Local Community Collaboration and Sustainable Staycation Tourism: Case Studies from Cebu and Bohol, Philippines

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Abstract

After the COVID-19 pandemic, developing countries such as the Philippines have sought to revive their weakened economies through tourism. As part of its revival plan, community-based tourism initiatives like "staycations" have been promoted to stimulate local economies and support post-pandemic recovery. However, limited research has examined whether such initiatives meaningfully engage local stakeholders or simply reinforce centralized, top-down governance, especially in a country where decentralization is met with a changing political climate. This study aims to elaborate on how staycation tourism, as a recovery strategy, uphold principles of participatory governance in the context of developing countries. Through reviewing and analyzing secondary data and the existing literature, the paper examines local staycation tourism in the Cebu and Bohol provinces of the Philippines, as informed by collaborative governance approaches, to analyze the institutional arrangements and the roles of local governments, tourism providers, and communities in implementing staycation initiatives as seen in programs such as the "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" (Wander Around Cebu), the "Celebrate Cebu, Stay Cebu," and Bohol's designation as the country's first UNESCO Global Geopark, which illustrate efforts to revitalize tourism through localized cultural and ecological experiences. While these initiatives promote domestic tourism, stemming from the collaboration between local and provincial authorities and local communities through the provision of skills training and funding, among others, there needs to be a clarification on the extent of how participatory these initiatives are. Ultimately, this paper suggests that to enable more sustainable and resilient tourism systems in both staycations and community-based tourism

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arrangements, governance processes must center community agency in planning and decision-making, while at the same time, nuancing collaborative frameworks through identifying and mapping power relations and its consequences in order to come up with a sustainable industry initially guised as a recovery safety net.

Keywords Staycation, Local Government, Collaborative Governance, Community-Based Tourism, Sustainable Tourism

1. Introduction

After the COVID-19 pandemic, developing countries such as the Philippines have sought to revive heavily affected economies through their tourism industry. Despite the unprecedented disruption brought by the pandemic, the share of tourism-related activities in the Philippines' gross domestic product (GDP) and employment has steadily grown since 2020, signaling a gradual recovery (Catilogo, 2024). As of 2023, the tourism industry contributed 8.6% to GDP and accounted for 12.9% of total employment (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). The Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT), which oversees national tourism policy, implemented a range of strategies under its 2021 Tourism Response and Recovery Plan, including mass vaccination and skills training for tourism workers, zero-interest loans for providers, digital campaigns, point-to-point travel, and the creation of "travel bubbles" (Department of Tourism, 2021a; Aguilar, 2020). The same plan emphasized the promotion of domestic tourism "as a natural recourse of citizens given stringent travel procedures and restrictions," targeting both domestic tourists and local tourism providers. Among the measures used to activate domestic travel were community-based initiatives like "staycations," which aimed to boost local economies and support recovery from pandemic disruptions (Ranada, 2020; Department of Tourism, 2021b).

Staycations are not new to tourism practice. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, they have emerged as a practical alternative for domestic tourists affected by travel risks and economic constraints (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; James, Ravichandran, Chuang, & Bolden, 2016; Kou, Wu, Lin, & Gong, 2024). Kou et al. (2024) define staycations as overnight leisure trips within 50 miles from a tourist's residence, while other definitions also encompass local day trips and short-term stays at hotels near one's home. In the Philippines, the term refers to at least an overnight stay for leisure in DOT-accredited "staycation hotels" (Department of Tourism, 2020). Despite varying definitions, staycations are generally understood as tourism activities within the proximity of a traveler's usual environment (Muritala, Hernández-Lara, & Sánchez-Rebull, 2022). During the pandemic, they were reintroduced by tourism policymakers as a crisis response measure that could stimulate domestic consumption while managing public health risks (Massey, 2003).

In the Philippines, staycations are largely framed as community-based tourism (CBT) programs that involve collaboration among local governments, residents, tourism providers, and civil society organizations. When reintroduced during the pandemic, staycations were implemented as part of domestic travel bubbles that aimed to reignite the local tourism economy and mitigate pandemic-driven losses (Department of Tourism, 2020; Burgos, 2021). Previous research on CBT in the Philippines shows that community participation is often pursued as a strategy for local development, poverty alleviation, and sustainability. However,

the degree of participation varies widely, from token consultation to full community control of tourism activities (Gutierrez, 2019).

