of Ecotourism Programs in the Philippines by Location and by Type of Tourism Resource Base

TOURISM RESOURCE	REGIONS			
	Luzon	Visayas	Mindanao	TOTAL
Marine Ecosystem	36	38	17	91
Terrestrial	66	25	23	114
Fresh-Water	36	15	24	75
Cultural Sites	23	7	2	32
Man-made	3	4	3	10
TOTAL	164	89	69	322

Explanation of the resource categories:

Marine – marine protected areas, coral reefs, islands, beaches, bays

Terrestrial – mountains, volcanoes, caves, trails, forest areas

Freshwater – lakes, rivers, hot and cold springs, waterfalls

Cultural – churches, historic sites, festivals

Man-made – urban parks, reforestation sites

Given the subjective nature of the classification process used (a form of content analysis wherein researchers determined the type of tourism resource based on the program name or description), it is very likely that some items on the list may have been misplaced. However, the purpose of this exercise was merely to develop a starting point for describing and, eventually, differentiating the types of ecotourism initiatives being

developed in the country. Thus, the methodology employed was sufficient for this limited objective.

Table 4 lists some examples of programs and sites nominated or identified by our sources as ecotourism. The subjective, even liberal, definitions of ecotourism among the various stakeholders is illustrated by the presence of built (e.g. Cape Bojeador Lighthouse in Ilocos Norte, the Capas Death March National Monument in Tarlac) and cultural attractions (e.g. Banaue Rice Terraces, Guling-guling Festival) in the list. This is consistent with the inclusive definition adopted by the NEDC. Relying on this definition, the Ecotourism Technical Working Group of the DOT and DENR has also recognized *heritage, agricultural* and *cultural ecotourism* in addition to the other more conventional variants such as *nature-based, wildlife* and *adventure ecotourism* (ETWG, undated).

Table 4. Examples of Ecotourism Sites or Programs Identified for each Type of Tourism Resource Base

Resource Base	Examples of Ecotourism Sites and Programs
Marine Ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ El Nido Protected Areas - Palawan ▪ Whale shark watching - Donsol, Sorsogon ▪ Boracay Island – Aklan ▪ Danjugan Island and reef system – Negros Oriental ▪ Agoo-Damortis Seashore – La Union
Terrestrial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mt. Pinatubo – Pampanga/Tarlac ▪ Calbiga Caves – Samar ▪ Chocolate Hills – Bohol ▪ Mt. Apo – Davao
Fresh-Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paoay Lake – Ilocos Norte ▪ Tinago Falls – Iligan City ▪ Governor’s Rapids – Quirino ▪ Siraan Hot Spring – Antique

Cultural Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cape Bojeador Light House – Ilocos Norte ▪ Banaue/Ifugao Rice Terraces – Ifugao ▪ Guling-Guling Festival – Ilocos Norte ▪ Farm Tourism Village – Tangalan, Aklan ▪ Capas Death March National Monument – Tarlac
Man-made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ San Jose Ecotourism Park – Tarlac ▪ Bucari-Aganan Reforestation – Iloilo

As can be seen in Table 3, ecotourism programs based on terrestrial resources (mountains, forests, caves, etc.) represented the single largest grouping with 91 items on the list. This represents more than one-fourth of the entries in the list. Combined with some 75 fresh-water resource based projects (lakes, rivers, falls, etc.) the inland ecotourism destinations represent about half (52%) of the national inventory. However, the predominantly island-based nature of the tourist product in the Visayas is reflected by the fact that marine ecosystem programs are its largest grouping.

About half (164) of the programs on the list are found in Luzon (which includes Palawan and the other island provinces of Regions 4 and 5) with the Visayas and Mindanao accounting for 89 and 69 entries respectively. However, one cannot conclude that Luzon is richer in terms of ecotourism resources. Perhaps, it is a case of the Luzon tourism sector being more prepared to identify ecotourism products than its counterparts in the Visayas and Mindanao.

On a per region basis, we also note that there have been no ecotourism programs nominated from the National Capital Region (NCR). It may be expected that heavily-urbanized metropolitan regions such as Metro Manila and Cebu City will not have much in terms of natural environments with potential for ecotourism. Nevertheless, given the liberal interpretation of ecotourism by some sectors, it would not have been a total surprise if a couple of cultural or historical places in Metro Manila were nominated.

While useful as an exploratory description of the state of the art, a classification framework based solely on the type of resource or attraction used is inadequate for our

purposes. A purely resource-based framework addresses only half of the issue. From our perspective, the application of ecotourism is incomplete without any mention of the *way* or *manner* that the resource is used or enjoyed.

In turn, an indication of the behaviors or activities of tourists *in situ*, could suggest the intensity of impact that visitation would have on a site. High impact activities such as adventure tourism would be classified similarly with low impact nature tours. Thus, this initial categorization would not be able to compare the potential environmental impacts of different activities such as white water rafting down the Chico River, scuba diving down the Tubbataha Reef, or trekking up Mt. Apo via the Sibulan trail.

A Proposed Classification Framework for Ecotourism Programs

Using the initial propositions of Acott et. al. and Weaver, a framework for classifying ecotourism programs was developed (See Figure 2). It incorporates the major elements of the “deep-shallow” and “hard-soft” perspectives of the respective authors. For this particular framework, “Active” and “Passive” labels have been placed on either end of the *x*-axis. These were deemed more appropriate adjectives to describe the intensity in which the community (in the form of development chosen) as well as the ecotourist (in the activities engaged in) encounter the environment.

The active-passive continuum is, essentially, Weaver’s hard-soft framework. However, this application does not address the issues of environmental commitment and type of sustainability sought. Thus, an active ecotourism program is one that tends to promote physically active tourist activities such as trekking, swimming, diving and other similar exercises. Trips and itineraries are specialized — designed to emphasize the ecotourist’s personal experience of the natural or cultural resource. Active ecotours are generally longer in duration. This refers to the journey (final destinations tend to be remote and relatively inaccessible), as well as to the actual activity. Finally, active ecotourists do not expect many western-type services and facilities at the destination.

