

Sustainability Principles And The Challenges Encountered By Asean-Certified Homestays

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to assess the application of sustainability principles of the ASEAN-certified homestays in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to determine the challenges that the homestay providers encounter in operations. This study utilized the descriptive survey research method with the aid of questionnaires. Data gathered were processed, assembled, presented in tabular format, analyzed and interpreted. Descriptive statistics was applied with the use of the weighted mean formula. Results revealed that sustainability principles in the economic, environmental and socio-cultural aspects are applied to a moderate extent by the homestay providers. It was also ascertained that the challenges of the homestay providers were moderately felt in the aspects of marketing and promotion and collaborations; slightly felt in the aspect of recordkeeping; and were very slightly felt in terms of managing operations. Based on the findings, the ASEAN-certified homestays are sustainable, despite the challenges they encountered in operations.

Keywords: Sustainability principles; challenges; ASEAN-certified homestays.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism continues to be one of the world's leading industries. Its direct contribution to the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can never be denied. (Tayco and Sequino, 2014). It is a means of adding value to our country's balance of payments. Nevertheless,

the constantly changing landscape of the tourism industry has taken the call to address the current genre of tourist expectations. This current scenario of the tourism economy has motivated government units, non-government organizations and the academe to coalesce in terms of resources, capabilities and expertise for sustainable tourism development. The researchers posit that upgrading of tourism products and services to a whole new innovative level and mitigating the challenges in operations of tourism establishments would address sustainability issues and maximize the latter's contribution to the Philippine economy.

Accommodation is one of the primary tourism products. In relation, there are many types of accommodation facilities which include inns, hotels, pension houses, resorts, guest houses and homestays, among others. However, for tourists visiting ecotourism sites, homestay is the most appropriate one because it is purposely designed to provide tourists with opportunities to interact with the local family who lives in the house used for accommodation (Cruz, 2017).

In the Philippines, the Province of Siquijor is the first and only destination in the country being awarded the ASEAN Standard Homestay Award, a reputable distinction during the 35th ASEAN Tourism Forum in 2016. The Province of Siquijor, dubbed as the Healing Paradise of the Philippines, is located in the Central Visayas area and the smallest among the four provinces in the region. The awardees are the following: Agan's Homestay, Ates Homestay, Estelita Homestay, Xylla's Homestay, and Daval/Omandam Homestay. This paper models the ASEAN Homestay Accreditation Standards on sustainability with the end view of advancing proposals for strengthening application of sustainability principles and mitigating the challenges that ASEAN-certified homestay providers experience in operations.

This study is premised on the concept of sustainable development and the Theory of Constraints. Moreover, it is also anchored on section 1-2 of Republic Act 9593 (the Tourism Act of 2009) and the ASEAN Standards for Homestay Accreditation as the most significant legal bases. Republic Act No. 9593, otherwise known as the Tourism act of 2009 is an act declaring a national policy for tourism as an engine of investment, employment, growth and national development. From an ecological economics perspective, the paper of Romeiro (2012) offered a definition of

sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development emerged under the name of ecodevelopment in the 1970's. According to the United Nations, "sustainable development or sustainability is the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (<https://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org>).

The paper of Ivanov, Ivanova, and Iankova (2014) aimed to determine the role of establishments' category, product and size on the degree of application of sustainable practices. It was found out that factors on category, location and size caused statistically significant differences on their sustainable tourism practices.

The study of Bruns-Smith, A., Choy, V., Chong, H., Verma, R. (2015) delved into the most common green practices of hospitality establishments. A separate study of hotel customers found out the "willingness of the guests to participate in sustainability programs but the presence of green operations still do not override considerations of price and convenience in selecting a hotel" (Bruns-Smith, Choy, Chong, and Verma, 2015). In this study, a weak link between environmentally sustainable programs and improved customer satisfaction was ascertained, nevertheless, hotels are increasingly expected to maintain sustainability programs as a regular feature of their business. This idea vindicates the ASEAN Standards for Homestay Accreditation which includes the criterion on sustainability principles in the economic, environmental and sociocultural aspects.