Using secondary data and the existing literature centered in the Cebu and Bohol provinces of the Philippines, this study aims to illustrate how collaborative governance frameworks were carried out, especially in the context of the Global South. While previous studies on collaborative tourism governance (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Bichler & Lösch, 2019) suggest that stakeholder integration enhances sustainability outcomes, the potential reality that participatory governance has become more symbolic rather than substantive must be considered (Gutierrez, 2019). This paper takes these frameworks in studying the provinces of Cebu and Bohol, probing whether or not these models cultivate meaningful participation opportunities. This paper further juxtaposes the realities of Cebu and Bohol to that of existing studies, in order to gauge whether staycation tourism as a post-pandemic recovery strategy, genuinely fosters participatory governance or simply reinforces top-down decision-making arrangements. Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to highlight how collaborative approaches to tourism governance often lack consideration for changing political climates and potentially dominating actors in a decentralized setting. This is evident in how collaboration operates in the Philippine context where there is a need to assess the effectiveness of ongoing initiatives in stimulating collaborative participation and emphasize how existing collaborative frameworks need nuance and modifications before being applied in the Philippines. The power asymmetries in various levels of tourism governance and the contested degree of collaboration remain persisting challenges to the tourism economies of Cebu and Bohol as seen through problems such as unregulated operations in protected areas (Basina, 2024) and over-tourism capacity strains (Ocubillo, 2023). The insights drawn from this study aim to bridge the theoretical gaps of existing frameworks by arguing how re-centering community-driven processes is vital in the carrying out of this framework, especially in tourism agenda setting in the Philippines.

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the tourism industry because of the stringent measures that were taken to curb the spread of the virus, which include physical distancing, travel restrictions, and the make-shift use of hotels as quarantine facilities (Rivera, Gutierrez, & Roxas, 2022). These measures hit the high-touch interactions and mobility that characterize the core of tourism, especially in inter-island archipelagic contexts such as the Philippines, which severely affected tourism flows and revenues. The pandemic also undermined the trend toward responding to over-tourism which gained prominence before the lockdown as a reaction in tourism operations, management, and development to the threats on the sustainability of nature-based tourism destinations (Regan & Olarn, 2020; Roxas, Rivera, & Gutierrez, 2021). When domestic travel restrictions

were eased down, localized tourism activities in so-called travel bubbles were deemed integral to the recovery of the tourism industry, seeing it as a practical way of managing the crisis and returning to normalcy despite the risk of infection and the relative uncertainty at the time (Helble & Fink, 2020).

Despite its challenges and the pivot to normalcy, the pandemic opened the space for critical junctures in developing and implementing sustainable and community-driven transitions within the tourism industry (Stankov, Filimonau, & Vujičić, 2020). This signaled a shift in post-pandemic tourism governance, which rendered conventional business models and governance frameworks that respond to over-tourism inadequate and unresponsive (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Particularly, recent studies on post-pandemic tourism governance attempt to go beyond crisis management and call for a "sustainable tourism transition" (Becken & Loehr, 2022) that is marked by enabling governance arrangements. Rivera et al. (2022) underscored the need for enhanced collaboration among tourism providers and stakeholders to manage destinations and implement sustainable tourism initiatives. Benjamin, Dillette, and Alderman (2020) argued, for instance, that post-pandemic tourism should be grounded by a commitment to equity centered on incorporating an "ethics of care, social and environmental justice, and racial reconciliation" (Benjamin et al., 2020, p. 479) in tourism practices. Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) goes as far as calling for socializing tourism for social and ecological justice by situating tourism within its societal context and leveraging it as a tool for empowering and enhancing the well-being of local communities. This builds on an earlier work by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) which argued that tourism should be radically redefined as the "voluntary hosting of visitors in local communities for the benefit of locals" (Benjamin et al., 2020, p. 1939) even above the rights of tourists. These studies tell us that post-pandemic tourism governance has centered the local not just as a practical response to recover the industry and repair damage at the domestic level amid the easing of travel restrictions but also as a site for rethinking how tourism should take a more equitable, balanced, and sustainable direction. Translating these considerations require more collaborative approaches to tourism governance to involve providers and community stakeholders in co-designing and co-implementing post-pandemic tourism initiatives, restructuring tourism according to the authorization and stewardship of local communities (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

Staycations, defined as "tourism activities within one's usual environment" (Muritala et al., 2022), has consequently become a focal area of concern and practice in the post-pandemic restructuring of tourism in line with equity and sustainability imperatives. The emergence of staycations as an alternative tourism approach in crises, however, is not new. During the 2008 financial crisis, staycations emerged as a popular cost-effective and stress-relieving alternative, allowing individuals to cope with economic uncertainty while simultaneously supporting local economies until a return to normalcy

(Sharma, 2009; Frew & Winter, 2009). What makes staycations in the post-pandemic period different from those in 2008 is its association with the deals, packages, vouchers, and tax credits offered to local tourists by hotels instead of the focus on local destinations (Muritala et al., 2022). The gradual influx of local tourists in staycations consequently compensated for the shortfall of international visitors due to pandemic restrictions (García-Gomez et al., 2021), which highlighted how staycations became a viable tourism recovery strategy to stimulate local economies despite the pandemic, especially for hotels.

