

A Community-Based Framework for Building Sustainable Tourism

Erwin A. Mallo

University of Southern Mindanao, Kabacan, Cotabato, Philippines

Author Email: ermallo@usm.edu.ph

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Abstract. Exploring the community's perspectives on sustainable tourism yields valuable and insightful ideas about their involvement in local tourism development. In terms of their development, which reflects the abundance of resources, manages economic benefits, fosters cultural openness to visitors, and promotes dynamic collaboration among stakeholders, this study employed a phenomenological research design to capture their experiences and perspectives on what it means to have sustainable tourism. Results show remarkable responses and themes that emphasize the factors contributing to promoting tourism in the province's various tourist attractions. The participants believed that sustainability in local tourism includes people in the form of security forces, community, private sectors, and LGUs; profit as a result of infrastructure development like roads and buildings, commercialization, investment in local tourism where investors gradually come in, and crop production they sold their local products and delicacies; a planet where it must be a safe and peaceful environment, maintenance and cleanliness, sustainable living and environmental conservation. Furthermore, a new aspect of tourism is the places themselves. As the participants believed, for tourism to become sustainable, it must be emphasized through government support, the absence of conflict, security, relaxation, and development. With these four domains — planet, profit, and places — sustainable tourism is described this way. This paper attempts to develop a new framework for creating sustainable local tourism.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism; Community-based framework.

1.0 Introduction

Sustainable Tourism is a form of development that highlights economic and social development involvement (Zhang & Ali, 2024). Tourism promotes environmental and infrastructural development, which is reflected in the community's involvement and government support. The emergence of the tourism industry in Southeast Asia attracts travelers worldwide to spend their vacations with family and friends. These industries maximize environmental sustainability and development (Ha Van et al., 2024). This benefits the incoming economic generation of the government and residents.

Cotabato Province's opening of its doors to promote tourism in the Philippines has made it a new destination. According to the Department of Tourism (2025) demand statistics for travelers between 2022 and 2023, the province has an exceptional increase in visits of 213,767 and 233,214 in the respective years. Tourism's impact on the province is strongly supported, especially by the community's engagement in tourism development (Villamor et al., 2024) and stakeholders' participation in peace tourism (Mallo, 2025). Based on the record, there has been an increase in attendance among local and neighboring travelers who visit captivating attractions and environments to enjoy each other's company. One remarkable behavior that travelers often experience is the

opportunity to savor local delicacies and explore historical areas considered a “war-torn” province. The suspension of conflict allows locals to showcase their hidden tourist attractions to the public, including national and international travelers.

Unlike previous studies, some literature discusses sustainable tourism as a balance between economic growth and environmental and social sustainability. (Elgin & Elveren, 2024); sustainable tourism employment (Kim & Baker, 2024); sustainable entrepreneurship (Zeng et al., 2024); ethnic tourism (Guo et al., 2024) , emphasizing the community's participation in creating sustainable tourism is essential and integral in promoting the social and cultural practices that local tourism is designed to showcase. The artistic practices therein were products of their ancestors, which were believed to have been adopted decades ago. This emphasis on community involvement can inspire hope for the future of sustainable tourism.

Furthermore, this research aims to explore the community's perspectives on sustainable tourism and address the question: What community-based perspectives on sustainable tourism have been explored? At the end of this study, new perspectives will be constructed, forming a framework for local, sustainable tourism in Cotabato Province. This framework could transform the region, bringing hope and optimism for the future of sustainable tourism.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological research design, chosen for its unique ability to capture the distinct experiences and perspectives of the local community regarding sustainable tourism. This design was particularly relevant given the evolving landscape of local tourism in the Province of Cotabato. It provided a nuanced understanding of how tourism has impacted their lives and contributed to their social participation and the locality's development. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) the design, it aims to capture individuals' unique experiences of a phenomenon that affects their lives.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in the Province of Cotabato, which is characterized by emerging tourism activity. According to the most recent survey by the Regional Department of Tourism XII, conducted in March 2021, the province reported 216,182 domestic and foreign tourists. Additionally, several local attractions in the province can be found in the nearby neighboring municipalities of Aleosan, Pikit, and Makilala, where the study was specifically conducted. In the Municipality of Pikit, the historical Bahay Kasal, known for its use as a military camp during the Spanish occupation, can be found. The Bahay-Kastial was declared a National Historical Landmark in central Mindanao. Today, the national government renovated and sponsored it to revive memories that shaped the Municipality's recognition for its development and cultural identity.

