

Analysis of the Social, Environmental and Economic Effects of Tourism Industry in Selected Municipalities in Sorsogon

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Abstract— This study investigates the social, environmental, and economic effects of the tourism industry in selected municipalities of Sorsogon: Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog. Using a qualitative research approach, the study assessed the current state of the tourism industry, analyzed its impacts on local communities and environments, and proposed relevant policy recommendations. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how tourism influences the social, environmental sustainability, and economic growth in these municipalities. The findings revealed both positive and negative effects, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to tourism development that maximizes benefits while minimizing adverse outcomes. The study also emphasizes the importance of involving local communities in tourism planning and management to ensure that development is sustainable and inclusive. Based on the results, the study proposes policy recommendations aimed at enhancing sustainable tourism for social, environmental, and economic development in smaller, less-explored regions like the province of Sorsogon.

Keywords— Environmental Effects, Economic Effects, Sorsogon, Social Effects, Tourism Industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed by the United Nations to address growing global social, economic, and environmental challenges. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recognizes tourism as a key driver in achieving these goals, emphasizing its role in promoting economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Scholars have also examined how tourism can align with the SDGs to ensure long-term sustainability.

Several international studies highlight the importance of integrating SDGs into tourism policies. For example, research by Fauzi and Nguyen (2023) stressed the relevance of SDG-oriented strategies, while Rasoolimanesh and Jaafar (2017) found positive impacts of such policies in G-7 countries. In Indonesia, Rhama and Setiawan (2023) identified both achievements and challenges in implementing SDGs in tourism. UNWTO's 2017 publication further outlines how stakeholders can effectively contribute to these goals.

In the Philippine context, local studies also demonstrate the role of tourism in sustainable development. Research has underscored the importance of local indicators,

stakeholder engagement, and community-based tourism, as seen in case studies from Zamboanga City, Puerto Princesa, and Lake Holon. These studies show that local governance and community involvement are key to successful sustainable tourism.

Focusing on six municipalities in Sorsogon, the current study analyzes how tourism influences social, environmental, and economic aspects of development, with an emphasis on SDG integration. By reviewing policies and engaging stakeholders, the study aims to evaluate tourism's contribution to sustainability and provide policy recommendations for a more inclusive and resilient tourism industry in the Philippines.

Tourism Act of 2009

The Tourism Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 9593) was enacted to strengthen the Department of Tourism (DOT) and its attached agencies, transferring tourism marketing functions to the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB). Signed into law by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Act recognized tourism as a key driver of national economic growth, environmental conservation, and social progress. It called for comprehensive policies that ensure equitable sustainability and benefits for all stakeholders in the tourism sector.

International studies have shown how legislative frameworks shape tourism's impact on economic and

environmental development. For instance, tourism laws in Africa, small island nations, and Costa Rica demonstrate the importance of government policy in balancing economic gains with environmental sustainability. Scholars like Hall, Elliott, and Dredge emphasized inclusive governance and stakeholder engagement in tourism policy.

In the Philippine context, the Tourism Act of 2009 aims to enhance competitiveness, promote sustainable tourism, and decentralize governance by involving local government units (LGUs). Local studies have assessed its implementation and impact. Researchers such as Dela Santa, Cruz, and Manzano analyzed the Act's policy-making process, effectiveness, and challenges faced by small enterprises. Others, like Briones and Garcia, explored its contributions to sustainable tourism and local governance, particularly in places like Cebu City.

In relation to Sorsogon, the Tourism Act of 2009 is relevant in assessing tourism's social, economic, and environmental effects. The law serves as a foundation for evaluating local tourism policies and sustainability practices in the region.

Tourism Industry in the Philippines: An Overview

Tourism is a vital sector in the Philippines, significantly contributing to the economy, employment, cultural exchange, and environmental awareness. The country is known for its natural beauty and hospitable people, making it a leading tourist destination in Southeast Asia. However, the industry faces major challenges, including the impact of COVID-19, governance issues, and sustainability concerns issues that are especially relevant in municipalities like Matnog, Prieto Diaz, Barcelona, and Irosin in Sorsogon.