Several studies on tourism during and after the pandemic point out that recovering from the crisis requires responsive modes of governance that draw on the support and pooling of public and private resources from different stakeholders to boost marketing and minimize shared risks (Wan, Li, Lau, & Dioko, 2022; Shubtsova, Kostromina, Chelyapina, Grigorieva, & Trifonov, 2020; Del Pilar Pascual-Fraile, Villacé-Molinero, Talón-Ballestero, & Chaperon, 2024). Accordingly, post-pandemic efforts to facilitate staycation tourism entail strong collaboration between stakeholders for it to succeed. Developing and implementing staycation initiatives are thus collaborative exercises in so far as they involve government, local tourism providers, and community stakeholders in a destination. Ansell and Gash (2008) conceptualized collaborative governance as state-led engagements with non-state actors and stakeholders in a "formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative" collective decision-making process with the objective of making and implementing public policy and managing public goods. However, extending beyond the conventional focus on the state as a public manager and the formal public sector, Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) elaborated collaborative governance as a set of public policy decision-making processes and institutional arrangements that facilitate constructive engagement among actors across public, private, and civic sectors to achieve collective goals that would be unattainable through unilateral action alone. Emerson et al. (2012) thus conceptualizes collaboration as a cross-boundary and iterative process that is sensitive to the power asymmetries and ongoing collaborative arrangements in governance. In tourism governance, Jamal and Getz (1995) highlighted that collaboration is crucial to managing and mitigating planning issues due to the joint decision making that takes place among key stakeholders across organizations in community tourism. In another study on collaborative governance in tourism development, Arfisal (2022) argued that mutual trust, constrained competition, and equality among collaborating parties are necessary for collaborative planning to be realized with corresponding roles for government and the private sector in developing tourism activities. These prerequisite conditions outlined by Arfisal (2022) confirm that collaborative approaches are more attuned to attaining collective outcomes across public and private boundaries, as elaborated by Emerson et al. (2012), and further point to the potential for these approaches to restructure tourism activities based on equity and sustainability.

Further, the collaborative approaches in developing staycation tourism includes having receptive government institutions that do not simply consult with civil society with preconceived plans, but are rather receptive in co-producing and co-managing initiatives beyond the state. At the same time, staycations also require a strong local community base to sustain tourism programs, given that the local residents are at the forefront of showcasing their culture and heritage. As part of the post-pandemic recovery plan, the Philippines has likewise utilized collaborative strategies and models in promoting and popularizing staycation tourism. For example, in Romblon, Philippines, local residents are more incentivized to take part in community-based tourism packaged as "staycation" tourism if and when the proposed tourism programs are perceived by the residents as beneficial for their environment and Romblon's economy (Andalecio & Martin, 2022).

Another area in the Philippines where community-based tourism and collaboration between stakeholders is evident is in Sagada, Philippines, where thousands of tourists visit annually. However, as much as it promotes Sagada, the rapid influx of tourists has been a cause of problems ranging from congestion in tourist destinations, traffic, and waste disposal and management (Loverio, Chen, & Shen, 2022). To resolve this and to offer a more adaptive "staycation" plan, the local government of Sagada has reached out to both public and private (inn and hotel owners, restaurant managers, etc.) stakeholders, and created the Municipal Tourism Council (MTC) where they "collectively" decide and carry out action plans concerning staycation tourism in Sagada. In the Municipality of San Nicolas in Ilocos Norte, collaboration between cross-boundary stakeholders can be observed, albeit in varying degrees (Mercado, Bautista, & Zerrudo, 2023). For example, the collaboration in terms of how staycation programs are being carried out is more evident in the public-private partnership (PPP) initiatives where they invite private business owners and managements and create partner engagements with them, but the collaboration between government institutions and local communities tend to follow a top-down approach, where initiatives from government institutions trickle down to the communities for implementation.

