

THEMATIC AREA: Environment, Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction

TITLE :SAFE FOR TOURISTS: SUSTAINING TOURISM GROWTH AMIDST THREATS OF NATURAL DISASTERS A CASE STUDY OF THE PROVINCE OF ALBAY, PHILIPPINES

Researchchers : Ma. Zerlaine A. Fornoles
Researcher, ORES
Mariners' Polytechnic Colleges

Mariel R. Estrella, Ph.D.
Director/Office of Research and Extension Services
Mariners' Polytechnic Colleges

Marilissa J. Ampuan, Ph.D.
President
Mariners' Polytechnic Colleges

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a way by which people can relax in an atmosphere of safety and security. With the ever-growing threat of natural calamities borne of climate change, few places in the world can claim to be truly safe from the wrath of nature. This is a reality that the tourism industry has to adapt to, and tourism-oriented educational institutions have the responsibility to take the lead in developing and promoting strategies to cope with this global challenge.

The Province of Albay in the Phlippines is a popular tourist destination with the near-perfect cone of the Mayon Volcano, its pristine coastlines, verdant hills, and native delicacies. Yet, being within the so-called "Pacific Ring of Fire", the forces that shape its natural beauty are also the reasons for the dangers and damage to life and property in the form of seasonal typhoons, intense weather shifts, and volcanic eruptions.

Faced with these challenges, the Provincial Government of Albay, instead of succumbing to nature's threats of increasing fury, still managed to post higher tourism inflows for the past years. How the people and their leaders managed to sustain and even develop its local tourism industry despite the risks posed by natural calamities is the subject of this study.

METHODS

The open systems approach as a framework for analysis. And the factors and processes established by the local government leadership were assessed to distill the coping strategies used to minimize the threats of natural disasters, while sustaining the growth of its tourism industry. Key informant interviews, content analysis of government documents and press releases, as well as basic statistical analysis of a survey conducted among representatives of the local tourism industry were used as the basis for determining the success factors.

FINDINGS

The Provincial Government's Integrative Approach

The first phase of the study focused on the provincial government's multi-faceted approach to provide an atmosphere of safety for its people and visitors. The governor of Albay, aggressively pushed for the creation of a specialized office to minimize the damage from the inescapable natural calamities that constantly threaten the province. This was the Albay Provincial Safety and Emergency Management Office (APSEMO), which was the first of a series of initiatives taken by the local government to address the risks of climate change. These include the creation of the Center for Initiatives and Research on Climate Adaptation (CIRCA), the Millennium Development Goals Office (MDGO), as well as other projects, activities, and networking initiatives.

Perceptions and Participation of the People

The study's second facet utilized the private sector's perspective. Elicited were perceptions of representatives of tourism-related sectors on the systems installed by the local government to overcome the problems of climate change and natural disasters. The survey revealed a positive assessment of the provincial government's support mechanisms for the public and the private business establishments. This positive feedback is also manifested by the recognition and international support from other national governments and funding agencies. This assistance increased the capacity of the provincial government to further enhance and expand its programs, thus making their province "Safe for Tourists".

CONCLUSIONS

The results can be summed up into a *General Integrative "7-I" Model* that identifies the key elements in promoting the province's tourism industry despite the threats of calamities and climate change, through its *integrative* "Safe and Shared Development" paradigm.

Reacting to the debilitating challenges of natural disasters, the governor of Albay, through *individual leadership*, created the Albay Provincial Safety and Emergency Management Office (APSEMO). This launched a series of *initiatives* taken to address the challenges of climate change, including the creation of the Center for Initiatives and Research on Climate Adaptation (CIRCA), the Millennium Development Goals Office (MDGO), and other projects, activities, and networking efforts.