Homestay is a form of alternative tourism and accommodation product in that it is different from the usual bed and breakfast facilities (Cruz, 2017). In homestays, "tourists stay with the host's family in the same house and experience the everyday way of life of the family and the local community. According to ASEAN Homestay Accreditation Standards, "homestays preferably should be low scale, low density, flexible, spontaneous, and owned and operated by the local communities" (ASEAN, 2016). The ASEAN Homestay Accreditation Standards include nine (9) criteria, namely: (1) host, comprising sub-criteria on the village and community and homestay provider; (2) accommodation which includes standards for sub-criteria of house, bedroom and toilet; (3) activities which include village and community-based activities, surrounding activities and authenticity; (4) management; (5) location; (6) hygiene and

cleanliness which sets standards for the house, surrounding compound, and food preparation, (7) safety and security; (8) marketing and promotion; and (9) sustainability principles which include economic, environmental and sociocultural sustainability (ASEAN, 2016).

Related terms as outgrowth of sustainable development are ecocentrism and ecotourism. The concept of ecocentrism by Aldo Leopold in 1940's posits that there are intrinsic values of all living things on earth and claims that man is the most advanced species with the ability to take care of all other species. Relatedly, ecotourism is defined by the International Ecotourism Society as a "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people." (<https://www.rainforest-alliance.org>).

A homestay is an ideal form and is the most fitting type of accommodation in ecotourism areas because its operations are designed to give tourists the chance to familiarize the culture and the biodiversity in a typical rural village under the guidance and orientation of hosts/owners of the house. As cited in the article by Acharya and Halpenny (2013), "homestay tourism adds authentic sociocultural richness to the tourists' experience, viewing tourism as an alternative product for a nation that cannot make extensive infrastructural investment a priority but which possesses an abundance of tourism opportunities in remote communities". This is true with the Philippine economy which puts its thrust on the tourism industry for sustainable development. The province of Siquijor, dubbed as the Healing Paradise of the Philippines, is located in the Central Visayas area and the smallest among the four provinces in the region. This study focuses on three essential aspects of sustainable development: economic, environmental and sociocultural. Economic sustainability refers to the practices that support long-term economic growth without negatively impacting social, environmental, and cultural aspects in the community (www.sustainability.umw.edu). Environmental sustainability allows for the needs of man to be met without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs (www.study.com). Sociocultural sustainability is a combination of social and cultural criteria which supports the welfare of the people while at the same time preserving the cultural heritage of the local community. The study of Thompson and Friess (2017), affirms another significance of ecotourism on its influence on business strategies, and how

challenges and tensions may inhibit the economic, social and environmental sustainability of ecotourism. This argument makes the Theory of Constraints (TOC) by Eliyahu M. Goldratt in 1984 significant in this aspect. This theory views an organization as a manageable system having few constraints that may prevent the system from achieving its goal. Applied to this study, the Homestay Program comprises organizations and service providers or operators which can be considered as a manageable system which has goals to achieve and its constraints may be the challenges it encounters in operations which may be the hindrance of the system from achieving its goal for sustainable development.

The reviewed literature on the ASEAN Accreditation Standards discussed the nine criteria which includes sustainability principles. Previous related literature and studies discussed about sustainability and green practices by accommodation establishments in the Philippines. Related theory and legal bases all support to the idea of sustainability. Nevertheless, there is paucity of information relating to the sustainability of operating homestays in the Philippines as well as the challenges encountered by the providers in the aspects of management, recordkeeping, marketing and promotion and collaboration with the government, the industry and the academe.

This scenario gives motivation for the researchers to conduct a study of the first ASEAN-accredited homestays in the Philippines located in the Province of Siquijor to address the above-mentioned gaps in knowledge. With the end view of advancing recommendations for strengthening application of their sustainability principles and alleviating possible operational challenges the providers encounter, the researchers will present outputs of this research to replicate the Siquijor homestays' best practices, being pioneer awardees in the ASEAN Homestay Standard certification. The findings and outputs are expected to become a valuable contribution to the sustainability of the Philippine tourism industry.