Several studies have examined the vulnerabilities of Philippine tourism, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kalonda (2023) and Busalla (2025) emphasized the need for strategic policy responses, infrastructure improvements, and sustainable practices. Reports like the one from Report Linker (2025) project future growth and investment opportunities, reinforcing the importance of long-term planning.

Governance and community participation are also key themes in tourism development. Aquino and Porter (2022) stressed the role of community-based tourism and local stakeholders in achieving sustainability. However, studies by Garcia (2013) and Dela Santa (2017) noted gaps in tourism management and policy

implementation, indicating the need for reforms. Research by Andulana et al. (2021) and Caynila et al. (2022) provides further insight into how the industry has adapted post-pandemic.

Given these findings, this study aims to assess the social, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism in selected municipalities in Sorsogon. The goal is to generate policy recommendations and best practices that will support sustainable tourism while addressing local challenges in governance, infrastructure, and community development.

Tourism Industry in Sorsogon Province

Tourism plays a vital role in driving economic, social, and environmental development globally, and this is also true in Sorsogon province, Philippines. Studies from Indonesia and Vietnam emphasize the importance of cultural identity, community participation, and sustainable governance in tourism—principles that align with the situation in Sorsogon. In the Philippine context, local government units (LGUs) play a central role in tourism development, as seen in case studies from Bohol and Bulacan, where effective governance and stakeholder engagement have boosted tourism growth.

Sorsogon is rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and emerging tourist destinations. The municipalities of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog each offer unique attractions: Barcelona with its Spanish heritage, Prieto Diaz with eco-tourism sites, Irosin with wellness resorts, and Matnog with pink-sand beaches. These areas contribute significantly to local development through job creation, income generation, and cultural preservation. However, tourism also brings challenges such as environmental degradation and governance concerns.

This study focuses on analyzing the social, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism in the four municipalities. It aims to assess governance systems, economic benefits, and community involvement to create policy recommendations that promote sustainable tourism. By integrating both local and international research, the study seeks to guide local stakeholders in planning tourism strategies that ensure balanced growth, environmental care, and inclusive development in Sorsogon.

The Present Study

The study recognizes that tourism significantly contributes to economic growth, environmental protection, and cultural preservation across the

Philippines. However, prior research also reveals risks such as environmental degradation when tourism is poorly managed, as in Boracay. Scholars stress the importance of community involvement, policy enforcement, and sustainability awareness. While many studies focus on popular destinations, there is a lack of research on the tourism impact in smaller, rural areas.

To address this gap, the present study concentrates on four lesser-known municipalities in Sorsogon: Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog, by assessing the social, economic, and environmental effects of tourism from 2022 to 2024. These areas have been largely overlooked in tourism research, making it difficult to develop locally tailored strategies. By generating localized insights, the study aims to support effective tourism planning and governance in these communities.

The research explores tourist attractions, governance structures, and income generation, incorporating stakeholder perspectives and policy implications. It builds on earlier studies, particularly those focusing on coastal awareness and sustainability, but brings the discussion into the specific context of Sorsogon's municipalities.

Ultimately, the study aims to provide evidence-based policy recommendations that will support inclusive, sustainable tourism development. Its three main objectives are: 1) to assess tourism in terms of: a) attractions, b) governance, and c) income; 2) to analyze tourism's social, environmental, and economic effects; and 3) to propose a policy brief for sustainable tourism development in Sorsogon.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study examined the social, environmental, and economic effects of the tourism industry in four municipalities in Sorsogon—Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog. It explored how tourism influences governance, economic activities, and environmental sustainability in these areas.

A descriptive qualitative research design was employed, allowing an in-depth examination of individuals, groups, and situations. This approach is ideal for understanding unique local contexts and explaining complex theoretical ideas related to tourism's impact.

Sources of Data

The sources of data in this study were the informants who were purposefully selected from the four municipalities of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog. These informants included tourism officers from each municipality, local government officials in charge of tourism or economic development, business sector representatives involved in tourism-related enterprises, and environmental or social development advocates, such as environmentalists or community development officers. Each municipality had four key informants, bringing the total to 35 informants across all areas. These individuals provided primary qualitative data through in-depth unstructured interviews, offering valuable insights based on their direct involvement and experience with tourism in their respective communities.

