



Transforming Communities Through Sustainable Tourism Initiatives

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It was during the 2012 Davao Business Mission to Singapore when a Singaporean participant told us, "Your city is still raw. You still have plenty of room to grow." That is very true of Davao. We still have many untapped potentials and I am happy to be part of the positive changes happening here.

I was working at the City Tourism Operations Office under the Mayor's office when I was given a chance to study in Australia to take up Master of Tourism Management in 2009. I was advised

to join other Filipino tourism industry scholars in the Gold Coast so I can be part of a support system. However, I could foresee that course subjects on gaming and hotel operations would be of no use to me since I work in the city government.

Thus, even if I would be separated from fellow Filipino scholars, I chose to attend the University of Canberra alone, instead. From research, I found that the course subjects there have a government perspective and I knew those would serve me well.

Putting theory into practice

When I came back to the Philippines a year later, I was able to immediately start my Re-Entry Action Plan (REAP), which was to create a sustainable community-based tourism development manual. The objective was to provide guidelines to community tourism stakeholders in planning, developing, managing, and implementing sustainable projects and programs that will eventually contribute to economic growth and development.

I was actually still in Australia when I started working on the manual and had the chance to show it to one of my professors. He shared his opinions and said it is a good project. I placed emphasis on sustainability because that's one of the things I learned in the university. I realized that in the Philippines, we usually plan on creating projects without thinking if they would be good for the environment.

Our office chose five barangays where we could help implement community-based tourism. We taught the residents that it is not enough to just come up with tourism activities for the sake of holding them because what is important is to create sustainable ones.

Among the five communities, Barangay Mintal stood out because it has been declared a Japanese heritage site due to its history of being the Little Tokyo of Pre-War Philippines. We believe that preserving the community would attract Japanese visitors to pay homage to a site that their descendants occupied. The residents are very involved and they have the support of the Japanese government through the consular office.

We are currently working to get pledges of commitment from several Japanese organizations that can help us develop the area more. There are already plans to reconstruct some Japanese

monumental sites to further attract the Japanese and other international markets. Barangay Mintal is a good place to showcase what community-based tourism is about. Hopefully, we'll be able to really rehabilitate it and develop other activities.

This 2015, the creation of the Davao-Japan Tourism Development and Investment Promotion council, which I initiated, will be finalized through the enactment of a local ordinance.

I am very grateful that my boss, who is also an Australia Awards scholar, is very supportive of what I do. We conduct strategic planning workshops and have set a budget to fund my REAP's initiatives. Now that it has already been institutionalised, I offer my help to fellow scholars in Davao who may need it.

Injecting the investment component

At the moment, I am head of the Investment and Trade Promotion Unit of the Davao City Investment Promotion Center (DCIPC). I have been transferred to this higher position in 2012 and continue to promote opportunities for tourism. I am still involved in helping the communities while also conducting business missions outside the country.

DCIPC has already been to Singapore twice and we are going to Dubai next to also promote opportunities in Davao. In coordination with the Mindanao Development Authority, we want to promote agri-business and tourism in our current investment areas as well attract big ticket investments such as the creation of a Light Railway Transit (LRT) system in the city and an upgrade of our airport.

Paying it forward

After coming back from Australia, I also had the chance to teach for one semester at the Philippine Women's College (PWC). I taught Tourism Planning and Development to third year students and was able to use materials from my studies abroad.

In 2014, I had the honor to be appointed by the University of Canberra as its alumni representative for the Philippines. They contact me whenever they have activities here.

For me, it is important to pursue your dreams no matter how challenging they may be, even if it means leaving your country for a time to expand your knowledge. I learned a lot from my stay in Australia and feel that the benefits from my REAP has already been multiplied ten times.

I felt that my network has really expanded not only with tourism industry players but also with business players.

Right now, I am involved in the formation of a cooperative that aims to establish a palm oil industry in Davao through a palm tree plantation. I provide the linkage for this group and help facilitate palm oil investment in order to help small growers and farmers generate more income and provide more jobs to people. We also want to help them find support from foreign investors who can put up a palm oil refinery here.

As some people say, if the city government takes care of the peace and order, businesses will thrive. That is true of Davao City. This is definitely a great city to live and work in and I plan to continue helping to make it so.

Cathrine Tzaris J. Pagatpatan finished her Master of Tourism Management from the University of Canberra in 2009. Her REAP was all about Creating a Sustainable Community-based Tourism Development Plan for the City Government of Davao.