Statement of the Problem

The main objective of this study was to assess the sustainability of the ASEAN-certified homestays in the Philippines and to determine the challenges they encounter with the end view of advancing recommendations for strengthening their sustainability principles and mitigating the challenges they experience in operations.

The following specific questions were formulated to serve as guideposts in the conduct of this study:

1. What is the extent to which sustainability principles are put into application by the homestay providers in terms of the following:
 - 1.1 economic;
 - 1.2 environmental; and
 - 1.3 sociocultural sustainability?
2. What is the degree to which the challenges are experienced by the homestay providers in the aspects of:
 - 2.1 management;
 - 2.2 recordkeeping;
 - 2.3 marketing and promotion; and
 - 2.4 collaboration with government, the academe and the industry?
3. What recommendations shall be proposed to strengthen the sustainability principles and mitigate the challenges encountered by the ASEAN-certified homestays in their operations?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the descriptive survey method of research. The locale of the study is in the Province of Siquijor, where the first ASEAN-certified homestays are located, particularly in the City of Siquijor and the municipalities of Lazi and San Juan. A survey was conducted in gathering the necessary data for the extent of application of sustainability principles and the challenges encountered by homestay operators/providers by administering questionnaires to all the ASEAN-certified homestays. The questionnaire as the main instrument for the survey was adapted from the ASEAN Homestay Certification standards accreditation tool. In the gathering of data, research protocol and ethics was followed. The gathered data were processed and assembled and then presented in tabular presentation. The data were analyzed and interpreted in the light of the theoretical underpinning of the study. Descriptive statistics was applied to help in the analysis of data, with the use of weighted mean formula to describe the application of sustainability principles and the degree of challenges experienced by the respondents. A conclusion and recommendations were drawn from the significant findings to address the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Table 1 Homestays' Application of Sustainability Principles**

I. Sustainability Principles	WM	Description
A. Economic Sustainability	3.20	To a Moderate Extent
1. Makes sure that local staff is employed.	NA	
2. Provides attractive bonuses and performance-based incentives to the host/employees.	NA	
3. Provides micro-finance to deserving locals for capital.	NA	
4. Purchases materials and products from micro-enterprises.	NA	
5. Encourages guests to buy locally-made goods.	4.00	To a Great Extent
6. Promotes local festivals, cultural events and performances.	2.80	To a Moderate Extent
7. Promotes traditional handicrafts in the locality.	2.80	To a Moderate Extent
B. Environmental Sustainability	2.51	To a Moderate Extent
1. Limits and mitigates the physical impact of tourists.	3.20	To a Moderate Extent
2. Discourages the participation in activities which exploit local flora and fauna.	2.60	To a Moderate Extent
3. Adopts nearby beach, forest, or river.	1.40	To a Very Low Extent
4. Organizes cleanups with guests.	1.60	To a Very Low Extent
5. There is a Code of Conduct for interaction with wildlife.	2.60	To a Moderate Extent
6. Educates local community on the importance of biodiversity conservation.	2.80	To a Moderate Extent
7. Environment-friendly design and construction of tourism facilities and services.	3.40	To a Great Extent
C. Sociocultural Sustainability	3.20	To a Moderate Extent
1. Has information corners and cultural displays at the homestay center and common areas.	2.00	To a Low Extent
2. Properly informs guests to respect local customs.	3.40	To a Great Extent
3. Conducts a briefing for guests to behave appropriately.	3.60	To a Great Extent

4. Educates local community on the importance of cultural preservation.	3.40	To a Great Extent
5. Bans commercial sexual activities.	3.40	To a Great Extent
6. Bans illegal drug use.	3.40	To a Great Extent
Overall Weighted Mean	2.90	To a Moderate Extent

The table reveals higher extent of application of the principles on economic and sociocultural sustainability compared to environmental sustainability. In the economic sustainability, the homestay providers are one in encouraging guests to buy locally-made products as exhibited by result in item number 5 with a weighted mean of 4.0 described as “to a great extent.” The first four items in economic sustainability as listed in the guidelines for accreditation, are not applicable to the homestays in Siquijor because the owners of the house or operators are at the same time the host and they are not employing personnel in their homestay. Moreover, they are not having entrepreneurial operations nor providing financial support to micro-entrepreneurs in the community.