Research Ethics

The study strictly followed ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights, dignity, and well-being, based on Creswell's (2014) principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained through signed forms after explaining the study's purpose and procedures.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, personal identifiers were removed, and data was securely stored. Participants were not subjected to coercion and had the freedom to refuse or withdraw at any time without consequences.

The study ensured that no harm physical, emotional, or psychological would come to participants. Questions were framed sensitively, and participants could skip any uncomfortable ones. A debriefing session was also conducted to clarify the study's purpose and address concerns, ensuring transparency and ethical integrity throughout the research process.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was an unstructured interview guide designed to comprehensively examine the social, environmental, and economic effects of the tourism industry in the municipalities of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog. This qualitative tool allowed for in-depth conversations with various stakeholders, including local government officials, tourism coordinators, business owners, environmental advocates, and community members. The guide was divided into three key sections.

The first focused on assessing the current state of tourism, covering topics such as tourist attractions, governance, and revenue trends from 2022 to 2024. The second section explored tourism's social, environmental, and economic impacts, addressing issues like cultural shifts, community well-being, environmental conservation, pollution, and livelihood opportunities. The final section sought policy recommendations for sustainable tourism, probing existing policies, implementation challenges, suggested sustainability measures, and the role of community participation in decision-making. This structure ensured the collection of rich, detailed data to support a thorough analysis of tourism's effects on the selected municipalities.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study involved conducting unstructured interviews to gather qualitative insights on the social, environmental, and economic effects of tourism in the municipalities of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog. Interviews took place on several dates between September and December 2024 and involved key stakeholders such as local government officials, tourism officers, business owners, environmental advocates, and community members who were directly or indirectly affected by tourism. Prior to the interviews, formal approval was obtained from local authorities through letters of request outlining the study's purpose and ethical considerations. The interviews were held in accessible locations like government offices and barangay halls, using open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences freely. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented by notes to ensure accuracy. Additional interviews targeted indirectly affected community members to gain broader perspectives on tourism's impact. Ethical standards—including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation—were strictly followed throughout the process. The collected data was then transcribed, organized, and prepared for thematic analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of tourism's effects in the selected municipalities.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed a structured qualitative and thematic approach to explore the social, environmental, and economic effects of tourism in selected municipalities of Sorsogon. To assess tourist attractions, governance, and income, the researcher reviewed relevant documents such as municipal tourism

reports and financial records, supplemented by informal interviews with local officials. These were organized thematically to identify key trends. For the analysis of tourism's broader impacts, unstructured interviews with stakeholders were transcribed verbatim. A constant comparison method was used to code and refine themes and sub-themes, ensuring consistency across the data. Analytical memos and reflections were maintained to enhance transparency and the validity of the results. The themes were then synthesized into a cohesive narrative, including illustrative quotes, to interpret findings in relation to the study's objectives. This final synthesis helped generate insights and propose interventions for promoting sustainable tourism in the region.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourist Attraction

A tourist attraction refers to a site, event, or object visited for leisure, interest, or cultural value, and it plays a vital role in the tourism industry (Leiper, 1990). In Sorsogon Province, located at the southernmost part of the Bicol Peninsula, tourism is flourishing due to its rich natural and cultural heritage. The municipalities of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog offer diverse attractions that contribute to the region's tourism-driven development. Barcelona features Spanish-era structures such as the St. Joseph Parish Church, La Presidencia Ruins, and Escuela Pia, alongside modern attractions like Agri Hope Farm and Bukid Scenic View Deck. Prieto Diaz is known for its vast mangrove forest, Nagsurok Cave, restored Escuela Pia, and coastal sites such as Halabang Lapis Sandbar, Lebanon Beach, Coral Reef Formations, and Sabang Beach. Irosin, regarded as the "Spring Capital of Sorsogon," boasts hot and cold spring resorts including Aramaru Resort, 2JCLA Nature Resort, and 401K Resort, along with family-oriented sites like Vida Guest Resort, Triple R Resort, Eco Zoo Park, and Irosin Lake. Matnog captivates visitors with its iconic Subic Beach with pink sands, the Juag Lagoon Fish Sanctuary, and the spelunking site Calintaan Cave.