In an empirical study on collaborative governance in community-oriented destination tourism, Bichler and Lösch (2019) argued that leadership across levels of governance is key in enabling collaborative processes in tourism, noting that it steers tourism providers and stakeholders toward shared objectives and an awareness of industry interdependence. They further argue that institutional transformation in the setting of tourism governance, such as when new central public organizations are introduced, acts as a barrier to collaborative governance – opening space for insecurities and tensions among actors (Bichler and Lösch, 2019). In the context of staycations, this tells us that decentralized governance structures lead to more resilient and collaborative tourism models that are equipped to enable the close participation of stakeholders at the local level, which

is the primary loci of staycation tourism. Steering from the center breeds insecurities that disables the mutual trust and respect that binds the interdependence necessary in collaborative governance.

However, in a study on community-based tourism, Gutierrez (2019) finds that local community engagement in the Philippines often remains superficial due to political and bureaucratic constraints. Local communities often risk getting disenfranchised due to the special favors and exemptions granted to the local elite because of elite capture. Bulilan (2014) also previously explained that without selective incentives for the local community, the commitment to collective goals in collaborative tourism can lead to dysfunctional and unstable forms of organizations who manage tourism activities; this is because other collaborative actors have other sources of capital or incentives to start private tourism businesses on their own without the local community. He pointed out that community benefits are key to sustaining local tourism initiatives, especially in a highly competitive industry such as tourism (Bulilan, 2014). Thus, studies on localized community-based tourism illustrate that collaborations are often unequal and contested. They are unequal because of the politico-administrative barriers posed by vested interests and local elites who have little incentives to collaborate with local communities, and they are contested because it remains challenging to develop local tourism initiatives that provide selective incentives for the local communities themselves.

The focus on collaborative approaches to tourism governance, however, limits the degree to which we can scrutinize the relative positioning and power relations among central and local authorities, tourism providers, and local communities. Extending the discussion beyond developing collaborative relationships (developing trust, shared theory of action, resolving institutional barriers, etc.) points future research to the concept of polycentric governance models (Ostrom, 2010; Carlisle & Gruby, 2019). Polycentric governance models are characterized by the multiple semiautonomous centers of power in decision making, which are overlapping and nested at multiple jurisdictional levels. Carlisle and Gruby (2019) further stated that polycentric arrangements do not necessarily guarantee sufficient coordination among the decision centers but noted that they are capable of resolving conflicts. While considering polycentricity is key to analyzing power relations across power centers, the primary focus of this study is to examine the collaboration that takes place between a concentrated set of staycation tourism actors at the local level.

Informed by the literature and past Philippine cases, it is clear that the idea of staycations necessitates the involvement not only of government institutions or the private sector, but more importantly, local communities who are usually the ones carrying out the programs. In looking into the collaborative process that is being practiced in other staycation hotspots in the Philippines, this paper seeks to examine how cross-boundary collaboration for staycation tourism affects local

communities and the promotion of "sustainable" staycations in post-pandemic Philippines. Does collaboration for local staycation tourism, for instance, empower local communities and stakeholders, or are they positioned as passive participants in co-designing and co-implementing local staycation tourism?

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach in gathering and analyzing secondary data sourced from articles, periodicals, tourism providers, and local governments of Cebu (Cebu City and the Province of Cebu) and Bohol. Specifically, the study collected text and narrative data published between 2020 and 2024 on the development and implementation of localized staycation tourism initiatives — namely, "Gabi-i sa Kabilin" (Night of Heritage), "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" (Wander Around Cebu), and Bohol's designation as the country's first UNESCO Global Geopark. However, for staycation or domestic tourism initiatives that were introduced before the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-2020 data was included to guide the researchers in contextualizing data from 2020 to 2024; this is the case with the "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" initiative. Data was triangulated with other data sources to validate the findings and confirm the accuracy of the accounts. For future studies, this paper recommends conducting focus group discussions and interviews with local tourism providers, local communities, civil society organizations, and government stakeholders to examine the power configurations that exist in tourism governance collaboration.

4. Staycation Tourism in Cebu and Bohol

Staycations, which used to be a pandemic response to save communities from the detrimental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Muritala et al., 2022), have now been integrated into the new normal frameworks to boost local tourism globally, including the Philippines. Various communities and provinces in the Philippines have since come up with programs designed to draw in tourists into the country's provinces, immersing them in both culture-based and nature-based tourism activities (Hall & Boyd, 2004; George, Mair, & Reid, 2009). In the central Philippines, the Cebu and Bohol provinces have established themselves as some of the top tourist destinations for staycations and local tourism targets in the country. Staycation tourism initiatives in Cebu include local government-driven campaigns to boost tourism activity among local residents and balance the upset in inbound foreign tourist arrivals in the island through the promotion of "staycation packages" for local residents in Cebu City hotels and resorts and the gradual revival and modification of pre-pandemic provincial tour packages by the Cebu provincial government.