Figure 2. Proposed Classification Framework for Ecotourism Programs

	LARGER SCALE		
A C T I V E	Higher volume; larger groups Emphasis on personal experience Western standard services not essential Some degree of standardization for trips and itineraries	Higher volume; larger groups Emphasis on interpretation Services and facilities expected Example: Gardens of Malasag Ecotourism Village	P A S S I V E
	Lower volume; smaller groups Emphasis on personal experience Few, if any, services expected Specialized trips and itineraries Example: Ulugan Bay	Lower volume; smaller groups Emphasis on interpretation Services and facilities expected Example: Olango Birds and Seascape Tour	
	SMALLER SCALE		

Passive ecotourism, on the other hand, places an emphasis on interpretation. Activities are generally less taxing physically. These include guided sightseeing tours, visits to interpretation centers, photography, etc. Passive ecotours are shorter; some can be taken as day tours. Visitors also expect a relatively higher degree of comfort (compared to active ecotourists) in that western standards of service may be expected. This suggests that more artificial structures and facilities may be introduced to the site.

The proposed framework also agrees with Weaver in that ecotourism need not be limited to a niche market. Thus, the y-axis describes ecotourism programs according to

the volume of activity that they can or aspire to serve. Larger-scale ecotourism offers destinations and activities that can absorb a greater volume of visitor traffic. This will be the form of ecotourism that is closer to traditional tourism activity in that larger groups can be accommodated at any given time. However, the sustainable tourism practices and concerns about carrying capacity will still require some form of cap on group sizes.

Smaller-scale ecotourism, on the other hand, requires visitation by individuals or small travel parties. Whether a program goes for the mass market or for smaller-scale ecotourism will depend on the destination. The more sensitive or threatened the environment is, the more that ecotourism should move away from larger scale ecotours.

Smaller-scale ecotourism, by this system, would more closely adhere to the niche conception of ecotourism espoused by PATA (Dowling, 1998) that implies the non-sustainability of volume visitation. Larger-scale ecotourism, by this same token, may be interpreted as hewing more closely to the mainstream tourism industry. To better illustrate this framework, three programs will now be discussed briefly and classified according to the proposed system.

Smaller-Scale Passive Ecotourism: The Olango Birds and Seascape Tour

Initially conceived to answer the need for more exciting day tour activities for guests of Mactan hotels and resorts, the Olango tour offers a package to a bird sanctuary that also incorporates the glorious waters, scenic seascape and diverse coastal village culture in and around Olango Island. The Olango Birds and Seascape Tour (OBST) is located in barangay Suba, on the island of Olango, approximately two nautical miles east of Mactan Island in the province of Cebu (See Figure 3). The island is considered an important wildlife sanctuary in the province of Cebu. Not only does it possess a rich and diverse marine ecosystem, but it also serves as a major stop-over of thousands of migratory birds using the East Asian Flyway. Thus, for about eight months of the year, thousands of migratory birds complement the native bird species on Olango, making the island one of the premiere birding sites in the country.

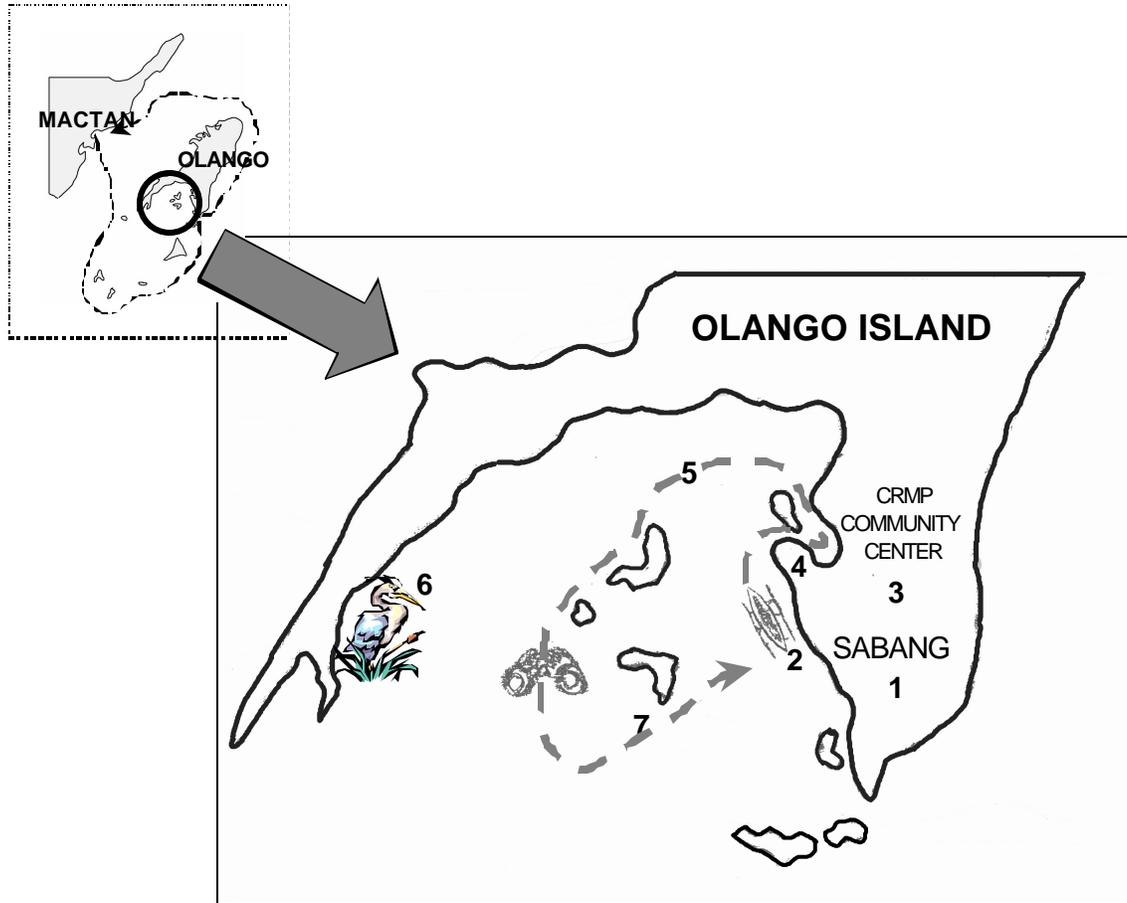
The project was initiated and implemented by the Coastal Resource Management Project (CRMP) of the DENR with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). From the beginning, CRMP set out to ensure that

the site would be a true community-based ecotourism destination. Thus, the complete marketing package of the site is “Olango Birds and Seascape Tour: An Ecotourism Venture and Conservation Initiative of the People, by the People, and for the People”. This is to emphasize the community-based nature of this ecotourism business.