Another neighboring municipality is Aleosan, a newly established tourist attraction, the UK Peak. Previously, the area where the tourist site was developed was known for its grassy lands, which were used for horse ranches and were not conducive for locals to spend time or visit. It has mountainous features and a windy environment. Later, the private owner and the government decided to innovate in this area. A series of infrastructure developments were observed, and continuous support from the locals made it known to families and lovers that it was a moment to relax.

The New Israel Eco-park is in Barangay in the municipality of Makilala, a culture-based tourist attraction. New Israel is known for its community development through the religion of Moncadista. It was home to Macaque Monkeys, who had already lived there for decades. It was believed that monkeys brought luck to their community, as they were used to improve economic well-being. The provincial government exhausted some funds to make it accessible. Better known for its popularity, the New Israel Eco-Park is considered the most visited tourist site in the province.

2.3 Research Participants

This study used purposive sampling techniques to identify participants who were residents of the selected areas and could directly attest to stakeholders' development, engagement, and participation in local tourism. Their participation in regional tourism development varied according to their knowledge and type of involvement.

The selection process for research participants was based on specific parameters. Participants were chosen from the municipalities of Aleosan, Pikit, and Makilala. For the Key Informant Interview (KII), six participants were selected, including the LGU and BLGU Barangay captains, who were chosen for their current roles and knowledge of tourism development and living conditions during times of conflict. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involved 18 participants, including owners of tourist sites, the head of BPAT, teachers, vendors, habal-habal drivers, and a Brgy. Kagawad. These participants were selected based on their barangay residence, experience with local development, and knowledge of tourism development in their area.

2.4 Research Instrument

The study's instruments included a researcher-made interview guide. Before data collection, this guide was validated by Florie Jane Tamon and Rowell Natafan, who provided necessary probing questions. A pilot test was then conducted to ensure the questions and probes were suitable and accurate. The Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) used the same questions to ensure consistency. These questions focused on transitioning from peace to sustainable tourism and the involvement of multiple sectors in offering programs to address tourism needs and implement sustainable tourism interventions in their locality.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

This study employed in-depth interviews and focus group methods. Environmental scanning was conducted before the interview and focus group to validate and confirm the participation of key informants. The researcher identified the participants using the criteria provided. A letter was sent to the local government unit and the barangay captain for approval. After receiving the acceptance letter, the interview was arranged. Interview responses were digitally recorded to document the participants' answers.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the principles of protecting participants and maintaining the integrity of the process, ensuring trustworthiness, and presenting accurate results in social research. According to the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1978) ethical consideration, the value of the participants' respect, belief, and security as subjects of the study's conduct is maintained. It reiterates the provision of a proper venue, a safe space, and data privacy for the participants. Additional considerations were noted in the capacity to provide informed consent when data were produced from the participants, as well as the goal and process of how data were generated solely for this study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Places as Sustainable Local Tourism

Table 1 shows the subthemes of places such as sustainable local tourism.

Table 1. Places for Sustainable Local Tourism	
Sub-themes	Description
Government support systems	The Department of Tourism assisted in training the tourism front liners. The LGU planned to improve the facilities and parking space. The province funded the rehabilitation. The barangay checked the arrival of the tourists.
Absence of Conflict	Suspension of sporadic conflicts. The arrival of tourists in the locality.
Secure and relaxed	Visibility of peace
Development	Accessibility and security are strictly enforced, ensuring tourists feel safe. A children's playground has been installed. BPAT secured the tourism spot, and PNP monitors attendance.
	Tourism opens new opportunities for the community. Tourism activities are present, and the locality is emerging as a destination. Infrastructure-related and social development are progressing. The community and LGUs work hand in hand.