In the environmental sustainability, highlighted is the design of tourism facilities which is environment-friendly, however, most homestay providers are neither adopting a nearby beach nor organizes environmental clean-up activities with their guests.

In the sociocultural sustainability, the providers are applying to a great extent the practices indicated, except for one which is on having information corners and cultural displays at the homestay center and common areas. Overall, the respondent homestay operators apply all three sustainability principles to a moderate extent.

The results appear to support the concept on ecocentrism by Leopold (1940) which has positive effects on sustainable development since it emphasizes responsible ways of minimizing environmental devastations and on ensuring sustainable growth. The concept of Ecocentrism posits that “there are intrinsic values of all living things on earth and believes that man is the most advanced species with the brain and ability to take care of all other species.” In a similar manner, the ASEAN-certified homestay operators endeavour to take good care of the ecology by holding

themselves accountable for the conduct or behaviour of their guests for environmental and cultural preservation. Promoting locally-made products and giving value to the importance of biodiversity conservation, the homestay providers practice sustainability principles in the grassroots.

Table 2 Degree to which Challenges are Experienced by the Homestay Operators

Challenges Experienced	WM	Description
I. Management	1.72	Very Slightly Felt
The homestay experiences a challenge in the aspect of:		
1. planning for the activities of the homestay guests.	2.40	Slightly Felt
2. organizing and facilitating events and programs for the guests.	2.20	Slightly Felt
3. adopting nearby beach, forest or river and organizing cleanups with guests.	1.40	Very Slightly Felt
4. orienting the guests on the proper conduct during the tour or their stay in the village.	1.60	Very Slightly Felt
5. briefing on safety aspects prior to any activity.	1.40	Very Slightly Felt
6. communicating to the guests the local customs and/or practices in the village.	1.60	Very Slightly Felt
7. encouraging the guests to buy locally-made products.	1.60	Very Slightly Felt
8. disseminating/explaining the code of conduct for interaction with wildlife.	2.00	Slightly Felt
9. promoting the local festivals, traditional handicrafts, and cultural events and performances to the guests.	1.80	Slightly Felt
10. educating the local community on the importance of biodiversity conservation	1.40	Very Slightly Felt
11. educating the local community on the importance of cultural preservation.	1.80	Slightly Felt
12. facilitating empowerment of the locales during events and activities.	1.40	Very Slightly Felt
II. Recordkeeping	2.17	Slightly Felt
Homestay providers experience challenges on:		
1. recording the revenues and expenses related to operations.	1.80	Slightly Felt
2. preparing financial statements showing the results of operations and the financial position of the homestay.	2.00	Slightly Felt
3. analyzing the profitability and economic status of the homestay.	2.00	Slightly Felt
4. maintaining a Homestay Operator Database.	3.20	Moderately Felt
5. maintaining a Guest Database.	2.00	Slightly Felt
6. maintaining a Product Database.	2.00	Slightly Felt
III. Marketing and promotion	2.66	Moderately Felt
The Homestay Program encounters challenges relating to:		

1. identifying target markets for the homestay and nearby tourism sites.	1.60	Very Slightly Felt
2. designing tour packages to suit the needs of the guests.	1.60	Very Slightly Felt
3. creating promotional materials for the business.	1.60	Very Slightly Felt
4. positioning signage and promotional materials in strategic areas.	3.60	Extremely Felt
5. handling online bookings of the guests.	4.00	Extremely Felt
6. maximizing the use of social media in promotion.	2.20	Slightly Felt
7. updating online promotional media.	4.00	Extremely Felt
IV. Collaboration with government, academe and the industry	2.98	Moderately Felt
The Homestay Program encounters challenges relating to:		
1. cooperation with the government in the conduct of the activities.	3.60	Extremely Felt
2. collaborating with the government for capability building on homestay management.	3.40	Extremely Felt
3. collaborating with the local government on training and capability building for safety personnel.	2.20	Slightly Felt
4. working closely with tour operators in the community.	3.40	Extremely Felt
5. establishing public relations for product promotion.	1.60	Very Slightly Felt
6. building linkages with establishments in the industry for mutual cooperation.	3.40	Extremely Felt
7. collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGO's) for joint programs in environmental conservation and cultural preservation.	3.20	Moderately Felt
8. partnerships with universities and higher educational institutions (HEI's) for assistance in training and technical advice.	3.00	Moderately Felt
Overall Weighted Mean	2.30	Slightly Felt