The village of Suba, on Olango Island’ southeastern tip, was selected over three other barangays to host CRMP’s ecotourism project on the island. Suba’s main advantages were its strategic location, accessibility from Mactan, and the community’s readiness for coastal management work up (Flores, 2000). Further, CRMP identified ecotourism as a viable response to a community need for income generation options in Suba. As part of the project, the residents were organized into an ecotourism cooperative. It was envisioned that the people of Suba would have the major role in the development and operation of ecotours to Olango Island. Today it is the cooperative which runs and manages practically every facet of the OBST, the running of the actual tours, to the back room functions such as monitoring and accounting.

The plan for Olango Island, however, is not limited to its role as a birdwatching destination. The whole community was prepared to make it an ecotourism destination based on the totality of biodiversity in the area. For this reason, the island has been packaged as a birds *and* seascape tour.

Figure 3. Map of Olango Island Birds and Seascape Tour



NOTE: Tour begins and ends on Mactan Island. The bird sanctuary component of the tour is magnified here (shown in the circle on the smaller map on upper right). # 6 shows the best location for viewing birds on the tour.

One acknowledged strength of the destination is its proximity to Mactan Island, one of the most important source regions of tourists in the country. As the country's second major airport, Mactan provides an entry point to Olango for foreign as well as domestic visitors. Several major resorts are located just in front of the island, thus making it an ideal site for day tours from Mactan. Thus, the site appears to be an ideal candidate for an ecotourism site that has the key ingredients for success: unique, high-quality natural resources; a cooperative local community; and ready access to tourist markets.

Its proximity to the resort areas of Mactan, also makes it easier for OBST to implement a “no overnight visit” policy on Olango. The policy serves two purposes. One, it facilitates visitor management. And two, it minimizes the potential social impacts from the disruption that tourists would bring to the social and cultural fabric of the Suba community.

Monina Flores was a key member of the CRMP team that shepherded the Olango project to maturity. In reflecting on the project’s first years, she noted some critical lessons that other communities could take away from the Olango experience (1999). First, the communities needed to identify and focus on the unique attractions of their areas (e.g. Olango’s migratory birds and seascapes). In addition, the destination must be able to complement these attractions with other things that would make visitors want to prolong their stay or to come back. She cited Suba’s village culture and the people’s warmth as examples of these facilitating elements.

How would the Olango program be classified? In terms of market, the program falls under the niche classification. Although, it is only a short banca ride from a mass tourism destination (Mactan), the tour takes only small groups at a time and the trips are limited to day tours only. This is a program that still remains part of a conservation strategy, and is conscious of minimizing the negative impacts that volume traffic and congestion can have on both the coastal resources and the cultural fabric of the host community.

The nature of the Olango bird tour is also more passive than active. In keeping with the conservation theme, the tour places a lot of emphasis on interpretation. “In Olango, an articulate naturalist guide who did biological work on the birdlife and mangroves in the sanctuary was hired by the community to do the natural interpretation. Interpretation of village culture, however, was performed by the community (Flores, 1999).” Because the tour has been designed to be taken as a day-trip or excursion, there is little need for much western-type facilities on the island. Nevertheless, Flores notes that “paying attention to comfort, safety and enjoyment in getting there (the island) adds great value.”

Smaller-Scale Active Ecotourism: Community-Based Sustainable Tourism at Ulugan Bay

The “Ulugan Bay Experience” is a community-based sustainable tourism project (CBST) in that is a component of a wider integrated coastal resource management project implemented by UNESCO in collaboration with the Puerto Princesa City Government. The bay is situated on the central western coast of Palawan Island, approximately forty-seven (47) kilometers from the provincial capital of Puerto Princesa (See Figure 4). It covers more than 7,000 hectares and stretches over more than 110 kilometers of coastline.

Ulugan Bay is characterized by a high level of biodiversity. More than 1,200 hectares of coral reefs, 790 hectares of mangrove and almost 500 hectares of seagrass beds ensure a large diversity of fish and marine invertebrates. Sea turtles, dolphins and dugongs may also be found here. Extensive areas of primary rainforest and karst outcrops also provide an interesting array of terrestrial flora and fauna. In addition to these natural resources, Ulugan Bay is also home to more than 6,000 people, including the indigenous cultural communities of Tagbanuas and Bataks. Ulugan Bay is also considered one of the most significant coastal and marine ecosystems of in the entire province, acting as the most significant source of fish for Puerto Princesa City.

The entire Ulugan Bay project involves five separate barangays (Bahile, Macarascas, Buena Vista, Tagabinet, and Cabayugan) as well as two Tribal Ancestral Domain Claims (in Cabayugan and Kayasan). At last count (1998), there were an estimated 6,000 people residing in the 254 hectares covered by the five Ulugan Bay barangays. From Puerto Princesa City, Barangay Bahile is approximately one (1) hour by land while Barangay Cabayugan can be reached in two (2) hours. However, Cabayugan is only some 15 minutes from Sabang which is the jump-off point for the popular Puerto Princesa (formerly St. Paul) Subterranean River National Park).

Each barangay involved in the Ulugan Bay Experience offers a different form of ecotourism. For example, visitors to Bahile are given a paddle-boat tour along a mangrove-lined river to Kayulo waterfalls. On the other hand, spelunking (cave exploration) and trekking appear to be the main ecotourist activities in Tagabinet. Thus, each barangay can be considered as an independent ecotourism destination, even as the

diversity of activities and attractions from one barangay to the other make the entire Ulugan Bay a uniquely multi-faceted ecotourism destination.

