

Understanding and reshaping tourist culture in response to community ideals and environmental development

IO M. JULARBAL*

Abstract

This policy brief stems from how tourist cultures impact communities, specifically in indigenous areas, where culture has inadvertently become part of the tourism industry. The modern ideals for cultural tourism could be seen as an avenue for environmental protection, forging community bonds, and heritage preservation. But certain key steps and measures have to be taken that are preferably initiated by these communities. Tourism in itself is a culture, but this culture can be reshaped and re-designated to work in congruence with community ideals and principles. Community involvement and education play a major role in changing how tourism affects areas and communities, but such requires a reidentification with community identities and ideals.

Policy background

This policy proposal stems forth from the development of cultural tourism. The tourism industry has gone a long way from its one-sided origins which were simply centered on catering to the visitor. Structures, among other physical

improvements, on tourism-driven communities were primarily thought of bearing only the tourist in mind. With this comes the creation of a tourism-centered culture which is utterly devoid of the locality's sensibilities, society, and ways. At present, some communities have now taken a more proactive approach, taking into consideration not only the economic benefits of tourism, but also that there are several tourism industry-based communities which have difficulty in moving forward, especially for communities that have grown more or less familiar with traditional tourism schemes.

The move towards cultural tourism is ideologically attached to modern conventions of cultural representations, whereas culture and identity become the foci for non-appropriative, sensitive, and respectful treatment delivered towards host communities in tourism-driven areas, specifically in areas where community practice, products, and folkways are the driving force behind the industry. However, for some communities, culture, environment, and other aspects of native representations can be approached as either modifiable or utilitarian aspects which can be sourced to specifically increase the influx of clientele. Culture for tourism has always been seen

* Assistant Professor, Department of Language, Literature, and the Arts (DLLA), College of Arts and Communication (CAC), University of the Philippines Baguio and Head, Program for Indigenous Cultures (PIC), University of the Philippines Baguio • Email address: imjularbal@up.edu.ph

as quantifiable in terms of its potential in generating income. But on the other side of the spectrum, there are communities that live knowing that culture is important in terms of preserving folkways, identity, and environment and should therefore not be utilized for economic gain. It is indeed a community's right to preserve and maintain what they see as cultural, but tourism, on the other hand, is also inevitable. Therefore, balance should be sought.

Francesco Frangialli, former Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization writes, "Tourism is an extremely complex endeavor. Not only are huge amounts of money at stake; we are, in addition, providing economic incentives for protecting the natural environment, restoring cultural monuments, and preserving native cultures" (1998, vii). Communities can be taught and encouraged to understand that tourism, if conducted properly, has the ability to cater to both the needs and advantages of the community and the tourists. Tourism can be used not to abuse and destroy, but to improve and maintain whilst giving the tourist a lasting and enjoyable experience, and, for the community, utmost security and respect.

The establishment of policies on cultural tourism are directed towards the local government units involving offices which are directly involved with tourism and cultural affairs, as well as other environmental sectors. But such policies should also be designed and planned by the community due to its knowledge and experience with their own culture.

Bearing this in mind, the development of the proposal will be driven by the following objectives:

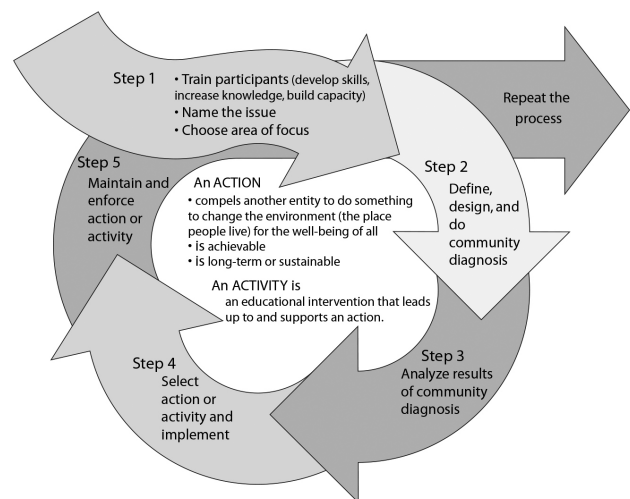
- (1) To provide tourism communities a proper understanding of tourist culture, for them to be made aware of its pros and cons;
- (2) For communities to develop proper responses to tourism cultures which are sensitive to both environmental and community ways;
- (3) To provide sustainable solutions in attaining proper economic and cultural accords with tourist cultures that will benefit both sides; and
- (4) To create guidelines which will mandate tourist behavior in communities and how to formally administer these.

Proposed policy guidelines

This proposed policy change focuses its attention on full involvement of the communities that are directly concerned with tourism areas. Though the concept of cultural tourism has already been stipulated through guidelines, procedures, and strategies in several countries, it should also be taken into consideration that the concept of cultural tourism is fairly new to several tourism-driven global communities. A general statement on cultural tourism policies is impossible as varying communities require more specific community culture-based stipulations, whereas, sensibilities, folkways, and community laws and norms have to be taken into consideration in design and implementation.