The table discloses the challenges experienced by the ASEAN-certified homestay operators in Siquijor. It reveals that managing the homestay is not a serious challenge for the operators. In the recordkeeping aspect, maintaining an operator database is a challenge moderately felt by the providers. This is a more serious challenge compared to financial recordkeeping which is only slightly felt. The providers also feel a moderate challenge in terms of marketing and promotion and on collaborations with the government, the academe and industry. Overall, the challenge they encounter is said to be slightly felt.

The results on the management aspect of homestays can be construed that managing a homestay does not pose a serious issue for the providers considering that they already know how the general operations work, from briefing the guests to the organization and facilitation of events to make the guests' stay in

the community worthwhile. Under recordkeeping, the financial aspect is just a slight challenge experienced in that homestays are not required by the government to submit financial records and besides, they are also exempted from paying income taxes. In terms of operator database maintenance, it is considered a moderate challenge which means that they still need to learn about the thing and thereby need the necessary support from the local tourism office. In marketing and promotion there is a moderate challenge felt because there is no positioning of homestay promotional materials in strategic areas of the province and the operators/providers are not trained in the handling of online bookings. In terms of collaborations, it is a challenge described as moderate and even extreme in some areas because the homestays have lesser networks and partnerships with the industry, the academe, government and non-governmental agencies.

These results are consistent with the Theory of Constraints by Goldratt(1984) that assumes that “a constraint is anything that prevents the system from achieving its goal.” The homestays are considered manageable systems that can limit achievement of its goals due to few constraints that hinder the system from achieving its goals for sustainable development. In this research, constraints are the few challenges felt by the homestay providers in operations, especially in terms of marketing and promotion and on building collaborations.

CONCLUSION

The ASEAN-certified homestays experience some challenges in operations, nevertheless, they emerge to be sustainable in the economic, environmental and sociocultural aspects. Government intervention is essential to mitigate operational challenges, and state support is significant to maintain homestay sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance application of sustainability principles to a great extent, the following recommendations are presented to the homestay providers:

1. Engaging the guests in sociocultural and environmental activities is suggested. The homestay providers shall consider organizing community activities, with the local government unit, in which the guests can be involved.

2. They may adopt a nearby ecotourism or ecocultural destination to improve environmental sustainability.

To mitigate the challenges encountered in operations, the following recommendations are presented for the providers and the government units:

1. To foster collaborations with government units, the academe and the industry, the homestay providers shall consider creating an association of ASEAN-certified homestays. Support from the local and national government units and the Department of Tourism will be sought. In this way, collaborations may be strengthened.
2. The homestays shall be enjoying constant support, incentives and/or privileges from the local and national government. Promotion for these homestays needs to be intensified as these establishments brought prestige to the province and the country as a whole, in terms of maintaining the ASEAN-quality standards.
 - Department of Tourism and its instrumentalities shall consider promoting the sustainable practices of these homestays to be replicated by other provinces in the country with homestay operations and to serve as the latter's motivating factor to press forward for ASEAN certification for homestays.
 - Marketing strategies, like online booking and other appropriate marketing scheme may be innovated for these ASEAN-certified homestays.
 - Trainings and support and/or incentives for trainings shall be afforded for the homestays by the local and national government to maintain its status of being ASEAN-certified. Capability-building activities on recordkeeping and guest relations are recommended.

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