These places are considered essential characteristics of sustainable local tourism. This includes a government support system, the absence of conflict, security, relaxation, and development. The participants were also trained as tourism frontliners through DoT initiatives. This training enhances frontline staff's communication skills as tourism guides and ensures the safety of tourists. The provincial government secures the rehabilitation of the facilities. This involves constructing new recreational areas, enhancing the appearance of buildings, and implementing safety measures for tourists. DoT, a key player in promoting sustainable tourism, provides training and support to local communities and governments. The provincial government, a local authority, or

municipality has the primary role in developing and supporting the local tourism industry. Depending on the province or municipality's level of development and resources, the government may provide various support services, such as establishing a tourism office or department to manage and promote the local tourism industry. For tourism to be deemed a safe environment for visitors, the absence of conflicts must characterize the places where people will come to rest. The place has a significant attachment to the behavior of visitors, including both rational and emotional aspects (Meng et al., 2020), which enhances their connection with the environment.

Additionally, participants have noted the absence of sporadic conflicts as evidence of sustained security. Tourists are pleased with their nature experience and feel immersed in it as it offers comfort. The visibility of peace also implied that security was improved, and visitors were given a sense of calm. This way, the participants feel assured of their safety and security when traveling. This can help alleviate societal stress and enable individuals to enjoy their vacation fully. Security measures, such as increased security staff, surveillance cameras, and background checks, can help ensure tourists feel safe and secure. Additionally, improved infrastructure and enhanced public transportation can help tourists easily navigate unfamiliar places, providing an added sense of security and peace of mind.

Tourism has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, with an increasing number of destinations. For the participants, this is because there is more investment in the sector. They have been focusing on sustainability and eco-tourism destinations. In response, the community continually improves its living conditions, particularly regarding social and economic development. Similarly, sustainable tourism has played a significant role in their respective areas. It further emphasized that a place-based approach affects generality and can reflect the community legacy of future generations (Han et al., 2024). It is therefore important to underline that places must be improved in tourism development.

3.2 People as Sustainable Local Tourism

Table 2 shows the subthemes of People as Sustainable Local Tourism.

Table 2. *Subthemes of People as Sustainable Local Tourism*

Subthemes	Description
Security Forces	BPAT secured the place day and night. CAFGU remained in the vicinity.
Community	The community's active participation in the sustainable tourism process, not just as beneficiaries but as contributors, is a testament to its integral and inspiring role in the framework.
Private Sectors	Their active involvement is a testament to the collective effort required for sustainable tourism and is worthy of our appreciation.
LGU	The LGU's comprehensive and reassuring approach to sustainable tourism instills confidence and reassurance.

Sustainable local tourism is an approach that includes security forces, the community, the private sectors, and local government units. Security forces play a crucial role in ensuring safety and promoting sustainable tourism. The participants identified the presence of security forces, including police, as essential for public safety, especially in areas with a high concentration of tourists. BPAT officers patrol the areas, responding to incidents and preventing criminal activity to ensure the safety of both tourists and locals.

As mentioned by the participant:

We conducted a meeting with BPAT to maintain peace and order. As officials, we are always visible to the community and maintain peace and order.