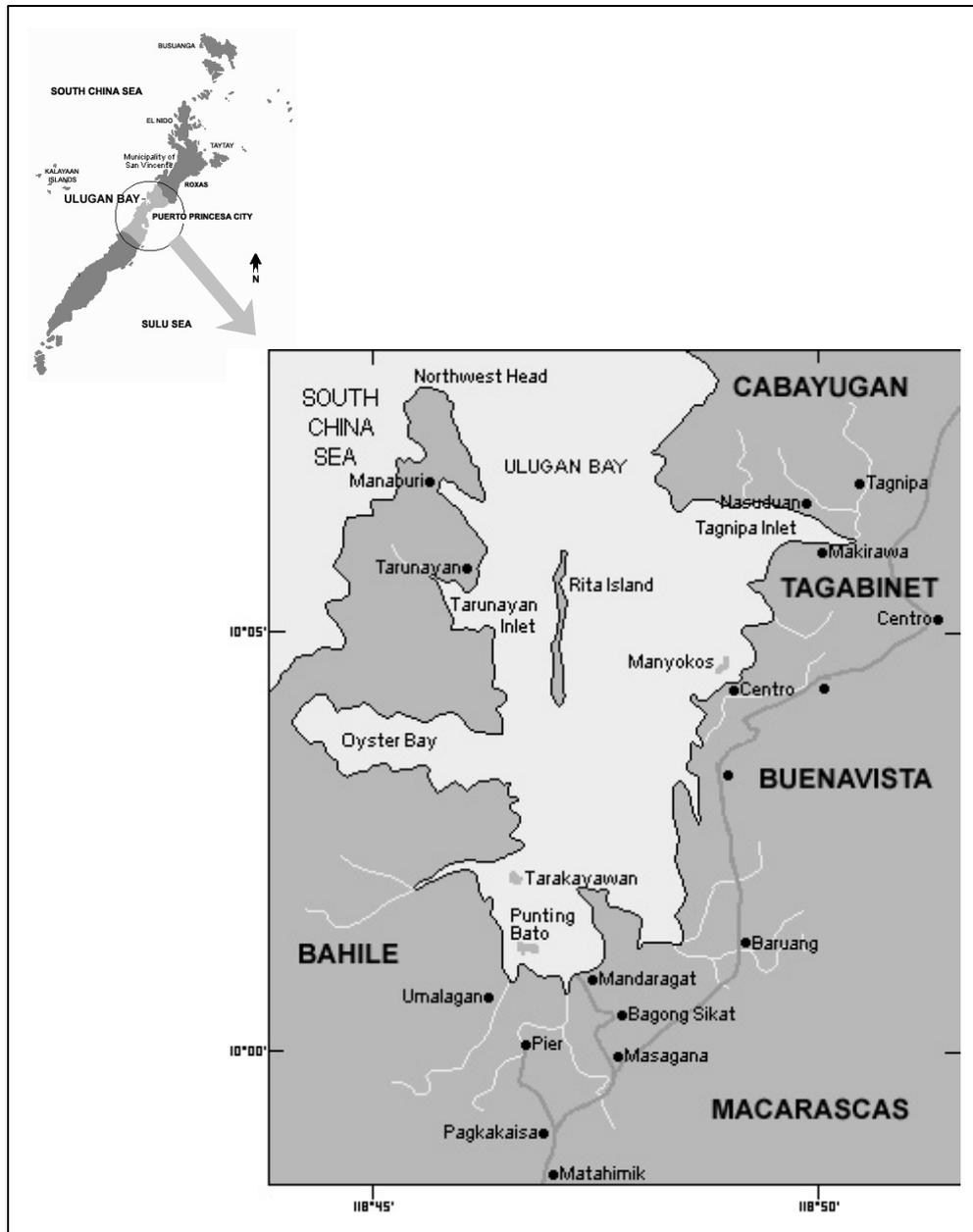
History of the Ulugan Bay project.

In 1996, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a Strategic Planning Workshop for the stakeholders of Ulugan Bay. This workshop resulted in the establishment of an Interim Ulugan Bay Multi-Sectoral Management Committee to coordinate and integrate all planning activities and actions for the bay. A series of consultations with national, provincial and local stakeholders (including local communities and indigenous groups living around the Bay) was then held.

The next year, UNESCO organized a series of training sessions designed to upgrade the capability of local institutions and organizations in data collection by direct involvement of local communities. These provided the basis for the plans and activities that eventually made up the Ulugan Bay Project.

Following this, UNESCO, in close collaboration with the city government of Puerto Princesa started the implementation of a two-year project “Coastal Resources Management and Sustainable Tourism in Ulugan Bay” in 1998. The project sought to develop a model for coastal resource management for Ulugan Bay using a community-based, multi-sectoral approach. After a series of studies on potential livelihood and resource management options was completed in 1999, several specific activities were implemented.

Figure 4. Location of Ulugan Bay on the Island of Palawan



These included the establishment of community-based areas for fish farming and crab fattening, as well as a Master Plan for community-based sustainable tourism. While the plan was designed to provide a sustainable tourism framework for the entire Bay, it

adopted a bottom-up approach to planning that encouraged the proposal of initiatives from each of the five barangays and two Ancestral Domains in the area.

These community-based proposals were then evaluated and integrated into Puerto Princesa City's (PPC) broader development and conservation plans. This philosophy extended to the implementation phase as well, wherein local communities were directly involved in the organization and management of their respective sustainable tourism programs. The first phase included capacity-building initiatives such as the formation of community tourism associations and tourism management teams, training programs on small business management as well as training on specific tourism activities such as tour guiding, snorkeling, spelunking and sailing.

The program was actually launched towards the end of 2000. However, a series of unfortunate events has prevented Ulugan's own CBST project from taking off. In May 2001, the Dos Palmas resort on Puerto Princesa's Honda Bay was raided by bandits belonging to the Abu Sayaff group. The kidnapping of resort employees and guests (including two Americans who still have not been released by their captors) dragged the Puerto Princesa tourism industry to a virtual standstill. Then in September 2001, the global tourism industry was rocked by heightened fears of terrorism, particularly involving air travel. This was in the aftermath of the World Trade Center incident wherein terrorists deliberately crashed two passenger planes into the prominent New York City landmark.

Nevertheless, even without such externalities, the Ulugan Bay Experience still suffers from poor infrastructure. The roads leading to the five barangays still have not been fully cemented. Further, telecommunication between Puerto Princesa and the Ulugan Bay barangays has been very limited. Arrangements are made through the Puerto Princesa City Tourism Office. The office then contacts the barangays to confirm the arrangements as well as to confirm the condition of the sites. Weather and sea conditions can determine whether a visit is possible on any particular day.

Like the Olango tour, the Ulugan CBST project should be considered as a niche eco-activity. Visitation is limited to small groups and individuals. The area can be considered

to still be in its introductory stage thus has not yet been noticed much by the mainstream tourism industry. This could explain the relative absence of tour packages to the area.