Each municipality highlights its unique natural and cultural features while showcasing the crucial role of local governance, community involvement, and sustainable planning in managing tourism resources. Barcelona and Matnog have advanced in sustainable practices, heritage preservation, and eco-tourism, while Prieto Diaz and Irosin focus on enhancing their infrastructure and promotional efforts. Overall, the collective efforts of these municipalities underline the potential of Sorsogon as a thriving and sustainable tourist destination.

Table 1. Tourism Attraction in the Municipality of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin and Matnog

Municipality	Tourist Attraction	Location
1.Barcelona	Barcelona Church (St. Joseph Parish Church)	Poblacion Norte, Barcelona, Sorsogon
	La Presidencia Ruins	Poblacion Central, Barcelona, Sorsogon
	Escuela Pia	Poblacion Central, Barcelona, Sorsogon
	Agri Hope	Purok 1, Brgy. Sta. Cruz, Barcelona, Sorsogon
	Bukid Scenic View Deck	Brgy. San Ramon, Barcelona, Sorsogon
	Mangrove Forest	25JV+WP8, Barangay, Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon, Philippines
2.Prieto Diaz	Nagsurok Cave	Barangay Sto. Domingo, Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon
	Escuela Pia	Within Prieto Diaz Central School, Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon
	Halabang Lapis Sandbar	Accessible via boat from Sabang Beach, Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon
	Lebanon Beach	Barangay Lupi, Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon
3. Irosin	Coral Reef Formation	Off the coast of Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon
	Sabang Beach	Barangay Diamante, Prieto Diaz, Sorsogon
	Aramaru Resort Corporation	Barangay Monbon, Irosin, Sorsogon
	2JKLA Nature Hot Spring & Inn Resort	Barangay Monbon, Irosin, Sorsogon
	401K Resort	Sitio Pako, Purok 7, Bliss, Barangay Monbon, Irosin, Sorsogon, 4707
	VI-DA Guest Resort	Irosin, Sorsogon, 4707
	Triple R Resort	Tulay, Barangay Bagsangan, Irosin, Sorsogon
	Eco Zoo Park	Barangay Patag, Irosin, Sorsogon
Matnog	Irosin Lake	Calintaan, Matnog, Sorsogon
	Subic Beach	Calintaan, Matnog Sorsogon
	Juag Lagoon Fish Sanctuary	Calintaan, Matnog, Sorsogon
	Calintaan Cave	

Governance

Governance in tourism involves the systems, structures, and decision-making processes that shape how tourism is developed and managed. In Sorsogon's municipalities Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog governance plays a key role in implementing tourism policies, allocating funds, and sustaining initiatives. Each municipality has a designated tourism officer under the supervision of the Local Government Unit (LGU), but their effectiveness largely depends on strategic planning, policy support, and budgeting.

Barcelona and Matnog demonstrate stronger governance structures. Barcelona has a localized Tourism Development Plan and regular budget allocations, although it still faces infrastructure limitations. Matnog excels with a comprehensive tourism code, clear policies on sustainability, environmental protection, and active collaboration with private and community stakeholders. These show how structured planning and consistent funding support sustainable tourism.

In contrast, Prieto Diaz lacks formal policies and a tourism development plan. Governance here is informal, with tourism relying on the mayor's discretionary funds, limiting the potential of its ecotourism assets. Irosin, meanwhile, integrates tourism into its Annual Investment Plan and collaborates with national agencies, though budget constraints remain a challenge.

Overall, the effectiveness of tourism governance varies across Sorsogon. Municipalities with structured plans, policies, and budgets like Matnog and Barcelona are better positioned for sustainable development, while others like Prieto Diaz need institutional reforms. The findings highlight the importance of organized, accountable governance and inter-agency collaboration for resilient and inclusive tourism growth.

Income (2022-2024)

Income is defined as the money, property, and other value transfers received within a specified time in return for services or goods (Thuronyi, 1990).

Table 2. Tourism Income (2022-2024)

Municipality	Tourism Income (2022-2023)	Tourism Income (2023-2024)
Barcelona	13,334,374.09	19,411,213.01
Prieto Diaz	40,000.00	40,000.00
Irosin	No ordinance on fees and charges in all public tourist attractions except on Private Tourist Attraction.	
Matnog	7,354,423.00	6,955, 294.00

Source: Municipal Treasurers Office of each municipality

From 2022 to 2024, the tourism income of the municipalities of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog varied due to differences in governance, infrastructure, and tourism management.