This claim was supported by Wu et al. (2021), as cited by (Villamor et al., 2024) residents, who were concerned about security issues such as crime and alcoholism. The security forces' visibility and proactive measures significantly contributed to the overall sense of security in the area. Moreover, the relevance of security to tourism can increase tourism as a value added that contributes to visits. According to Manrique-de-Lara-Peñate et al. (2022), the vicinity of tourism is secured through strong security, led by the government security agency. On the other hand, local communities have an active role in sustainable tourism. Tourism affects the economy and profits. It will add to the community's profit. If it is not beneficial, it will not be sustainable. It will hurt the planet. Empower the community to concentrate on social benefits and environmental impacts (Zeng et al., 2024). The LGU assisted in planning and funding the tourism site, fostering greater community cooperation. Additional programs were created to provide income to the community. DA and TESDA mainstreamed their

efforts into business ideas and production. Farming materials, practices, funding, and the production of saleable, income-generating products have become ingrained behaviors in the community.

As mentioned by the participant:

The LGU sponsored skills training on gas leaking and massage. TESDA offers training in the mechanical and automotive fields.

Furthermore, LGUs' engagement and collaboration strengthened tourism development (Mandić et al., 2024). This enabled the community to expand its resources and remain productive with continuous support. The company's dependence on these government offices, powers, and authorities is essential in implementing sustainable tourism (Maxim, 2016). In summary, people are crucially involved in actualizing tourism sustainability. Behind the implementation of tourism is the presence of security forces, the community, the LGU, and stakeholders. It is imperative to revisit and examine their roles in implementing sustainability, particularly in tourism. While it is correct to consider the success of the implementation, all deserve to be recognized and partnered to build and strengthen the relationship well.

3.3 Profit as Sustainable Local Tourism

Table 3 shows the subthemes of Profit as Sustainable Local Tourism

Table 3. Subthemes as Profitable, Sustainable Local Tourism	
Subthemes	Description
Infrastructure Development	Water and electric systems donated. Roads were concreted—more recreational facilities.
Commercialization	They stay at home while selling their products. The community introduced local delicacies or foods to the tourists.
Investment in Local Tourism	Investors come to the locality, and the land is now utilized. Businesses are visible in the locality. The LGU initiated tourism development, which helped to alleviate the community's economic instability. There were livelihood programs for women doing business.
Crop Production	Farming is the main source of food and production for the community. Ornamental plants were displayed for tourists to view.

Sustainable local tourism is a form of tourism that benefits both the local community and the environment. It aims to foster academic development, preserve cultural heritage, protect the environment, and create opportunities for interaction between locals and visitors. Another reason for effective, sustainable tourism is that it can generate profits while providing a positive social impact on the areas visited. The participants viewed tourism as a means of profit development for the locality and the province. This profit from sustainable local tourism is generated through infrastructure development, commercialization, investment in regional tourism, and crop production. The participants believed that infrastructure development is essential to the success of sustainable tourism in any province. By investing in infrastructure such as roads, reports, and accommodations, a province can create an environment that is more attractive to tourists, thus making it more profitable.

The community benefited from enhanced support in skills training. They transformed their village into a profitable area and continued to organize their other resources. Women and the locals strengthened their business efforts. Landowners within the tourist attraction constructed small businesses to cater to their clients. The idle lands are now transformed into income facilities. Homeowners residing near roads have strategized to earn money. They began selling vegetables and homemade products. They made "Talipapa" for the display of their products.

The participant proved that:

Most of my constituents, especially those in Muslim areas, worked as laborers at the market. They owned national highway stores. Prawns and tobacco were the most popular products in the area.

The emerging tourism activity in the locality caught the attention of tourists and investors from neighboring regions. The LGU collaborated with the private sector to develop infrastructure for the participants. The location was developed through consultative meetings with local community leaders and agencies. Farming was developed. The development movement also enhanced the community's infrastructure and social aspects. Funding and rehabilitation have become the leading services offered to tourism sites, creating a better

atmosphere of opportunities for the community. LGU initiated tourism development to help alleviate the community's economic stability. There were livelihood programs for women doing business. Tourism must consider employees' long-term involvement in achieving sustainable tourism (Kim & Baker, 2024). This financial stability is further supported by the updated intervention of the Department of Agriculture to enhance farmers' knowledge and skills in crop production and the continuous improvement of tourism sites like zip lines, tower views, flower production, and native delicacies. Even at home, a small business or a *tiange* supports their day-to-day expenses. In other words, the family can sustain their basic needs independently from the government programs.