In analyzing the extent of how participatory the collaborative process in the staycation landscape of both provinces, our findings, grounded on secondary

data and the existing literature, have been divided into three major discussion points: 1) government-led staycation initiatives, 2) community-based and decision-making constraints, and 3) public-private collaboration in tourism recovery.

4.1 Government-Led Staycation Initiatives

Recovering from the development setback brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, Bohol has since then reinvigorated its tourism industry, with now a focus towards local eco- and people-centered tourism packaged as "staycation tourism," having recorded over a million tourist arrivals in 2023, where 67% of which were local tourists (Cordova, 2024; Montecillo, 2023). The gradual surge of tourist arrivals can be linked to various initiatives to boost the tourism agenda of the province through government-led initiatives. For one, the provincial government has tapped the education sector and integrated the geopark development program in the education curriculum of Bohol, through the province's Department of Education. Additionally, they have also reached out to institutions such as the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in order to offer courses that will help the local residents of the province be skilled in handling the various aspects of the local staycation scene in Bohol. Furthermore, local communities are also kept engaged in a program called "Purok Power Movement," which aims to serve as an information drive that streamlines government projects from the state institutions to the public (Espiritu & Lawas, 2019). At the city level, the Tagbilaran City government has coordinated with its various sub-administrative units (called as "barangays" in the Philippines) and extended cash assistance in the preparation of their participation in the annual "Saulog Tagbilaran" (Bongcac, 2023). These initiatives of the government in coordinating with the barangays through the councilors and barangay officials and extending monetary assistance are aimed to kickstart barangay-centered tourism features, which can be best seen during the city's celebration of its annual 'Saulog Tagbilaran' festival, bringing in tourist within and beyond the city.

In 2020, the Cebu City government, through the Cebu City Tourism Commission, launched the "Stay Cebu, Celebrate Cebu" campaign to revive the city's hospitality and lodging establishments by offering discounted room rates and week-long stay packages to local residents. Around nine hotels in Cebu City sold room vouchers that gave up to 75% discount on room rates, inclusive of other hotel amenities. The campaign specifically targeted families in Metro Cebu who were reluctant to travel outside Metro Cebu due to public health risks and restrictions but hope to go out and stay in a safe environment (Dagooc, 2020; SunStar Cebu, 2020). The province of Cebu, on the other hand, through the Cebu Provincial Tourism Office, revived the "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" (translated as "Wander Around Cebu") program, which is a local tourism caravan that offers themed tour packages that includes visit to tourist destinations, heritage sites,

cultural exhibitions, and delicacies of selected cities and municipalities in Cebu for a period of 2-3 days (Cordova, 2022). The program brands tour packages based on the location and shared heritage of the cities and municipalities to be visited across the province. For example, its revival in 2022, branded as the "Southern Heritage Trail," featured destinations and culinary stops in all the cities and municipalities south of Cebu City from Talisay City to as far as the municipality of Santander at the southernmost tip of the island (Erram, 2022). Other tour packages offered through the "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" program include the "Northern Escapade," "Enchanting Camotes," and "Best of the West" tours. Tourists who avail of the program are given a range of accommodation packages that are available in a given tour. When "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" was reintroduced, the program targeted domestic tourists in the province who wanted to have a vacation after the gradual easing of pandemic restrictions but not necessarily leave the island. This program has been lauded by the DOT and other tourism stakeholders for its relative success in promoting the diverse cuisine as well as nature-based and cultural travel destinations in cities and municipalities beyond Metro Cebu – boosting local tourism and small tourism providers.

From these initiatives in Bohol and Cebu, we can see how the government steers the recovery of local staycation tourism to boost the economy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with public tourism agencies taking the role of an initiator in collaboration. This demonstrates the central role of local governments in planning and implementing local staycation initiatives – privileging the objectives of the state over the agency and stewardship of local communities (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Despite the fragmented tourism industry in the Philippines (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Bichler & Lösch, 2019), local staycation tourism in Cebu and Bohol reveals that there is an increase in the participation of local governments in tourism development. This is partly because tourism continues to form part of the Philippines's development strategy – recognizing that a thriving tourism industry translates to poverty alleviation and improvement in the quality of life of local communities (Dwyer & Thomas, 2011; Gutierrez, 2019; De Kadt, 1979). Initiatives in Bohol are latched in a festival/fiesta-oriented framing, wherein initiatives are usually attached to festivals instead of cultivating a year-round and a more sustainable arrangement for these programs.