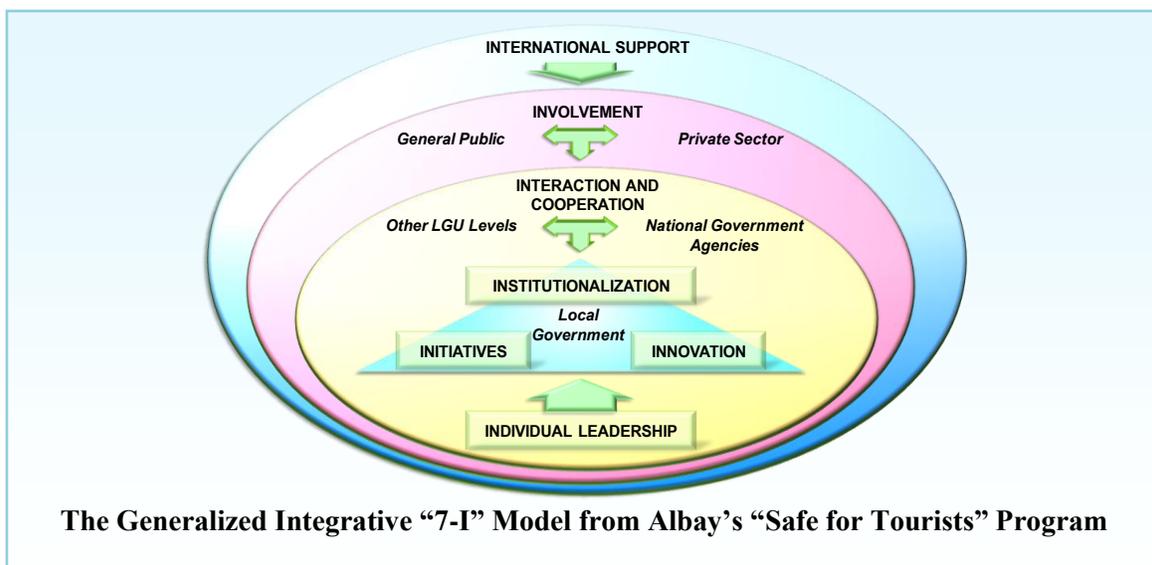
These became more successful and shielded from the risks of political interference, when these were *institutionalized* as permanent departments and offices under the office of the governor. Apart from being appropriate responses to local needs, these were also novel and *innovative* approaches to address the province's unique predicament. The Philippine national government used the APSEMO as a model in creating a national Disaster Risk Reduction and

Management Council. The United Nations, World Bank, and other global bodies also honored Albay for being the model for such innovations.

The value of strengthening ties with other local government units both *vertically*, and *horizontally*, is manifested in Albay’s effective implementation of its programs. These relied heavily on the clear delineation of responsibilities and coordination with other government entities, a sign of strong *interaction and cooperation* within the political system.

The provincial government also established support mechanisms for the public, as well as the private business establishments for disaster situations. This underscores the significance of the *involvement* of the public and private sectors in the province’s programs. The study showed that private sector developed an effective level of calamity preparedness, having been equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills through the education and information dissemination efforts of the government.

The positive feedback generated by Albay’s programs is evidenced by the recognition and *international support* from other governments and funding agencies. These have increased the capacity of the provincial government to further enhance and expand its programs, thus making their province even more “Safe for Tourists”.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Faced with the challenges of its unique geography and climate change, Albay’s Provincial Government responded directly and appropriately using its own resources, inventiveness, and political will, and experiences, resulting in an Integrative 7-I Model.

Today’s local government units and tourism sectors have the advantage of the international awareness of Climate Change, support from global funding institutions, as well as Albay’s model of coping systems. The remaining factors that other entities need to assess are the more elusive elements of local leadership and political will. There is, in addition, the need to identify specific needs of localities, and the enhancement of local traditions and modes of behavior that can contribute to the development of a sense of safety and security.

More importantly, it must be acknowledged that policies must be anchored on the existing conditions and shared values of the people. Models, such as the one evolved from this study, can only be taken as they are – patterns of actions, which must be adapted to the local environment, processes, and systems.

Tourism-oriented educational institutions should, in turn, adapt and expand their academic perspectives to develop a knowledge base from such innovative efforts. In so doing, they can share their learnings to the local and global tourist community, and help protect and sustain the growth of the tourism industry in the face of global environmental challenges.

*Paper presented in Taipei, Taiwan during the 18th Asia Pacific Tourism Association (APTA) Conference on June 26-29, 2012.

* Won 3rd prize in the joint Symposium of R&D Highlights of BCIEERD, BCAARRD, and BCHRD held in BUCAF, Guinobatan, Albay on November 27, 2015.