Aside from tourism, the locality was also known for its farming. The province shared a hundred hectares of agricultural land. It provided crops and livestock production to the local and national markets. Various crops, including palay, corn, caravan, fruits, and African oil, were mainly planted in the land areas.

The participant believed that,

Before, the source of income was enough only to buy basic needs and things. But now, because of tourism, you cannot buy more than before. A stable business helps me improve my house. That is where I get my income.

3.4 Planet as Sustainable Local Tourism

Table 4 shows the subthemes of Profit as Sustainable Local Tourism.

Table 4. *Subthemes as Planet as Sustainable Local Tourism*

Sub-themes	Description
Safe and Peaceful Environment	The tourism site was funded to undergo rehabilitation.
Maintenance and cleanliness	The tourist site will be provided with a caretaker to maintain cleanliness.
Sustainable living	The presence of visitors and the community's income. Business keeps on going.
Environmental Conservation	Raise awareness among the community about the importance of caring for trees and prohibit the use of pesticides.

An ideal sustainable local tourism is tied to the planet. This is because the environment is the source of all our needs. The participants defined the planet as a sustainable regional tourism destination with a safe and peaceful environment, sustainable living, and environmental conservation. Sustainable tourism, to be considered a secure and peaceful environment, has a strong connection with the harmonious coexistence of the community. The community, as stewards, fosters a quiet living environment, welcoming visitors who wish to travel. During the interview, the participants stated that while tourists enjoyed nature's beauty, nature needed to rest for a while to regenerate and be restored: the DoT and the LGU funded and rehabilitated the tourism site. The strong support of government agencies made tourism sustainable, and it continued to expand its resources and create more realistic opportunities in the industry. Rehabilitating the area ensured visitors' safety, allowing them to enjoy the peaceful environment they deserved.

Tourism has become a sustainable source of income and shelter. The community's dependency on tourism was characterized by optimal security and safety monitoring, improved infrastructure, and the support of the local government unit (LGU) and stakeholders for the community. Tourism's impact on participants' income is believed to be caused by economic uplift. To achieve a sustainable lifestyle, tourists' visits were necessary.

For the participants,

Sustainable living is when there are visitors every day for viewing. When they try to claim in the UK Peak, they will probably enjoy the area's scenic beauty.

Moreover, the province of Cotabato is dedicated to promoting environmental protection and sustainable tourism. It focused on conserving a destination's natural environment and cultural legacy. Its operations guarantee that it is organized and managed to minimize the adverse effects on nature and local people. For the participants, activities concerning environmental conservation were initiated. The LGU initiated tree planting as part of their consensus agreement with the DENR to protect the environment. Designated garbage bins were located at various points throughout the tourist site. The community has demonstrated a favorable level of participation in tourism-related environmental protection. It suggests that green growth policies for environmental protection concern carbon emissions (Idroes et al., 2024). Environmental approach to minimize

emissions contributions (Dolnicar & Greene, 2025). Further, the balance between economic growth and environmental conservation (Ha Van et al., 2024).

3.5 Elkington's Triple Bottom Line approach

Elkington's Triple Bottom Line approach to sustainability emphasizes profit, people, and the planet, or the 3Ps (Elkington, 2013). This paper presents various perspectives on defining sustainability, utilizing tourism as a focal point. It defines sustainable tourism in four Ps: the process of Transition from Peace toward Sustainable Local Tourism. These domains include places, people, profit, and the planet. More importantly, places are given a distinct concept due to the presence of tourism, unlike the TBL approach, which discusses places within the context of the planet. The 4Ps concept encompasses a different domain that is highly significant to tourism. Places in sustainable local tourism play an important role in promoting tourism.