4.2 Community-Based and Decision-Making Constraints

Local communities in Bohol perform significant roles in the development and promotion of "staycation tourism" in the province. The case of Tagbilaran City shows how local communities participate as entertainers in various ensembles during the city's festival season, and even beyond it. Furthermore, local residents have also been tapped to facilitate and serve as community guides for the tourists as they have a more nuanced appreciation of the various attractions in the city of Tagbilaran (Bulilan, 2021). On a provincial level, local communities

also provide entertainment as seen in how they take part in the floating river cruises in both the municipalities Loboc and Loay. Additionally, local communities also promote coastal tourism through their initiatives of serving as diving and snorkeling guides and experts in the various beaches and small islands in Bohol like that of both Pamilacan and Balicasag islands in the municipality of Panglao.

Cebu City's "Celebrate Cebu, Stay Cebu" staycation initiative considerably lacks the participation of local communities in the area. The initiative was largely steered and driven by private local tourism providers such as hotels and restaurants and the Hotel Resort & Restaurant Association of Cebu Inc. (HRRACI). Local residents, however, were the primary audience and market for the initiative since discounted staycation deals and room offers were offered — providing residents with a "staycation" in a domestic travel bubble during the COVID-19 lockdown. In 2023, the Cebu City Tourism Commission disclosed plans to develop programs for sustaining the flow of tourism in upland Cebu City with the participation of local tourism providers in the area, which could potentially mean more opportunities for local community participation in staycation tourism (Cacho-Laurejas, 2023; Osmeña, 2023). This initiative evolved from its earlier versions during the pandemic such as the "Highland Bloom and Ecotourism" project, which promotes the city's upland tourism sites with the collaboration of local tourism providers such as private resorts, gardens, farms, and local communities (Letigio, 2021). These initiatives are still largely driven by the leadership of the local government and private local tourism providers with local communities as a potential source of labor in the operation of tourism sites to be packaged with staycation initiatives.

The "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" program, on the other hand, despite being steered and managed by the Cebu provincial government, demonstrates sustained forms of collaboration with the local communities of Cebu's provincial towns and their sources of livelihood in MSMEs and local tourism providers. Since the program is packaged as a tour that highlights both the nature-based (Hall & Boyd, 2004) and culture-based (George et al., 2009) tourism destinations and activities, local communities have been the recipients of orientation and upskilling training programs from the towns' local governments and the provincial tourism office to capacitate them as "community guides" and local experts in canyoneering, diving, hiking, eco-tourism site management, and the marketing of local goods and delicacies (Cebu Provincial Tourism Office, 2018; Cebu Provincial Tourism Office, 2021; Cebu Provincial Tourism Office, 2022; Department of Tourism Central Visayas Office, 2023). However, the emerging forms of collaboration in both Cebu City and the province of Cebu demonstrate the still-central role of the local government in governing and managing tourism activities in the island as mentioned in the previous section.

The experience of Cebu and Bohol highlight a significant asymmetry in the collaborative dynamic in the tourism sector, where locals do not necessarily have the capacity to assume an equal role in how these initiatives are made, but rather, they are usually just given instructions on how such programs will be carried out. In the case of Cebu City's staycation tourism initiatives, local communities are only involved in so far as they are the target market for domestic tourism. While there were efforts to engage with local communities upland, the city government and local tourism providers are the foremost decision makers in collaboration. Capacity-building exercises for destination tour guides in the province of Cebu constitute local communities and residents as recipients of government support to complement the need of the province's existing program instead of substantively integrating them in co-creating programs. These unequal arrangements risk the interests of local communities, particularly on sustainability and conservation, where without their inputs being integrated into the programs, depletion and potential gentrification can occur. And while some communities like that of the coastal communities of Panglao and in the municipalities of the province of Cebu actually partake in tourism initiatives, they are often not supported sufficiently leading them doing and exerting more resources than gaining enough from the said programs.