Barcelona showed a steady increase in revenue, rising from ₱13.3 million in 2022–2023 to ₱19.4 million in 2023–2024, thanks to structured tourism policies, budget allocations, and private sector partnerships that stimulated economic growth and job creation.

Prieto Diaz, in contrast, maintained a stagnant income of only ₱40,000 for both years due to a lack of operational public attractions and dependence on private resorts. This reflects the municipality's untapped tourism potential and the need for better infrastructure, policy reforms, and possible public-private initiatives to increase revenue.

Irosin reported no direct income from its public tourist sites since most attractions are free to access. While this promotes inclusivity, it limits municipal revenue. However, tourism indirectly supports local businesses such as transport and food services. Implementing entrance fees or eco-tourism packages could help establish a more sustainable income model.

Matnog saw a slight decrease in income from ₱7.3 million to ₱6.9 million, likely due to seasonal fluctuations, collection inefficiencies, or tourist volume changes. Despite this, it remains a major tourism hub, requiring consistent promotion and improved revenue strategies. Overall, the income data highlights how governance, legal frameworks, and strategic investments significantly affect the tourism sector's financial performance in Sorsogon.

Social, Environmental and Economic Effects of Tourism Industry

Table 3. Factors and Themes of the Social, Environmental, and Economic

Factors	Positive	Negative
Social	Cultural Exchange Economic Benefits to Communities Community Pride	Social Inequalities Behavioral Changes Human Exploitation
Environmental	Conservation and Protection Restoration Projects Sustainable Practices	Pollution Overuse of Resources
Economic	Employment Creation Support for Local Businesses Boost to Related Industries	Inflation and Rising Costs Unequal Distribution of Benefits Seasonal Employment

Social Effects of Tourism Industry

The social effects of the tourism industry can be both beneficial and challenging, depending on how tourism is managed and how communities are involved. Positively, tourism fosters cultural exchange and mutual understanding between visitors and locals, while also generating income through services like homestays, guiding, and local product sales. These opportunities promote community pride and the preservation of cultural heritage.

However, negative effects include unequal distribution of benefits, where profits mainly go to business owners rather than the broader community. Tourism can also influence local behavior, particularly among the youth, who may adopt foreign values that clash with traditional norms. Moreover, vulnerable groups may be exploited through low-wage work or unethical practices. These issues highlight the need for responsible and inclusive tourism that protects and empowers all community members.

Environmental Effects of Tourism Industry

The environmental effects of the tourism industry can be both positive and negative, depending on how tourism is managed. On the positive side, tourism can support the conservation of natural and cultural sites by generating revenue for restoration projects and promoting sustainable practices like eco-tourism. It also raises environmental awareness and encourages waste reduction, provided tourism activities stay within an area's carrying capacity.

However, negative impacts include pollution from waste, noise, and traffic, as well as the overuse of local resources like water and land. When tourist activity exceeds the environment's capacity, it can lead to ecosystem damage and create conflict between tourism and community needs. Poor management and lack of regulation can make tourism harmful to the environment instead of beneficial.

Economic Effects of Tourism Industry

Tourism plays a significant role in economic development, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas, by generating jobs in hospitality, transportation, and related sectors. It boosts local businesses and stimulates other industries like agriculture and retail, contributing to income generation and local economic growth.

However, tourism can also bring negative economic impacts. It may cause inflation and raise the cost of living, making basic goods and housing less affordable for residents. Profits often go to large corporations rather than local businesses, and many jobs in tourism are seasonal, leading to income instability.

To address these issues, it's important to promote fair profit distribution and create sustainable employment opportunities that benefit local communities year-round.

Sorsogon Tourism Industry

The tourism industry in Sorsogon, particularly in the municipalities of Barcelona, Irosin, Matnog, and Prieto Diaz, showcases a rich blend of cultural heritage and natural attractions. According to Leiper's (1990) model of a tourist attraction system, these areas demonstrate how tourist sites, promotion, and visitor interest combine to support local economies and tourism development.