The facilities and services introduced into the area are still very basic by international tourism standards. This remains consistent with the general planning approach applied wherein CBST projects were evaluated according to their compatibility with existing community resources. Economically viable projects that could be successfully implemented and did not require sophisticated infrastructure were preferred under this policy.

Given the diverse activities possible in each barangay, a high degree of personalization is possible for each visitor. Visitors can have different combinations of attractions and activities, depending on their schedules and interests. Although there will not be any shortage of educational or interpretative facilities in Ulugan Bay, the emphasis appears to be on the visitor activities — such as trekking, snorkeling, cave exploration and kayaking — rather than interpretation. Thus, it is a more active mode of ecotourism than the Olango example. More specifically, Ulugan Bay appears to be developing into a smaller-scale active ecotourism area.

Larger-Scale Passive Ecotourism: The Gardens of Malasag Eco-Tourism Village

The Gardens of Malasag Eco-Tourism Village (GMETV) are located in the Cugman Watershed approximately twenty minutes from the center of Cagayan de Oro City. They offer a view of Macabalan Bay and hills of Malasag (See Figure 5). Operated by the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA), the Gardens of Malasag were originally conceptualized in 1991 as the Philippine counterpart to such sites as the gardens of Granada in Spain and the Bouchart Gardens in Canada. It occupies some six hectares of land, connected to another two hundred hectares of reforested land.

According to the DOT's own project brief on GMETV, the gardens "give visitors a colorful glimpse of the *ecology* and rich ethno-Filipino heritage of Northern Mindanao showcased through various artifacts, customs and traditions, flora and fauna amidst a reforestation setting." This description implicitly suggests that some *ecotourism* programs (the gardens being part of an "ecotourism *village*") can exist in an artificial or built environment. In GMETV's case, the primary concern is that the region's ecology and culture be provided a showcase in keeping with ecotourism's vision of educating visitors on the environmental and cultural resources of an area.

That this education takes place in a setting where flora are exhibited in professionally landscaped gardens rather than wild natural settings is not as important. Similarly, regional fauna such as butterflies and deer are displayed in gardens and cages rather than observed in their normal environs. The cultural learning experiences are conducted in similarly orchestrated conditions through what the project brief describes as a Tribal Village¹.

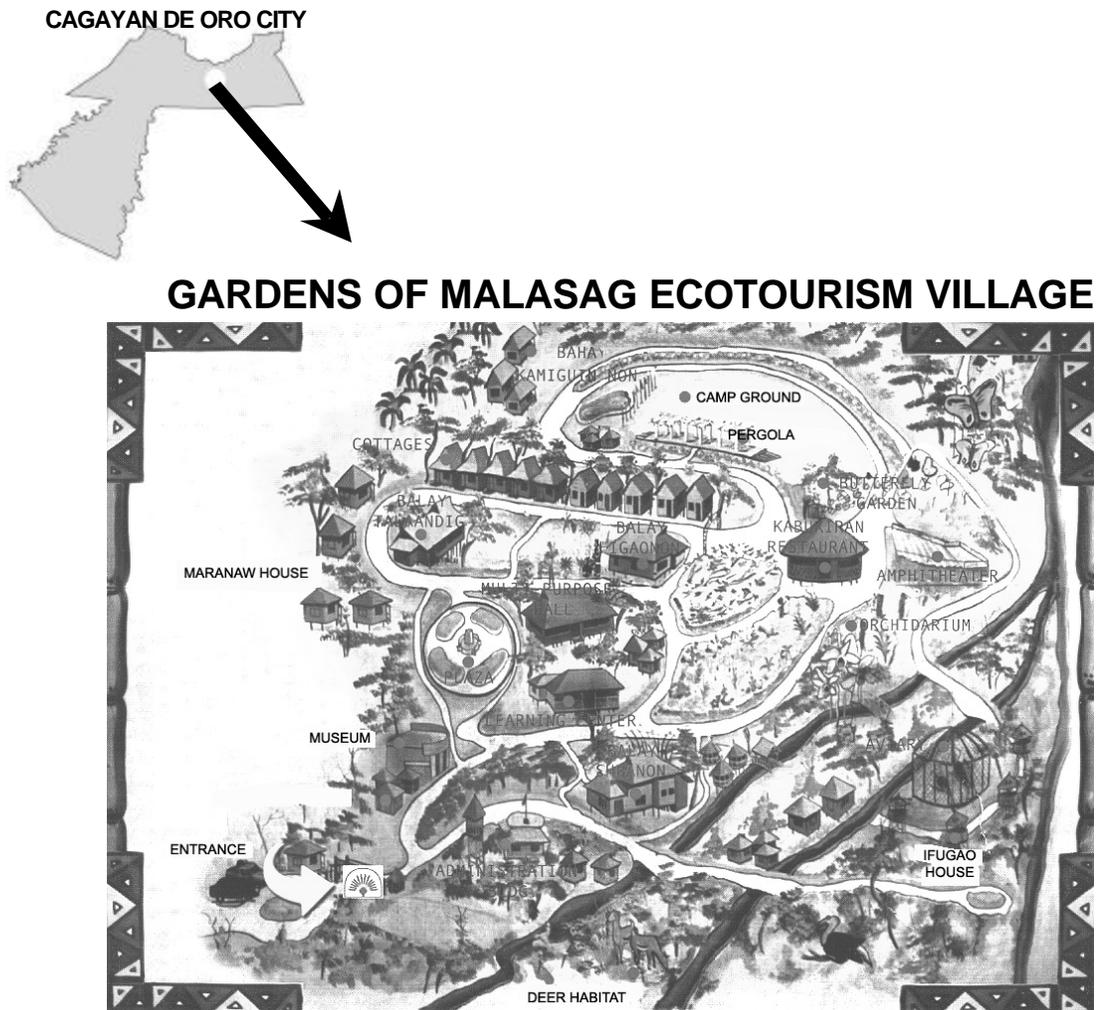
The cultures of various indigenous groups (Talaandigs, Higao-non, Subanon, Maranaos and Ifugaos) are interpreted in separate huts, each reflecting the traditional architecture and design of the cultural community. Inside the huts, different members of each indigenous community (temporarily residing in the GMETV) demonstrate various traditional arts such as weaving and woodworking, as well as perform traditional songs

¹ "Tribal Village" and "tribes" are the original labels used by DOT-PTA. However, the continued use of these terms is now viewed as inappropriate and insensitive.

and dances. Traditionally designed artifacts, as well as, indigenously-themed tourist items are also available for purchase in each hut. As each hut represents the typical abode found in these indigenous communities, various household furnishings and implements are displayed in each room of the hut.