4.3 Public-Private Collaboration in Tourism Recovery

The reinvigoration of Bohol's staycation trend surged when the province launched their "Balik sa Bohol Balik Program," in close partnership with big hotels and accommodation places, offering tour packages at a discounted price for local residents to enjoy and take advantage of (Department of Tourism, 2021c). This pandemic response was then incorporated in future tourism boost plans for the province in the post-pandemic period, where, for example, in the city of Tagbilaran, the city government has revitalized its celebration of "Saulog Tagbilaran," the city's fiesta celebration and a starting point of the month-long festivities throughout the province of Bohol (Bongcac, 2023). The city government transformed "Saulog Tagbilaran" from a mere religious celebration to a cultural festivity drawing local tourists in its many activities such as a nightly food and trade bazaar where small to medium local entrepreneurs can showcase their products to the public (Bongcac, 2023). Additionally, the city also takes pride in the festivity's ritual showdown and street dance competition where tourists flock to witness the different presentations from the participating barangays. The same public-private collaboration extends to the provincial level, where for instance, last May of 2023, the province was recognized as the first and only UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp) (Udtohan, 2023), owing to the fact that Bohol is rich in terms of natural tourist attractions which range from the terrains and peaks to the many beaches spread throughout the province, which is complemented by a showcase of indigenous cultures of local communities weaved

within the tourism packages offered by the province, which caters to the interests of local tourists, in partnership with the business sector.

In Cebu City, the "Stay Cebu, Celebrate Cebu" campaign, while initiated by the city government's tourism commission, was carried out through the marketing schemes of local tourism providers – particularly, hotels and resorts – and major mall partners in the city's business districts (Dagooc, 2020). Later activities associated with the "Stay Cebu, Celebrate Cebu" campaign were driven by the city's hotels through the Hotel Resort & Restaurant Association of Cebu Inc. (HRRACI), a non-profit NGO that "provides an avenue for strategic alliances" among tourism providers in the hotel and beverage industry in Cebu (Hotel Resort & Restaurant Association of Cebu Inc, 2024). For instance, HRRACI convened its member hotels and restaurants and organized a "Christmas Sale" in November 2021 that introduced 75% discount offers on rooms and meals – stimulating the domestic tourism market during a peak season for vacations despite the pandemic (Salomon, 2021). In 2022, various Cebu City hotels, convened through the HRRACI, partnered with "2GO Travel," a major inter-island passenger-carrying shipping company in the Philippines, to carry out its "Sail and Stay Cebu" partnership, which was a modification to the usual staycation scheme that adjusted to the easing of inter-island domestic travel restrictions. The "Sail and Stay Cebu" partnership offered staycation packages that offered all-in discounted ferry rates and accommodation in HRRACI-member hotels (Hotel Resort & Restaurant Association of Cebu Inc, 2022). The Cebu City Tourism Commission merely oversaw HRRACI's initiatives in sync with the commission's "Stay Cebu, Celebrate Cebu" staycation drive.

The "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" program, on the other hand, was revived and is facilitated by the Cebu Provincial Tourism Office in collaboration with the local governments of the island's cities and municipalities, their corresponding tourism units, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), local tourism providers, tourism-oriented NGOs, and local residents who are targeted for employment in their locale's tourist sites and landmarks (Cordova, 2022; Sabalo, 2022; Ecarma, 2021). The provincial tourism office is the primary coordinating agency that organizes the tours whereas the local governments organize town-specific exhibitions and cultural performances that feature local cuisine and delicacies, textiles and handicraft, beverages, among others. The local governments of Cebu's towns convene local residents, MSMEs, and cultural performers from their respective towns for the "Suroy-Suroy Sugbo" program. MSMEs are invited to the exhibitions to demonstrate the production of handicraft and goods made from resources sourced from the town; these goods are also put on display for sale during the exhibitions. In a "Explore the Midwest" tour last June 2023, for example, local traders, craftsmen, and artisans from the towns of Tabuelan, Tuburan, and Asturias sold their handicraft goods and products to visiting tourists

– boosting local economic activity through the staycation tourism initiative (Sugbo News, 2023).

The interplay in the various partnerships between public and private actors show how staycation tourism benefits in Cebu and Bohol, where there appears to be relatively smooth collaborative relations. This claim, however, is noted with caution as residents of local communities are solely treated as a source of labor and the prices of commodities are calibrated to match the capacity of tourists over the locals. Furtheer, while smooth, it can also be observed how the collaborative process still begins with the state through the city and provincial governments, which could signal a prevalence of how public actors still hold the upper hand in constituting and steering the initiatives, pointing to a need to revisit these arrangements to ensure that initiatives can come either from the public or private sector. Indeed, for sustainability and equity imperatives to be put to the fore of local staycation tourism, local community actors should be given wide and sustained access in co-creating and co-implementing staycation initiatives. In doing so, local staycation tourism could become a constructive space not just for domestic economic recovery but also for the empowerment and stewardship of local communities and their environment.

