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Empowering Communities: Fostering Sustainable Tourism in Barasoain Church

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Abstract

This study explores the role of the community in promoting sustainable tourism at Barasoain Church, a significant cultural and historical landmark located in Malolos, Bulacan. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the research aimed to analyze the relationships between community awareness, satisfaction, engagement, and motivation without manipulating any variables. A total of 200 participants—including residents, business owners, local leaders, and tourists aged 18 to 40—were selected through purposive sampling to ensure active community involvement. Data collection was conducted through a structured survey questionnaire, and the results were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation. Findings revealed a high level of awareness, satisfaction, and engagement among participants toward sustainable tourism practices. Economic, cultural, and environmental factors were identified as key motivators for community involvement. A significant positive correlation was observed between community awareness and active engagement in sustainability efforts. Based on these results, the study recommends initiatives such as strengthening education and awareness programs, enhancing community engagement strategies, offering training and capacity-building activities, fostering public-private partnerships, and implementing incentive-based support systems. Furthermore, it suggests continuous monitoring, evaluation, and policy updates to sustain community-driven tourism development. This research highlights the critical role of community participation in fostering responsible tourism practices, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting long-term socio-economic benefits for the local area.

Keywords: *Community Engagement, Cultural Heritage Preservation, Community-Based Tourism, Tourism Development*

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a dynamic and multifaceted global activity defined as the movement of individuals to places outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes for less than one consecutive year (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2018). It encompasses the creation and consumption of services such as transportation, accommodation, food, entertainment, and cultural experiences (Kim & Lee, 2019). Tourism significantly impacts economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of both host and guest communities, making it a complex field that draws from disciplines such as geography, economics, sociology, psychology, and management (Mihalic, 2021; Scott, Hall, & Gössling, 2019). Given its wide-ranging effects, tourism requires critical analysis to promote practices that contribute to sustainable development.

Sustainable tourism, according to the UNWTO (2018), involves tourism that fully accounts for its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities. It seeks to encourage responsible travel, conserve natural resources and biodiversity, uphold cultural heritage, support local economies, and minimize negative environmental and cultural consequences (Fernández-Morales, Cárdenas-García, & García-Cárdenas, 2020; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2018). Sustainable tourism promotes a balance among economic growth, social inclusivity, and environmental stewardship, aiming for long-term benefits for all stakeholders (Weaver, 2020; Gössling et al., 2018).

Central to achieving sustainable tourism is the active involvement of local communities. Community participation ensures that tourism initiatives reflect local values, create ownership among residents, and empower them to reap economic and cultural benefits (Ruhanen & Cooper, 2018; Sigala et al., 2021). Engaging the community enhances cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and social cohesion while reducing tourism's potential negative effects (Wu et al., 2021). Community-based tourism fosters respect for local traditions and strengthens social networks between residents and visitors, further reinforcing sustainable development efforts.

The importance of community involvement has been emphasized in numerous studies. Fandos and Fernandez-Morales (2018) found that community participation positively influences sustainable tourism development in rural areas. Similarly, Kim and Gursoy (2020) revealed that community involvement in ecotourism significantly improves visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Gössling et al. (2019) also stressed that empowering local communities enhances sustainable management of cultural and environmental resources. These findings collectively underscore that understanding the motivators for community participation—such as economic opportunities, cultural pride, and environmental stewardship—is critical for realizing the goals of sustainable tourism and sustainable development overall.

This study thus builds on previous research by examining the role of community involvement in promoting sustainable tourism at Barasoain Church, an important cultural and historical landmark in Malolos, Bulacan.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of the community in promoting sustainable tourism at Barasoain Church in Malolos, Bulacan.

Specifically, the study aims to:

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1. **Determine the level of awareness** of the residents regarding sustainable tourism practices at Barasoain Church.
2. **Assess the level of community satisfaction** with current sustainable tourism initiatives implemented in Barasoain Church.
3. **Evaluate the extent of residents' engagement** in promoting sustainable tourism in the area.
4. **Identify the motivating factors** that influence community participation in sustainable tourism activities, particularly in terms of:
    - Economic benefits
    - Cultural preservation
    - Environmental conservation
5. **Analyze the relationship** between community awareness of sustainable tourism practices and their level of engagement.

METHODS

This study adopted a **descriptive-correlational research design**. The descriptive aspect aimed to profile the community's level of awareness, satisfaction, and engagement with sustainable tourism practices, while the correlational aspect sought to determine the relationship between awareness and engagement levels. This design allowed the researchers to analyze naturally occurring variables without manipulating them, offering a deeper understanding of existing community dynamics. The study was conducted in Malolos, Bulacan, specifically focusing on the community surrounding Barasoain Church, a prominent historical and cultural landmark.

The target population consisted of residents, local leaders, business owners, and tourists who were actively engaged in the community surrounding Barasoain Church.

Using **purposive sampling**, a total of **200 participants** aged **18 to 40 years** were selected. This age group was chosen as it represents an active segment of the community likely to be involved in or affected by tourism activities.

