



An ethnographic research on the commercialization of the town of Baler, Aurora

GIO ANGELO B. ESCANILLAS *

Centro Escolar University, Manila, Philippines

Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate how resorts and other tourist attractions have changed life in Baler, Aurora.
Method: The effects of this "progress" on the participants were monitored to determine their nature. We also conducted in-depth interviews with locals, during which we inquired about their length of residence in the area, their means of subsistence, and the impact of these businesses on their neighborhoods. Twenty residents of Bacong and Castillo Barangays answered the questionnaire.
Findings: The data showed that there was a convergence of positive and negative impacts as the number of businesses increased, but the positives carried more weight.
Implications/Novel Contribution: The Baler is the subject of this study's in-depth analysis. The findings will provide helpful information for tourism policymakers. These findings are also useful for vacationers on the lookout for new destinations. They'll have a better time in general if they take a trip to the city.

Keywords: Ethnography, Commercialization, Baler, Philippines

Received: 20 November 2019 / **Accepted:** 15 January 2020 / **Published:** 13 April 2020

INTRODUCTION

Traveling to a brand-new destination is more than just a vacation it's an adventure. It's exciting because it gratifies your deepest desires. Traveling alone is more enjoyable, and there are times when it's preferable to be by oneself rather than in the company of another person (Bariscil, 2017; Investopedia, 2019).

My original plan was to travel to the province of Aurora on the last Friday of April 2016. However, I missed the previous trip, which left at 2:00 in the afternoon, because I had to attend classes before making my way to the terminal, located some distance from my school. The late arrival of the bus, which had been delayed from an earlier time and extended until 5:00 p.m., was another factor in pushing my trip to the following day; by that point, I was still exhausted from the day's academic endeavors and preferred to return to my dorm. Since I had to leave Baguio City for Brgy. Bacong in the town of Baler so early in the morning that I slept for most of the four to five-and-a-half-hour journey. The van's air conditioning and quick travel time made for a pleasant and convenient ride. When I arrived at 9:30, Marian, my fieldwork partner, came to get me from the waiting shed close to their house. Her family is warm and welcoming, and they live in a modest home, unlike anything you'd find in a city. We ate breakfast and lunch on the first day, but since we were still exhausted from our travels (even though we had left on different days), we fell asleep for three hours. It was quarter to six when we awoke, so we headed to the convenience store (only five minutes away) to stock up on food and beverages. When we got home, we opened the cans of food and started cooking them for dinner.

The following day, we got up to catch the sunrise at Brgy. Castillo's beach in Baler. The beach was only about a 15-minute walk from our rental. Fortunately, we were in town during the local Barangay festival and saw a procession of their saint being carried along the beach. We also brought our breakfast (malunggay pandesal and hot coffee) and ate it on the beach. We returned to the house, went back to sleep for another couple of hours, and then showered and went to Brgy. Castillo to conduct interviews with dependable locals. Our friend had invited us over for lunch the day before, so we also did that.

* Corresponding author: Gio Angelo B. Escanillas

† Email: gio.escanillas@gmail.com

LITERATURE REVIEW

Commercialization is the progression by which a fresh produce or service is introduced into the general market. It is broken into phases from the initial production to the mass production. It considers the production, distribution, marketing and sales, and customer support to achieve commercial issues. Commercialization requires that a business develop a marketing plan, define how the product will be provided to the market and anticipate barriers to success (Investopedia, 2019; Luangsa-Art, 2016).

The Philippines being home to numerous indigenous cultures, native cultural tourism is one of the attractions offered by the country to visiting tourists. This is financially advantageous to the country and has brought some disadvantages as well. Literature suggests that one of the biggest downsides of indigenous cultural tourism is the commodification of cultural symbols and traditions. There are numerous concepts of cultural economy mainly defined by experts and scholars that advocate cultural economy. This is a concurrence held by international organizations such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), because to the concept of culture, there are various understandings of substantial or large-scale social ideologies and otherworldly fields when observed from the growth of society and history (Hanappi, 2016; Komaladewi, Mulyana, & Jatnika, 2017).

The increase of commercialism is a commodity of growth in the corporate world. It started as a part of a political answer by firms to income pressures and the successes of the natural and customer movements. Corporations encouraged the anti-tax movement and support for business prosperity, which aided in making subsidy predicaments in state and local governments and schools, which made them more engaged to transport advertisements. They recommended free market privatization and consumerism, while belittling the domain (Iskomunidad, 2016; Yang, Wu, & Lu, 2017).

Cultural heritage can be seen as a specific form of public information: a dozen or so cultural collections are owned by public institutions and are therefore open to the public and is considered as public goods. On the other hand, other parts of cultural heritages are public information: collections of files during the past public administrations are public information as well as currently appearing files. Due to this, it can be claimed that the argument on cultural heritage is at least partially also a dialogue of the norm and commercialization of public information (Multinational Monito, 2005).