The community action model (Hennessey Lavery et al. 2005) was originally conceived as a five-step guide on the implementation of community-led health care practices (*see* Figure 1 below). The same model can be applied and modified to provide instructions on a proposed community-based and -led tourism practice guide.

FIGURE 1 The community action model



Source: Hennessey Lavery et al. 2005, 612

Based on Paolo Freire's theories on education as a liberating factor for the oppressed and their beleaguered conditions, the community action model takes into consideration community involvement as a very fundamental means of arriving at better solutions to various problematic conditions in society (*ibid.*). As its proponents write:

The community action model involves participatory action research approaches and is asset based (i.e., it builds on the

strengths of a community to create change from within). Its intent is to create change by building community capacity, working in collaboration with communities, and providing a framework for residents to acquire the skills and resources necessary to assess the health conditions of their community and then plan, implement, and evaluate actions designed to improve those conditions (Hennessey Lavery et al. 2005, 612).

In applying the community model in designing a proposed community-led tourism guidelines, this proposal suggests the following steps based on the five-step model.

Step one: Community involvement and knowledge



Step one of the model relies heavily on community knowledge and involvement. The community, after all, knows first-hand what the tourism situation is and how it affects the people. By immediately implying that the community has a vital role in decision-making, responsibility is forged. Indigenous communities already have a pre-designed idea on how these matters are designated, because social hierarchies, as well as distinct societal decision-making roles, are already recognized and respected, the role of the local government would be to mediate such discourses and have these established and formally recognized.

In identifying community-based targets, it should be made clear that all sides encompassing

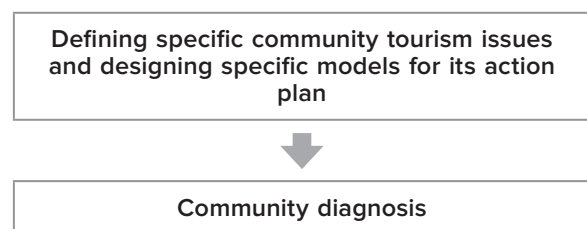
community and tourism should be given an equal foothold. Possible target samples would be:

- Changing tourism behavior (i.e., tourist education and discipline)
- Community limitations on tourist entry in ritual space
- Determining and distinguishing community and tourist space
- Environmental preservation
- Economic incentives for communities under tourism spheres

Community responses towards such targets would now flesh out certain members to be designated essential roles in addressing and realizing such targets. A good example would be the designation of community cultural leaders and elders in designing tourist limitation of movement for specific ritual areas. This may also include certain periods of the year when tourist entry is not allowed.

The perfect time to establish the improvement of community knowledge through training and capacity building would be once specific targets as well as community representatives and designations are already established. But it also has to be taken into consideration that trainings and capacity-building are ongoing processes.

Step two: Causes and effects

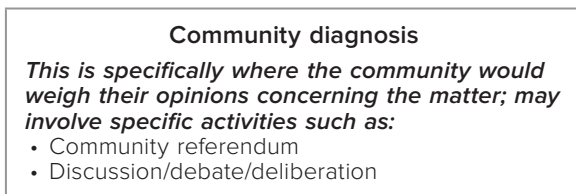
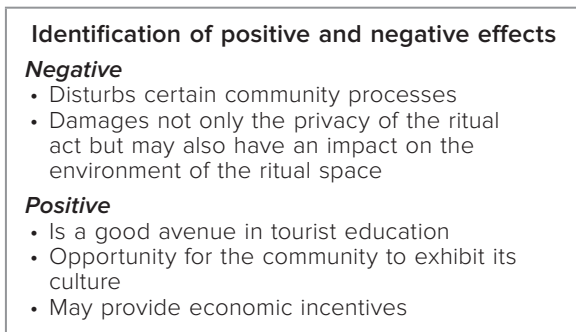


After this, the second step now moves toward a formally prescribed understanding of the issues. This may now involve technically determining issues with a more in-depth analysis of cause and effect. For example:



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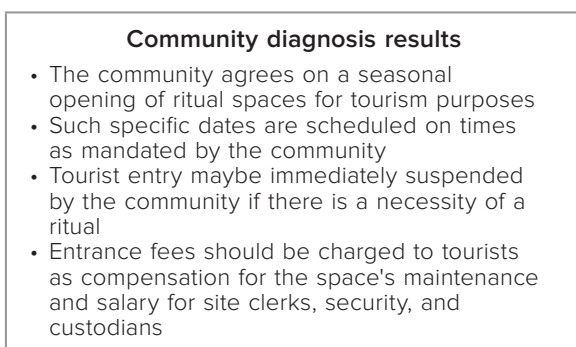


Steps three and four: Results and action



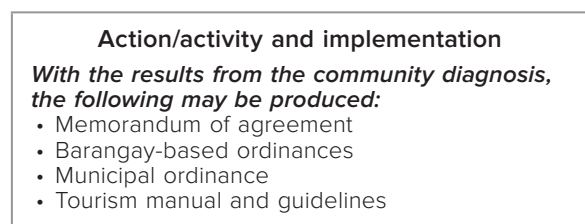
A proper study of the results of the community diagnosis may lead to an effective design of a community-approved and -mandated memorandum of agreement (MOA). The MOA may then be further augmented with again another set of community-approved guidelines for implementation and enforcement.