While it is undeniable that there is a considerable cross-boundary collaboration between the public and private sphere in Bohol and Cebu, available data shows that the collaboration is largely driven from government institutions "above," which reflect a top-down approach in governance where local communities are just "tapped" to co-produce staycation tourism initiatives instead of spearheading them. This reflects traces of power asymmetry within the collaborative process between government and non-government actors in local staycation tourism (Gutierrez, 2019). Indeed, local governments continue to have a central role in managing local staycation tourism. While local communities are being reached out to, the extent of their influence in the planning process remains uncertain since they simply become agents of delivering tourism, instead of possessing and exercising decision-making powers in the process of planning, implementing, and monitoring staycation tourism.

5. Conclusion: Recentering Community-Driven Local Tourism

The cases we have cited in the foregoing discussion of local staycation as a tourism and local economic development agenda provide a glimpse into hopeful scenarios or outcomes from which we can draw lessons and steer policy directions for successful future implementation. At the same time, it identifies opportunities and gaps that policy and development practitioners may consider addressing, warranting substantial attention to and contemplation of alternative futures for dealing with these situations. For instance, community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives have been recognized for their role in fostering sustainable tourism, though challenges related to top-down policies persist, making it crucial to

empower local communities and ensure their participation in the decision-making process (Simpson, 2008). In some cases, such as the Highlands Meander initiative in South Africa, collaboration between local towns demonstrated potential, but marginalized communities, particularly black communities, were left behind (Rogerson, 2002).

We can better say that local communities, in light of tourism development initiatives, are, at some point, not devoid of essentializing intentions and actions from local leaders, community planners, and technocrats who see them as subjects rather than as engaged and empowered collaborators. Moreover, with the rise of complex challenges and uncertainties that our society faces today, most of these communities in the grid, informal, and local economies are among the most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of various crises we currently face (Ramukumba, 2023). In the Philippines' case, the effects of climate change—such as sea-level rise, abrupt changes in weather conditions, and stronger typhoons—further exacerbate the vulnerable conditions of these communities (Pedrana, 2013). We cannot also deny that recovering from these adversities would require communities to have access to decent and readily available resources. Therefore, it is important that local tourism initiatives focus on the empowerment of local communities, sustainability, and crisis resilience (Nel & Binns, 2002).

What this work posits as the core message is to return to the dominant perspectives of Philippine local governments in governing these sectors and reflect on how they act on matters involving communities and local economic development ventures. While some parts of the cases highlight collaboration between community sectors and the government, there remain persistent scenarios where those in power assert dominant action through top-down processes (Muganda, Sirima, & Ezra, 2013). The cases from Cebu and Bohol presented in this study demonstrate unequal forms of collaboration that privilege the center – namely, the local government – while rendering local community sectors as passive recipients of government support or even the target market for local staycation tourism. Local governments were integral to the initiation of local staycation initiatives with little to no community participation in the decision-making process at all. This undermines the potential for collaborative governance in local staycation tourism to lead to the sustainability and equity outcomes they were designed for. The case studies also confirm the lack of substantive access to decision-making powers in community participation in the Philippines (Gutierrez, 2019). Additionally, the top-down approach in collaborative tourism governance often results in the marginalization of local voices, hindering the development of context-specific solutions that reflect the real needs of the community (Squazzoni, 2009). Drawing from the illustrative cases highlighted in this paper, we emphasize the need to refocus our attention on community-driven initiatives in the agenda-setting process. To clarify, the term "recentering" does not mean simply putting something back at the center in geographical or spatial terms. Rather, it refers to

a crucial aspect of the policy process: starting with and linking to problem identification or agenda-setting. Commonly, agenda-setting is dominated by policy analysts and decision-makers, often undermining the role of local people, their wisdom, and the knowledge they can contribute to productively address specific concerns. We argue that by opening discussions on "localizing" tourism and underscoring the relevance of "local staycation," it is equally important to center the discussion around a genuine agenda-setting process, involving communities authentically and inclusively, to achieve shared goals and mutual benefits (Afrisal, 2022). Empowering communities through participatory planning not only fosters more sustainable outcomes but also helps build local capacity and ownership, which are essential for long-term success (Vanneste & Ryckaert, 2012). In enhancing the participation of local communities, staycation tourism becomes a collaborative platform to curate a community-driven and -informed tourism scene in the Philippines that highlights the distinct culture and nature-based attractions of the islands with its peoples and their voices at the core.

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