In Galtung's positive peace theory, the environment is crucial to an individual's ecological well-being. He believes that the environment must be adequately protected against human activities. The planet represents the habitat where humans are dependent on what it produces. If people destroy the environment, they also destroy their future, lives, and everything else. In conclusion, places that are the domain of sustainable tourism are important to include in discussions of sustainable tourism.

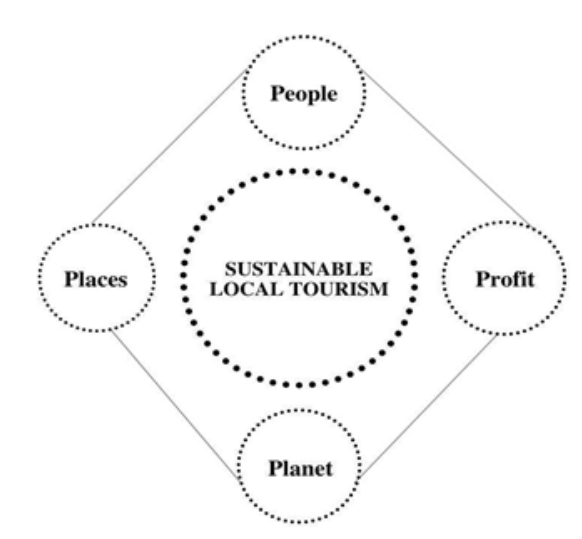


Figure 1. *A Framework for Creating Sustainable Local Tourism*

This research presents the newly created framework for creating sustainable local tourism. The domain of people is present, which is essential in actualizing peace and sectoral initiatives. This process includes the actors and imitators of peacebuilding activities, which include security forces, the community, the private sectors, and the LGU. Their role is to identify perceivable problems that might hinder the process of taking peacebuilding activities and the effects on the development of peace in their local areas. The domain of profit is present, offering economic resources to the community, facilitating commercialization activities, and attracting investment. It identifies perceptions of financial means and situations during conflict or economic disturbance. The economic means and coping interventions will help determine a basis for offering solutions to their losses. Tourism development is initiated with the community and LGUs' participation, alleviating local communities' economic stability. The government supports the strong demand for crop production, which will benefit farmers by improving their income and maximizing land area productivity.

Moreover, the domains of places and the planet significantly impact sustainable tourism. The primary requirement for tourism is that the place must be secure. This means the place is free from conflicts and has a stable security presence. The community and the tourists are enjoying the place. The planet, representing the environment and nature, should be valued as a natural resource. This means that while the community improves the area, it must also respect and secure it. They need to avoid human destruction that might endanger the natural environment. Within the process, agents must be visible to maintain security. It also encourages community participation in maintaining the area's security.

4.0 Conclusion

Sustainable tourism remains relevant to the country's and community's economic welfare and development. However, one domain that should be highlighted is places. In sustainable local tourism, it is the priority to establish and maintain a sense of attachment to places. In Elkington's Triple Bottom Line Approach, other domains, such as planet, people, and profit, have impactful contributions, especially in business sectors. However, what remains for local tourism sustainability is the participation of these four domains. In the case of Cotabato province, the tourism conflict was a disturbing problem, and places needed to be secured.

In conclusion, participation and support mechanisms established among the government, community, and private agencies are recommended. Considering the province's multicultural characteristics, further study is evident to protect, respect, and value the heritage that has been borne in the area. The attractions that tourism has developed may even affect the practices of the tri-people living within the tourist destinations, while local sustainable tourism is increasingly observed. It must also consider the government agencies, particularly the tourism sector, to provide adequate funding to improve their policies on security matters, where tourism activities are evident in the coming and going of tourists, and implement wider dissemination of agricultural opportunities to the local community for profitable business.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The researcher is the sole author of this study.

6.0 Funding

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

This research declares no conflict of interest.

8.0 Acknowledgment

None

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