The impact of tourism has a chance of turning local cultures into produces when religious rituals, traditional ethnic rites and festivals are reduced and sanitized to meet tourist expectations, resulting in what has been called "reconstructed civilization." Upon when a destination is considered as a travelers choice, and the tourism demand for souvenirs and crafts begin to exert influence, basic changes in human values might happen. Sacred sites and objects may be disrespected when they are perceived as trading goods. Since tourism involves movement of people to and from different geographical locations, and formation of social relations would otherwise not meet, cultural clashes are most likely to happen as a result of diversity in cultures, ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The result can be an overexploitation of the social carrying of limits of satisfactory transformation in the social system inside or around the destination and cultural carrying limits of satisfactory transformation in the culture of the host population of the local community. The attitude of local residents toward tourism progress may unravel through the stages of jubilation, where visitors are most welcome, through indifference, irritation and hatred, when anti-tourist attitudes start growing among the locals (Li, Zhao, & Weixi, 2010).

Cultural tourism is considered one of the largest and fastest-growing world-wide tourism markets. Cultural and creative industries are gradually being used to endorse destinations and improve their competitiveness and appeal. A lot of locations are now dynamically improving their concrete and vague cultural resources as a means of evolving relative compensations in a market where the level of competitiveness is rising, and to create local uniqueness in the face of globalization. The Impact of Culture on Tourism studies the mounting relationship between tourism and culture, and the way in which they have together become major drivers of destination charm and keenness. According to recent case studies that show the different sides of the relationship between tourism, cultural and regional attractiveness, and the policy interferences which can be taken to improve the relationship, this journal displays how a sturdy link among tourism and culture can be nurtured to help places become more appealing to tourists, as well as raising the level of their competitiveness as locations to live, visit, work and invest

in (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009).

Tourism has become a sensational habit for a lot of people today. It incorporates all free actions of persons away from their own places, as well as the service industries made to satisfy the needs consequential from these activities. It establishes the becoming of an important form of using the free time of individuals and the key tool for interpersonal associations and political, economic, and cultural contacts were made necessary by the internalization of all sectors of the life of nation. Tourism has a significant effect on life, including culture and economy, and all of society. The tourism industry is one of the subdivisions that can support in the progress and advancement of the countrys economy. Tourism, if properly enhanced in a supportable method can be a powerful economic development engine for the country. The Philippines government ruminates the progressive influence of tourism and makes tourism a top priority for national advancement. Ethnic/ traditional tourism is the speediest developing part of the tourism industry because there is a trend toward an amplified specialty among tourists. This movement is clear in the rise in the volume of tourists who seek thrills and adventure, culture and history with local people (Jamie, n.d.). Especially, Filipinos attention in travelling to traditional legacy destinations has increased recently and is expected to continue.

METHODOLOGY

Commercialization. To what extent can commercialization affect a certain place? Does it have positive and/or negative effects to the community and its culture?

April 30, 2016 at around 11:00am, when we went to Brgy. Castillo at the town proper of Baler to conduct interviews with reliable people such as the wise, old men of the place and some government officials (i.e., congressmen).

Upon interviewing, we also asked their years of residence in Baler, and as the number of years change (increase or decrease), their answers also change. Maybe answering the questions vary from the age of interviewee. For example, answers in terms of education vary. Those who are older say that education before was harder, it was not as accessible as it is today, and tertiary education was very limited (students who want to pursue college must travel either to Cabanatuan or to Manila). Unlike our respondents who are younger, said that education was accessible during their time because local colleges were built, and schools for primary/basic education were added.

Even if there were varying answers, there were also answers that remain constant among all respondents, such as their livelihood. All of them answered that their livelihood is fisheries, however some added *niyugan* (coconut grove), making ropes from the skin of firewood, and *pamumundok/pangangahoy* (hunting in the woods).

Their answers are also uniform, but with reservations, when it comes to the commercialization of the place. They all said that the commercialization (i.e., rise of resorts, groceries, etc.) of Baler had a great impact on their tourism. The influence of tourism led to infrastructure developments such as road improvements. They also said that during the peak of tourist arrivals, of course the price of their fish and other market products rise, which would affect not only the tourists but also the locals. Yes, it may seem to help their local economy, but like what our respondents said and as I have stated earlier, the locals of the town of Baler are also affected by the market products price hike. A negative impact of commercialization, which is common among their answers, is that upon the boom of commercialization, which attracted the tourists, it left them tons of trash/ garbage since trash bins are not visible, that is why the local government asked the resorts to clean up the trash in front (*nasa tapat*) of their property. The local government also hired cleaners to regularly pick up the trash found along the shore.

One of the respondents said that a great impact of commercialization and tourism in their place is that locals who normally stay until dawn, drinking their livers out, are now engaged to a business, a business common in Baler but not in other places: surfing tutorials. These *tambays* engaged themselves to surfing tutorials so that instead of just drinking beer until late in the evening, laughing so loud to the point that they are already disturbing their neighbors, they earn money, and by dusk time or as darkness touches the land (or sea) the streets of Baler are already quiet, because those who normally drink are already tired from their business, unless there are tourists who roam and explore the place even during night time.

One more thing that our respondents answered in common was that there were no bars, but they still have those *videoke* bars. The reason behind this was not because they want to bore the tourists and cancel their night life, but because the local government is avoiding troublesome people, especially when they are already drunk or sober.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Site

Imagine going to a place you think you have been there before, but as you arrived, you think again, have I really been here?