Data were collected using a survey questionnaire developed to capture four main areas:

- Awareness of sustainable tourism practices
- Satisfaction with existing sustainable tourism initiatives
- Engagement in promoting sustainable tourism
- Motivating factors influencing participation (economic, cultural, environmental)

The survey instrument underwent pilot testing to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability. Participants were approached individually and invited to complete the survey. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The data collection process was conducted ethically and respectfully, with participants allowed to withdraw at any point.

Collected data were analyzed using the following statistical techniques:

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- Mean and Standard Deviation: To describe the levels of awareness, satisfaction, engagement, and motivating factors.
- Pearson's r Correlation Coefficient: To assess the relationship between community awareness and engagement in promoting sustainable tourism.

Statistical results were interpreted to identify trends, relationships, and implications for sustainable tourism development in the study site.

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process, including:

- Obtaining informed consent from participants
- Ensuring voluntary participation
- Guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity
- Debriefing participants after data collection
- Securing approval from an academic or institutional ethics review committee

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The study revealed that the community surrounding Barasoain Church exhibits **high levels of awareness, satisfaction, and engagement** in promoting sustainable tourism. The overall mean scores in each area—**awareness (M = 4.53)**, **satisfaction (M = 4.45)**, and **engagement (M = 4.43)**—indicate a consistent and strong commitment from community members. Respondents demonstrated conscious efforts to practice sustainability, such as supporting local businesses, minimizing environmental impact, and valuing cultural preservation.

In terms of **motivating factors**, results showed that **economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions** were all perceived as **"extremely influential"**. Community members acknowledged the role of tourism in generating income, preserving cultural identity, and protecting the environment. These findings align with **Nunkoo and Gursoy (2019)**, who emphasized that community awareness of tourism's impacts influences participation and positive attitudes toward sustainable development.

Importantly, a **positive and significant correlation** was found between community **awareness** and **engagement** in sustainable tourism initiatives. This supports the hypothesis that increased knowledge leads to greater involvement. According to **Ruhanen and Cooper (2018)**, involving communities in tourism planning not only enhances sustainability but also builds a sense of ownership and long-term responsibility among residents.

The following table presents the mean scores of each motivating factor:

Motivating Factor	Mean Score	Interpretation
Economic	4.55	Extremely Influential
Cultural	4.52	Extremely Influential
Environmental	4.50	Extremely Influential

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These findings indicate that the economic, cultural, and environmental aspects of tourism significantly motivate community participation. This supports previous studies such as Fandos and Fernandez-Morales (2018), Sigala et al. (2021), and Wu et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of these factors in fostering sustainable tourism behaviors.

The study's findings affirm prior literature on **Community-Based Tourism (CBT)**, which argues that empowering local communities in heritage tourism contributes to effective environmental stewardship and cultural preservation (Gössling et al., 2019; Sigala et al., 2021). In the context of Barasoain Church, the results indicate that sustainable tourism can thrive when communities are informed, motivated, and included in the development process.

CONCLUSION

1. The surveyed participants demonstrated a high level of awareness, satisfaction, and engagement in sustainable tourism practices. This indicates a comprehensive understanding of sustainable tourism and its importance in preserving natural resources, supporting local communities, and minimizing environmental impacts. The high levels of awareness, satisfaction, and engagement suggest that the surveyed individuals are conscious of their actions and make conscious efforts to engage in sustainable tourism practices.

2. Barasoain Church's sustainable tourism practices have been successful in promoting environmental conservation, preserving cultural and historical significance, respecting local customs and traditions, providing information to tourists, engaging with the local community, contributing to the economic development of the community, and ensuring minimal adverse effects on the local ecosystem. The high level of satisfaction expressed by community members indicates that the church's efforts align with responsible tourism principles and have been effective in meeting the expectations and needs of the community.
3. Economic factors play a significant role in motivating community members to engage in sustainable tourism. Increased knowledge and awareness, environmental benefits, job opportunities, willingness to pay more, and positive impact on the local economy are influential factors that drive community participation in sustainable tourism activities. This suggests that emphasizing the economic advantages of sustainable tourism and its potential for local economic growth can effectively motivate community engagement. Cultural factors also strongly influence community members' motivation to engage in sustainable tourism. The preservation of cultural heritage and traditions, appreciation and respect for diversity, enjoyment of learning about local cultures, and unique experiences offered by sustainable tourism activities are influential factors that drive community participation. Promoting cultural exchange and understanding through sustainable tourism activities can effectively motivate community engagement. Environmental factors are significant motivators for community members to participate in sustainable tourism. The desire to preserve the natural environment for future generations, a sense of responsibility towards the environment and the local community, belief in the positive impact of sustainable tourism, appreciation of nature and wildlife, and concern about the negative impacts of conventional tourism are influential factors that drive community

participation. Highlighting the environmental benefits and the opportunity to connect with nature responsibly can effectively motivate community engagement.

4. There is a positive correlation between community awareness of sustainable tourism practices and their level of engagement. As community awareness increases, community engagement also increases. This suggests that raising awareness about sustainable tourism can lead to increased community participation and support for sustainable tourism initiatives.

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