The GMETV is a mass tourism destination. According to records of the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA), almost 100,000 day and overnight visitors come to the park every year. Nor is it particularly difficult to determine whether the type of development is passive or active.

Figure 5. Location of Gardens of Malasag on Map of Cagayan de Oro City



Given the extent to which mainstream facilities and infrastructure have been installed in GMETV, it might even be safe to classify it as a resort development. There are twenty-seven (27) cottage rooms, a swimming pool, a multi-purpose hall (maximum capacity of 120 persons), an 80-seat restaurant and an amphitheater.

The emphasis on interpretation is obvious. Upon entering the Gardens, one can immediately encounter the Ethnic Museum. Supervised by the National Museum, it offers an exhibit on handicrafts, musical instruments, indigenous ornamentation and

weaponry. Similarly, the lay-out of the botanical gardens, animal exhibits and miniature canopy walks are designed along the lines of traditional interpretation centers.

Thus, there is no question that GMETV caters to the mass market and offers a passive tourist experience. However, some may question whether GMETV and other similarly built up developments can be considered as being ecotourism. Can it still be ecotourism if it is part of a city? In this case, it can be argued that GMETV minimizes the socio-cultural impacts on indigenous cultural communities because it keeps tourists away from the actual settlements modeling indigenous village life. Furthermore, the GMETV are inside a watershed, thus GMETV advocates may point to it as a mechanism for facilitating conservation efforts in behalf of the resource. It may also be reasonably expected that a buffer zone will be maintained up to the foreseeable future between the GMETV and the urban developments around the watershed area.

In other words, it is GMETV's location *within* a natural area that distinguishes it as an ecotourism destination compared to the Manila Zoo, for example. Other areas that could qualify as mass passive ecotourism sites according to this criterion would include the La Mesa Dam watershed in Quezon City and the Jungle Environmental Survival Training (JEST) course offered in Subic Bay.

Are there examples of Philippine mass ecotourism that are active in form? At this stage in Philippine ecotourism's development, there are no programs that meet our criterion. This form of ecotourism is more popular in other countries where the recreation function among conservation agencies is more developed. For example, the park systems in the United States (National Parks Service, US Forest and Wildlife Service, etc.) have historically recognized the twin mandates of recreation and conservation. Thus, many US parks have programs in place that allow hundreds of visitors at a time to have encounters with nature along the lines of active ecotourism. These activities may include trekking, camping, bird-watching, etc.

In the Philippines, a possible candidate for mass active ecotourism development would be the eastern coastline of Luzon, starting with the Quezon-Aurora area. Reduced travel time to the area resulting from improved highway access could open up the opportunities for surfing, trekking and other forms of adventure ecotourism in the area.

Its relative proximity to the National Capital Region (NCR) might suggest that the mass ecotourism market may discover the region relatively quickly — through word-of-mouth or through the Manila-based media.

Conclusion

This paper has developed a framework for classifying ecotourism initiatives in the Philippines based on a relatively inclusive, as opposed to restrictive, definition of ecotourism. As suggested by Weaver (2001), it defines ecotourism as having three basic elements. First, the focus of attraction is the natural environment or some specific components of it. In the Philippine setting, we expand the focus to include elements of the cultural environment as well. Second, an ecotourism initiative should emphasize learning as an outcome of the tourist's interaction with the natural environment. Thus, programs that merely use the natural environment as a setting for tourist activity — such as some forms of adventure tourism or the traditional “sun, sand and beach” activities in beach tourism — without any educational objective do not qualify as ecotourism. Finally, the initiative should be sustainable, implying a desire to ensure that the integrity of the resources are not undermined. Given the difficulty in measuring sustainability, this paper subscribes to Weaver's “reasonable intent” standard wherein the ecotourism proponent makes “every reasonable effort to ensure that its operations are sustainable, in line with current best practice principles (p. 105).”

What are the implications of this classification framework for the development of ecotourism in the Philippines? Policy-makers, planners and host communities can use this framework as a tool for deciding what form of ecotourism is appropriate for their respective areas. The framework can assist these decision-makers by highlighting the trade-offs between economic benefits and environmental threats that ecotourism can bring. Figure 6 illustrates these trade-offs in terms of the possible advantages and disadvantages associated with each ecotourism category.

It should be emphasized that this proposed framework does not make any claim that poverty alleviation and environmental preservation are mutually exclusive objectives. If

ecotourism is to be a truly sustainable form of tourism development, it must aspire for both environmental preservation (to address the ecological sustainability aspect) and poverty alleviation (in response to the economic sustainability and equity aspects of sustainable development). However, it will be very difficult for any destination or community to maximize both socio-economic and environmental benefits from ecotourism.

Figure 6. Advantages and Disadvantages of Each Ecotourism Category

A C T I V E	LARGER SCALE		P A S S I V E
	(+) More visitors bring in more economic returns (+) Active ecotourism might encourage more return visits because of promise of novelty (-) Congestion, pollution, degradation of quality	(+) More visitors bring in more economic returns (+) Mitigate impact of tourists through passive ecotourism (-) Congestion, pollution, degradation of quality	
	(+) Active ecotourism might encourage more return visits because of promise of novelty (+) Smaller groups may be easier to manage (-) Smaller economic returns	(+) Lower impact ecotourism in form of passive ecotourism (+) Smaller groups may be easier to manage (-) Smaller economic returns	
	SMALLER SCALE		

As a general approach, the form of ecotourism, i.e. the category of ecotourism, that a given area or community might adopt will depend on their objectives for proposing ecotourism in the first place. If their development priorities lean more towards resource conservation, it would be preferable to develop smaller scale, more passive ecotourism programs. However, the choice to minimize market scope could threaten the economic

sustainability of the program. In such cases, alternative economic activities may be necessary to complement the ecotourism component. If ecotourism is the main or sole source of revenue for the area, there may soon be pressure to expand market reach to the mass or mainstream tourist markets.