In following our previously given example, steps 3 and 4 may be seen in the figure below:



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Step five: Maintenance and continuity



The final step is a reiteration of step 4, but with specific guidelines on its maintenance and continuity. It has to be emphasized that the effectivity of the design of the MOA guidelines, as well as manuals and brochures will be dependent on their specific yet comprehensive nature. A community-based governing body (i.e. committee/board/team) may be established to ensure the continuity of the action or activity.

Policy objectives

This proposed policy aims to **develop guidelines for a sustainable tourism culture** that also caters to the protection of:

- Geographical and environmental resources
- Local communities and the maintenance of their ways of living
- Preservation of local traditions, folkways, and heritage

Tourism and its effects have been virtually globally felt. Time and time again, the story of the sleepy village which becomes a space of hotels and restaurants is common. But regardless of its notions of structural improvements, the more modern view of tourism has now taken the role as an activity with a multitude of impacts. "Tourism is one of the most well-known free time recreational activities in modern society" (Muller 2002). Tourism thus becomes an inevitable activity of displacement. It is continual and unstoppable, but what does it imply as far as the destination and the tourist space is concerned? Guidelines, rules, and laws have to be made in order to maintain the tourist space. Taking care and maintaining the environment visited by the tourist is and should be the main priority since it emphasizes preservation of what the original intent

of tourism is all about, a detachment from what is seen as regular into a new space with new offerings and experience.

“Tourism is a social interaction between the host community and the guest community” (Apostolopoulos 1996). Not only does tourism rely on environmental and geographic space but on social space as well. But local communities that are under tourism areas tend to forget the community space, since these become eventually yet temporarily occupied by tourist intrusion. “The societal dimension of tourism deserves at least as much consideration as the economic dimension.” (Tuna 2011) The recognition of social space, its boundaries and its limits are very essential in terms of maintaining the folkways and traditions of the community. Without these, the community ceases to exist and becomes nothing more than service groups aimed to cater to tourists while adhering to a tourism-dictated way of life. Indigenous communities have seen the adverse effects of tourism and how it has permanently changed their lives. Tourism should not be controlling but a controllable factor, to be dictated upon by the community that considers itself as the host. Sustainable tourism in this instance should direct itself towards creating a culture that fosters and cares for the host community and will not demand much of them as required by traditional necessities of tourism, “...for health, sport entertainment, travel and holiday.” (Lanquar 1999).

Community folkways, local traditions, and heritage have the ability to attract a tourism industry but certain guidelines have to be taken into consideration so as not to convert these into nothing more than appropriated instances for tourist consumption. Folkways, traditions, and heritage are what dictate the lives of communities, it is where they draw their identities and abilities. For these to be subjugated into categorized avenues for tourism is demeaning for the community, and is culturally abusive. Tourism should be molded to become sensitive to such community ways. Community space and individuals should be respected and privacies maintained. Cultural education is the key in changing idealized tourism cultures. The steps toward the preservation of culture can safely involve tourism. The tourist experience can be designed to be non-evasive, respectful, and sensitive while at the same time educational, informative, and enlightening.

Possible Outcomes

This proposed policy as well as proper planning and execution will see the following outcomes toward sustainable cultural tourism:

- Guidelines and principles that are created, designed, and mandated by the community;
- Prioritization of the welfare, benefit, and protection of the host place and community;
- Raising of the image and profile of the place therefore not only forging its touristic value but more importantly raising community identity and pride; and
- Forging of community skill and knowledge and capability in handling and dealing with visitors as well as maintaining areas of touristic interest.

Tourism guidelines and principles help maintain and preserve local ways and traditions as governed by the following concepts:

- Respectful in aspects of dignity, rights, and beliefs of the local culture;
- Maintain authenticity and distinctiveness;
- Owned by the host community;
- Support locally made products;
- Aimed at providing benefits equitably to the community;
- Continually evolving with management responsive to change; and
- Primarily considers the reduction of environmental destruction and waste.

Conclusion

Modern tourism has already taken a more proactive role in the preservation and maintenance of not only the environment and its resources, but also of culture and tradition. But it also has to be taken into consideration that tourism has had its share of irreparable damages and permanent imposition of change in communities. Sustainable tourism asserts that tourism need not be one-directional, catering simply to touristic needs as it is traditionally understood. With pending modes of environmental degradation and the disappearance of community values and folkways, tourism can be transformed

into a tool that caters to preservation rather than utilization.

Many tourism communities still lack the fundamental tools in enforcing rules and mandates to protect themselves. Indigenous communities, which are now the highlight of a new breed of tourism, are also susceptible to this since they are virtually new to such a culture. Educating and training community members to be more responsive to community and touristic needs produces a balance from which both sides gain from greatly.

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Telephone: 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 68 / 3435-9283 • **Telefax:** 8426-0955

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