Barcelona emphasizes heritage tourism with Spanish-era structures and natural sites like the Bukid Scenic View Deck, blending culture, history, and agriculture to

attract visitors. Irosin, known as the "Spring Capital of Sorsogon," offers wellness and adventure tourism through its hot springs, parks, and outdoor activities, highlighting how government support can boost local tourism.

Matnog focuses on ecotourism, with attractions like Subic Beach, Juag Lagoon Fish Sanctuary, and Calintaan Cave. It serves as a model for sustainable tourism through its environmental policies. In contrast, Prieto Diaz, though less developed, shows potential for growth with proper infrastructure, investment, and strategic planning.

Overall, these municipalities reflect diverse tourism strengths heritage, wellness, nature, and sustainability demonstrating how well-managed attractions are key to regional growth and identity in Sorsogon.

Tourism Governance

Tourism governance in Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog varies in terms of policy implementation, planning, and resource management. Each municipality shows unique strengths and challenges in promoting and sustaining tourism development.

Barcelona has a structured tourism governance system, with clear policies, heritage preservation efforts, and a dedicated budget. However, limited infrastructure remains a barrier to fully optimizing tourism potential.

Prieto Diaz lacks formal tourism plans and relies on unofficial funding, making its tourism governance less institutionalized despite efforts in sanitation and seafood tourism promotion.

Irosin adopts a collaborative approach by partnering with the Department of Tourism and including tourism in its investment plans. Still, it struggles with insufficient funding for large-scale projects, relying on external financial support.

Matnog, on the other hand, leads in tourism governance with a comprehensive tourism code, sustainable practices, and strong public-private partnerships, effectively balancing economic growth with environmental conservation.

Overall, Matnog and Barcelona demonstrate more organized tourism governance, while Irosin and Prieto Diaz need stronger planning, consistent funding, and institutional support to improve tourism management and development.

Tourism Generated Income

From 2022 to 2024, the tourism income in Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog varied significantly due to differences in governance, infrastructure, and attraction management. Barcelona saw the highest income growth—from ₱13.3 million to ₱19.4 million—due to effective policies, budget allocation, and public-private partnerships, which led to job creation and improved infrastructure.

Prieto Diaz remained stagnant at ₱40,000 annually, largely because its resorts are privately owned, limiting local government revenue. However, the potential for growth exists if strategies like public-private partnerships, entrance fees, and tourism taxes are implemented.

In Irosin, tourism is active, but municipal income is minimal due to free public attractions. While this promotes inclusivity, it results in lost revenue opportunities. Introducing affordable fees or eco-tourism programs could help fund maintenance and community projects.

Matnog experienced a slight decline in income from ₱7.35 million to ₱6.95 million, likely due to seasonal trends and weak promotion or collection strategies. Despite this, it remains a key destination and would benefit from stronger management, marketing, and infrastructure improvements.

Overall, the differences in tourism income emphasize the critical role of sound governance, investment, and planning in maximizing tourism's economic impact.

Social Impacts of the Tourism Industry

Tourism in these municipalities has both positive and negative social effects. On the positive side, it promotes cultural exchange, strengthens community pride, and helps preserve local identity and traditions. Residents report feeling more connected to their culture through their interactions with tourists, echoing research that highlights tourism's potential for cultural revitalization and empowerment.

However, tourism can also deepen social inequalities. In many cases, only a few individuals or groups benefit economically, leading to concerns about elite capture and marginalization. Tourists' preferences may take precedence over community values, causing cultural commodification and a loss of authenticity. Informants also raised concerns about unfair labor conditions and exploitation of local workers.

To address these challenges, the study recommends (Policy Brief)-inclusive, community led tourism planning, fair labor policies, and capacity-building programs, especially for underserved areas like Prieto Diaz. Promoting cultural education and protecting local values are also essential. These strategies aim to ensure that tourism contributes to equitable development and aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities).

Environmental Implications of Tourism Industry

Tourism has brought both positive and negative environmental effects to the four municipalities in Sorsogon. On the positive side, tourism revenues have supported environmental conservation programs, such as site restoration, waste management, and tree planting. These efforts have raised awareness among communities about the importance of protecting natural resources, which aligns with studies showing tourism can promote ecological sustainability when linked to local conservation goals.