Conversely, more popular and active forms, might be more attractive for destinations interested in the livelihood opportunities from ecotourism. However, these areas must be conscious of the negative environmental effects that high-impact or high-volume tourist activity can bring — particularly to an environmentally-sensitive ecosystem. Management will contend with the obvious risks of congestion, pollution and other negative effects from mass visitation. They need to recognize that the continued economic viability of the attraction is directly related to their success in maintaining or enhancing the quality of the environmental resource. For this reason, mass ecotourism destinations (more so than niche destinations) must be ready with visitor management plans and programs. Figure 7 lists some planning considerations for each class of ecotourism program.

Figure 7. Planning Implications of Category of Ecotourism

	LARGER SCALE		
A C T I V E	Need to prepare visitor management plan	Need to prepare visitor management plan	P A S S I V E
	Install measures to mitigate impacts from expected congestion, pollution and degradation of resource quality	Site hardening measures to mitigate impacts from expected congestion, pollution and degradation of resource quality	
	Product-enhancement initiatives to increase the value of the visitor experience.	Product-enhancement initiatives to increase the value of the visitor experience.	
	Measures to counter expected pressures to expand scale of operations and scope of market	Measures to counter expected pressures to expand scale of operations and scope of market	
	SMALLER SCALE		

Given the relatively young state of ecotourism in the Philippines today, there is not enough information to develop a full database according to the framework we have proposed here. In most cases, potential areas have been identified but programs have neither been designed nor implemented. Thus, much of the data available so far has been limited to physical descriptions of the sites. In the future, it is recommended that ecotourism proponents and planners gather information that could help in filling out the proposed framework.

For each proposed ecotourism initiative, the following questions need to be asked:

- Does the program have an explicit educational objective? If so, what is the strategy for educating the ecotourist?

- Are there going to be caps on visitor volume? If so, how is visitor volume going to be controlled?
- What facilities and infrastructure do they intend to introduce to the area?

These are the basic data that will be needed to fill the framework. First, researchers must determine that the program complies with the educational objective of ecotourism. The primary approach (interpretation vs. personal experience) adopted suggests whether the program is more active or passive. Second, the framework will require information regarding the market scope that the program aspires to. Proposed caps on visitor volume (if any), including programs for controlling the flow of visitors through the area, suggest whether the area is aiming for a niche or mass market. Similarly, the form and scale of facilities and infrastructure to be introduced to a natural or cultural area will also indicate whether the ecotourism program has been planned on a small- or large-scale.

Ecotourism Standards and Certification

One specific means by which this information may be collected on a consistent basis would be through the institution of a certification system for ecotourism projects in the Philippines. Not only would such a system allow the industry to gather the data needed for classifying various ecotourism projects, but the process would also allow the establishment of benchmarks and standards that the various stakeholders can use to monitor the programs over time.

To date, there is no ecotourism certification system in place in the country. Internationally, there are around 100 different schemes for certifying and approving ecotourism programs (Crabtree, O'Reilly and Worboys, 2002). Most of these tools have been designed by tourism experts, governments and NGOs to promote sustainable tourism practices at varying levels — from the destinations and countries to individual tourist establishments. Furthermore, most of these certification schemes are voluntary in character (Sanabria, 2002). Among the more well-known certification systems are Green

Globe 21, ISO 14001², Australia's Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP), Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), the Blue Flag system for accrediting beaches and marinas, Europe's Protected Areas Network (PAN) Parks, and ECOTEL.

However, the absence of a single international standard for ecotourism has confused consumers and thus has limited the effectiveness of these schemes in identifying true, and high quality ecotourism ventures. Thus, there have been calls (Honey and Rome, 2001; Crabtree, O'Reilly and Worboys, 2002; Sanabria, 2002) for industry to move towards a unified certification scheme. However, such a set-up would undoubtedly be expensive for communities and destinations in the less developed countries. Further, there are concerns that a single international standard would not be able to address the unique conditions of each country.

Thus, the industry seems to be moving towards a two-tiered international certification system. The first level of certification would represent the minimum or basic requirements for any destination to be considered as ecotourism. Places that qualify for this first-level certification would be recognized by the tourism industry — and, more importantly, the tourist markets — as complying with ecotourism's basic economic, social and ecological objectives. The second level of certification would then represent the award or recognition standard for destinations that aspire to be recognized as models of ecotourism's best practice.

A similar structure could be employed in the Philippines. Again, there would be basic certification level corresponding to some locally-adapted variant of the Mohonk principles (see Table 5). By staying true to the Mohonk Agreement³, the system would ensure that the Philippine ecotourism product is comparable to those in the global marketplace. Best practice sites for specific types of environments (marine, mountain, etc.) could then be identified through a second, higher-level certification standard. Once

² The International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) ISO 14001 is not, strictly speaking, an ecotourism standard. Rather it contains an environmental management standard against which a tourism business may be certified.

³ The Mohonk Agreement is a document that resulted from Institute for Policy Studies' Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Certification Workshop, held at Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, New York from November 17 to 19, 2000. The Agreement was drafted by 45 participants from some 20 countries.

Source: Honey and Rome (2001).

However, none of the so-called national trade associations, not even the Philippine chapter of the Ecotourism Society, appears to have the resources, technical expertise, nor interest to begin implementing a national ecotourism classification scheme. National and international NGOs may have the technical expertise with regard to the environmental and social aspects of tourism development. However, the involvement of many NGOs in ecotourism – even those whose operations are national in scope — are focused on communities and not industries.

Thus, the DOT appears — by default — to be the entity best positioned to take the lead in developing the minimum standards for classifying ecotourism programs. At least in the short-term, DOT may also have to provide the accreditation and classification service for ecotourism programs in the Philippines. The national trade associations can support the DOT-led system by providing inputs related to the quality of the ecotourism product, as well as by conducting advocacy campaigns designed to boost industry acceptance and adoption of the ecotourism standards and guidelines. The NGO community, on the other hand, can work with DOT and DENR on the more technical criteria related to environmental and social impacts from ecotourism activity.

A national classification system will be useful for ensuring that quality and commitment to ecotourism principles is consistent from one region of the country to the other. However, the ultimate success of the certification standard, in particular, and Philippine ecotourism, in general, will still be determined at the local level. For this reason, it will be critical to strengthen the ecotourism partnerships among LGUs, the organized community and the local tourist industry.