The place or environment where we slept was not as I was used to living in, or not as I expected. Since I grew up in the city, I did not expect a very provincial-like surrounding where trees are everywhere, and buildings are nowhere. Seeing mostly green and blue and less of grey was very pleasing not only to the eyes but also to the soul. The house is like a nipa hut but progressed. It was simple and relaxing. It is the type of place where you would want to go to unwind and free yourself from everything that stresses you, like having a break from the burden of being a U.P. student, being fully loaded with academic work every week. While being in the town of Baler is bringing you a bit back to the city, you can still feel the touch of rurality of the place because the houses you see are big, but not as big as the houses in urban places. The place's main mode of transportation, as I have observed, is through tricycles. There are more tricycles in the place than four-wheeled vehicles. It might be because it is more convenient to drive tricycles because the roads have only two lanes and driving a car would be of lesser convenience.

You still try to remember, because it is clear to you, you know you have seen that place, but when? I know this place, you thought. Your questions start to grow bigger.

From the roads, you can see a wide view of fields, that I'm not sure of what plantation is planted there, and beyond those fields lie a long, winding range of mountains, gloriously standing under the blue skies and white clouds. Everything is colored green and blue. The sight while at the beach was more relaxing, for you can see the waters and skies meet; blue meets blue, waves meet clouds.

Riding the tricycle, having short trips from the house to the town proper, the sight of the fields and glorious mountains behind them, the sky smiling down to you, and the wind whispering to your ears.

That's when you start rethinking, going back to the memories, trying to remember the details of those reminiscence, but you just can't seem to pick up the past, because there is no past.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It is never easy to conduct fieldwork. Fun, yes, but never easy. Doing such takes a lot of time and effort. It is hard not to compare a rural place from yours, especially if you are from the urban areas (I'm sorry I but in writing this ethnography, I endlessly compared the rural to the urban. I apologize). The adjustment you have to do, even if you will stay there even just for a few days, is tough. Some people will not understand you fully, some will not understand you at all. Is the problem with you? The language you are using? Or their comprehension? Definitely not the last one, I bet.

During the collection and gathering of data, looking for credible and reliable respondents is hard. As a student who is studying Social Anthropology, my respondents should be reliable; they should be the ones who are really knowledgeable about the development of the place, for how can my study be trusted if my respondents alone are not reliable.

Participant observation. Yes, we used such technique because we, as Social Scientists, do not rely on one method alone (we also used recording, during interviews, but we did this with the consent of the participant). This method was used during the festival procession and afternoon celebrations of the locals.

During the collecting and gathering of data, I realized that the variety of answers may be caused by the age (for our study, but may include religion, gender, ethnicity, etc.) of the interviewees.

It is joyous to say that the participants answered the questions directly that we do not have to ask follow-up questions. Their answers are direct to the point, and we can already find what we are looking for at a snap.

Upon the interpretation of data, going back to my notes was a hard task, for it was scribbly and unreadable. But I also remembered, the dirtier the notes, the better. Why? For me, it just means that the information you're getting is meaty, not just lengthy. Because personally, I do not just write for the sake of adding information, but I get juicy figures to make the study delicious.

REFERENCES

- Bariscil, A. (2017). Some aspects of the competitiveness of Turkish regions and their tourism industry the example of Ardahan. *Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(6), 311-323. doi:<https://doi.org/10.20474/jahss-3.6.3>
- Hanappi, E. (2016). *Cultural heritage: The conflict between commercialization and public ownership*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3dH79jb>
- Investopedia. (2019). *Commercialization*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2xXECXm>
- Iskomunidad. (2016). *Culture for sale: A case study on the relationship of commercialization of bulul symbols and transmission of cultural heritage to younger generations among the ifugaos in the cordilleras*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2xX5iYe>
- Jamie, E. (n.d.). *Tourism in the philippines: Economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3co7KWD>
- Komaladewi, R., Mulyana, A., & Jatnika, D. (2017). The representation of culinary experience as the future of Indonesian tourism cases in Bandung City, West Java. *International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs*, 2(5), 268-275. doi:<https://doi.org/10.24088/ijbea-2017-25001>
- Li, Y., Zhao, J., & Weixi, H. (2010). Study on cultural commercialization and public consumption: The case of China. *International Journal of Asian Business and Information Management*, 1(3), 23-34. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4018/jabim.2010070103>
- Luangsa-Art, N. (2016). Guideline in developing a tourism route: A case study of Tambon Bang Nok Khwaek, Samut Songkhram province. *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 101-104. doi:<https://doi.org/10.20469/ijhss.2.20003-3>
- Multinational Monito. (2005). *Every nook and cranny: The dangerous spread of commercialized culture*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2YSfeNz>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2009). *The impact of culture on tourism*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2ztFLGx>
- Yang, C. C., Wu, S. F., & Lu, M. Y. (2017). Tourist hostel development in the East Taiwan area. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(2), 119-124. doi:<https://doi.org/10.26500/jarssh-02-2017-0206>