However, several environmental challenges persist. These include poor waste management, pollution, water shortages, and overcrowding, which threaten local ecosystems and reduce the quality of tourist experiences. Informants reported that tourism sometimes disrupts natural peace and strains basic resources, particularly during peak seasons. These concerns reflect global issues associated with unmanaged tourism, such as ecological degradation and reduced visitor satisfaction.

The four municipalities show varying capacities in addressing environmental concerns. Barcelona has shown proactive governance, while Prieto Diaz and Irosin face challenges in infrastructure and enforcement. Matnog maintains cleanliness but lacks a long-term sustainability plan. This inconsistency points to the need for improved policy implementation, resource allocation, and local leadership.

To address these issues, the study recommends strengthening environmental policy enforcement, improving infrastructure in weaker municipalities, creating long-term sustainability and disaster-preparedness plans, and promoting community education and environmental stewardship.

These steps are essential for achieving sustainable tourism development and protecting the environment for future generations.

Economic Contributions of the Tourism Sector

Tourism has significantly contributed to the economic development of the Sorsogon municipalities by creating employment opportunities in hospitality, transport, retail, and allied industries such as agriculture and crafts. These jobs have helped improve household incomes and living conditions, while increased tourist spending has stimulated local businesses and entrepreneurship. For example, tourism income rose to ₱704,970 in Barcelona and doubled in Matnog from ₱2.5 million to ₱4.8 million, enabling reinvestment in infrastructure and community projects. Tourism has also supported the rise of micro and small enterprises, indicating its potential for inclusive local economic growth.

However, the economic benefits are not evenly distributed. Many tourism jobs are seasonal and unstable, making it difficult for some families to rely on them year-round. Informants expressed concerns over income inequality and elite capture of tourism profits. Without inclusive policies and equitable frameworks, tourism risks worsening economic disparities within the community. Studies highlight the importance of linking tourism to pro-poor growth strategies and ensuring that all community members benefit, not just business owners or investors.

Another downside is the inflation of local prices due to increased demand for goods and services during tourist seasons, which affects residents not directly involved in the industry. Locals report that tourism has made basic necessities more expensive, reducing their quality of life. These negative impacts highlight the need for balanced tourism development one that improves local livelihoods without burdening the most vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, while tourism is a powerful economic driver in Sorsogon, its long-term success depends on inclusive, equitable, and sustainable practices. The study recommends implementing policies that support year-round employment, fair benefit-sharing, and local entrepreneurship. Strategic planning and collaboration among LGUs, NGOs, and tourism stakeholders are essential to promote economic resilience and align with the goals of tourism development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The tourism industry in the municipalities of Barcelona, Prieto Diaz, Irosin, and Matnog in Sorsogon demonstrates a complex but promising interplay of

cultural heritage, environmental assets, governance, and economic potential. The assessment reveals that while each municipality contributes uniquely to the province's tourism landscape, disparities in planning, governance, and infrastructure directly influence their tourism performance. Barcelona and Matnog show relative strength in heritage preservation and eco-tourism management, respectively, while Irosin highlights the benefits of wellness and adventure tourism. Conversely, Prieto Diaz lags due to inadequate promotion and planning. The analysis further uncovers the multifaceted social, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism, such as increased community pride and livelihood opportunities, but also issues like unequal benefit distribution, pollution, and seasonal employment. These findings underscore the critical need for strategic, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to tourism governance to maximize benefits and minimize adverse effects across all municipalities.

To foster sustainable tourism development in Sorsogon, each municipality should implement context-specific strategies that align with their unique strengths and challenges. Barcelona should focus on heritage preservation and infrastructure enhancement, while Prieto Diaz must prioritize tourism planning, investment attraction, and community-based initiatives. Irosin should establish eco-fees and improve governance to support its wellness and adventure tourism potential, and Matnog must strengthen its marketing, infrastructure, and environmental monitoring systems. Province-wide, it is vital to institutionalize sustainable practices through environmental regulations, carrying capacity assessments, and inclusive policies that promote equitable participation and benefit-sharing. Establishing a unified provincial tourism governance framework with tourism councils, a development plan, and regular impact assessments will enable better coordination and data-driven decision-making. By integrating environmental stewardship, community engagement, cultural preservation, and economic diversification, Sorsogon's tourism industry can achieve long-term growth that is both inclusive and sustainable.

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