The accreditation of tourism establishments has long been devolved to the local government units, under the Local Government Code. However, few local officials are formally trained on tourism development. This could again be an argument for minimum ecotourism standards to be developed by a national agency like DOT, which does have the expertise regarding this specialized form of tourism.

Local officials, however, have the power to enforce compliance with ecotourism principles through such controls as the issuance of building permits and business licenses as well as through various modes of local taxation. Furthermore, the LGU can make sure

that ecotourism initiatives are integrated and coordinated with local development plans. In particular, the ecotourism ventures must be compatible with LGU plans in terms of infrastructure, land-use and resource management.

Ecotourism, as with any sustainable tourism venture, will require patience. However, this may not be very compatible with the reality of a local election schedule that runs every three years. Thus, it is important for the accreditation and classification systems to be institutionalized and quickly insulated from the constantly swirling winds of political change. This is where community organizations and private business can come in.

Community organizations (CO), people's organizations (PO) and NGOs represent the residents' interests and concerns. They help organize the community, thereby facilitating dialogue with government by providing residents with a collective voice. If the projects are community-based forms of ecotourism, the NGOs will be directly involved the planning and implementation of these programs. Thus, they will likely be very involved in educating local residents on the behaviors consistent with the principles of sustainable tourism and ecotourism. Because of their intimate relationship with the community and its environmental resources, the NGO is possibly the local stakeholder with the most direct access to information about environmental and social impacts of tourism development. Thus, it is the stakeholder best positioned to monitor and evaluate the impacts of ecotourism programs.

The economic impacts of ecotourism can be magnified by tourism businesses such as lodging establishments, dining facilities, tour guides and local shops that encourage additional local spending by ecotourists. Moreover, these support services affect the overall quality of the visitor experience even if there is no direct link between the operations of these businesses and that of the ecotourism program. Private businesses can also contribute to the success of the program by linking the eco-destination to the national and international marketing systems operating outside the community.

However, much like the organizational work done for local residents, the local tourism industries will also need to be organized. An organized tourism sector can become a more effective lobbying group relative to the LGU as well as to the national government agencies. Similarly, organizing the local tourism industry can also enable the

small businesses to pool their limited marketing funds with those of the LGU and market the destination collectively rather than do their own separate promotions.

The LGU-Community-Industry partnership can thus be described as follows. The local government unit takes its cue from the national tourism industry and establishes the framework within which local groups and private businesses will operate their ecotourism ventures. This framework will be defined largely by the LGU's development agenda and its regulatory mechanisms such as permits, licenses and taxes.

Community-based, as well as commercial ecotourism operations can, as part of the normal licensing and building regulations, be asked to provide the preliminary, as well as longitudinal data that the ecotourism classification system will require. While the individual programs and businesses can be expected to have their individual promotional priorities, the marketing of the community or destination as a whole can be a collective effort. Whether this is an LGU- or industry-led campaign will depend on the degree to which the local businesses can be organized for collective action.

Finally, the point must be made that the discussion more or less assumes participation in the classification scheme. This premise will become valid only when the national ecotourism sector can convince developers, planners and investors of the value that an ecotourism certification will bring to a given program or project. The national ecotourism advocates must demonstrate that the classification and accreditation scheme will benefit the programs by enhancing the destination's image, as well as actual product quality.

Future Questions

The classification framework we have proposed is built around a *reasonable intent* standard of sustainability. This standard is broad enough to cover most definitions of ecotourism, whether these come from commercial ecotourism organizers or from environmentalists interested in ecotourism as a conservation tool. Conversely, we recognize that this decision to accept a liberal interpretation of ecotourism will not lack for criticism, particularly from groups who might insist on determining "true" ecotourism.

For such interests, the smaller-scale forms, more likely the passive variations, of ecotourism would probably conform to what is traditionally considered *true* ecotourism. However, we expect that the economic concerns of private as well as community groups will continue to fuel a strong advocacy for the more commercial variants of ecotourism.

This lingering issue highlights some of the questions that this paper has left unanswered for others to take up. Perhaps, researchers may address them in the future as more information and knowledge is gained from the ecotourism experience in the Philippines.

As presented here, ecotourism programs would be classified according to a set of descriptions collected about the attractions at a particular time. It may be necessary to track these programs over time to see if they evolve to the point that they would have to be classified in a new category. In other words, do destinations or programs move from one quadrant to the other? One may surmise that of the three major elements of our classification framework — educational strategy, introduced facilities and infrastructure, and volume of visitors — it is visitor volume that would be the most fluid. As a destination's objectives and strategies regarding visitor volume change, it may be expected that the education and infrastructure facilities will follow.

Destination life-cycle theory suggests that this evolution will likely involve a movement from small-scale ecotourism to large-scale — even, mass — ecotourism. Is this change inevitable and unavoidable? To an extent, much of the rhetoric about sustainable tourism argues that it *is* possible to achieve a steady state wherein the quality of the environment is maintained. Researchers may also want to take the issue further and ask if the reverse is possible — that a mass ecotourism program can evolve (or devolve) into a smaller, niche-oriented activity.

Image studies will also be useful in that they can see if tourists also view ecotourism programs as catering more to mass markets or niche markets. Similarly, image studies can determine if tourists perceive ecotourism programs as being oriented more towards interpretation (passive) or towards personally experiencing (active) the natural environment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Respondents and Interviewees

Respondent Organizations to the Survey of NGOs and Donor Agencies

1. Kitanglad Integrated NGOs, Inc. (KIN) c/o Ma. Easterluna Z. Canoy
2. Kabang Kalikasan ng Pilipinas (KKP) c/o Mr. Ed Tongson
3. Alliance of Volunteers in Development Foundation, Inc. (AVDF)
4. European Community (EC) c/o Daniel Plas
5. Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) c/o Eduardo Canawin
6. US Agency for International Development (USAID) c/o Leila Peralta

Experts interviewed

Ms. Cora Timones - Puerto Princesa City Tourism Office

Ms. Monette Flores – Coastal Resources Management Project, Olango

DENR - Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project (CPPAP)

Palawan Tropical Forestry Protection Programme

Trade Shows Visited

Philippine Travel Mart (2001)

Outdoor Recreation and Adventure Tourism Show (2001)

Tourism Investment Opportunities in the Philippines Conference (2001)

Travel Tour Expo (2002)