



## Attitude versus practices of the local community of Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines toward ecotourism

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### Abstract

*The Tourism Industry plays a vital role in the global economy. In fact, it has been coined by the World Travel and Tourism Council as one of the largest employers and biggest contributors to the Global Gross Domestic Product. Alongside with this is the intensive promotion of responsible travel as the United Nations World Tourism Organization had geared towards sustainable tourism development. This study focused on ecotourism by determining the attitude and practices of the residents of the Special Science and Nature City of the Philippines, Los Baños, Laguna. The inconsistency of the people's attitude with their practices towards ecotourism was also determined, thus, led to a conclusion on what is the reason why air and water pollution have been major problems in the Philippines. Results show that awareness towards ecotourism is evident as people were able to identify the right terms that describe ecotourism, and were able to determine the cause and effects of environmental issues. However, it has been proven that the attitude of people towards ecotourism is inconsistent with their practices as results clearly show that despite having the right attitude; people are contributors to environmental issues with their wrong habits. Nevertheless, the community has high potential to safeguard the natural beauty of the place evident to their preference between mass tourism and ecotourism destinations.*

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, people's attitude and practices, environmental issues, tourism, local community.

### Introduction

Nature's dreadful condition is one of the major problems of the world today<sup>1</sup>. In the Philippines, numerous natural areas are in an alarming state which is considered near total destruction<sup>2</sup>. In an article entitled: "Pollution, squatting, Industries hasten death of Laguna de Bay" written by Cinco<sup>3</sup>, a local resident of Biñan City, Laguna named Bayani Enriquez said that back in the 1980s, he often spend time with friends swimming or fishing in Laguna de Bay's unobstructed waters, but according to him much of the open space is now gone with shanties occupying the shoreline. According to the article, Mr. Enriquez also never thought how the lake which gave him some sense of calm and security would become a public hazard. In Metro Manila, the Country's Capital Region, Manila Bay and Pasig River are also facing the same problem. With the presence of ports, sea – based sources of pollution around Manila Bay are from ships and motorized boats<sup>4</sup>. Pollution in Pasig River on the other hand, is heavily caused by household wastes of the entire region, and the additional 4,000 illegal settlers along the river<sup>5</sup>.

Ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well – being of local people, and involves interpretation and education"<sup>6</sup>. Its principles includes building of environmental awareness, designing and operating low – impact facilities to Nature, and generating financial benefits for conservation, which would help on the restoration of damaged natural areas and makes sure of

its sustainability. However, there have been some inconsistencies on the attitudes of people towards environmental practices that would hinder the maximization of its benefits. According to Weinstein *et al*<sup>7</sup>, people who live in urban areas have a lower concern to the environment, and in the study of Alcock *et al*<sup>8</sup>, the more a person visits nature for recreation and the more they appreciate the natural world, the more pro-environment behavior they show. Unfortunately, 55% or the majority of the world's population lives in urban areas and is projected to increase to 68% by 2050<sup>9</sup>. As the world shifts to environment-friendly practices, Isaacs<sup>10</sup> argues that the potential of ecotourism as a wildlife conservation strategy is limited by its inability to ensure long-term protection of environmental assets by its tendency to contribute directly to environmental degradation. Ecotourism is also said to have negative implications to local communities for it tends to displace indigenous groups and local residents due to development, which not only damages the integrity of those local communities, but prevents its members from benefiting from the economic benefits of a growing tourism industry<sup>11</sup>. In contrary, Lanier<sup>12</sup> argues that ecotourism when sufficiently planned and properly managed does generate positive impacts; in the case of Ecoventura in Galapagos, Lapa Rios in Costa Rica, Camp Denali in Alaska, and Galudo Lodge in Mozambique, the viability of ecotourism is clearly illustrated through economic development, environmental interest increase, cultural diversity promotion, and the involvement of the community.

The Philippines is a country of Natural Beauty- an archipelago of wondrous islands and idyllic beaches, majestic landforms, and notable biodiversity<sup>13</sup>.

The country is clearly a place rich in natural tourism attractions as the Department of Tourism’s official list of Top Philippine Destinations published in its website is majority composed of nature-based attractions. In fact, in the article entitled: “12 Best Places to Visit in Southeast Asia” written by Bocco<sup>14</sup>, two popular Tourism destinations in the country were listed; Boracay Island and Palawan, which are both nature-based attractions, thus, making the Philippines a perfect locale for this study.

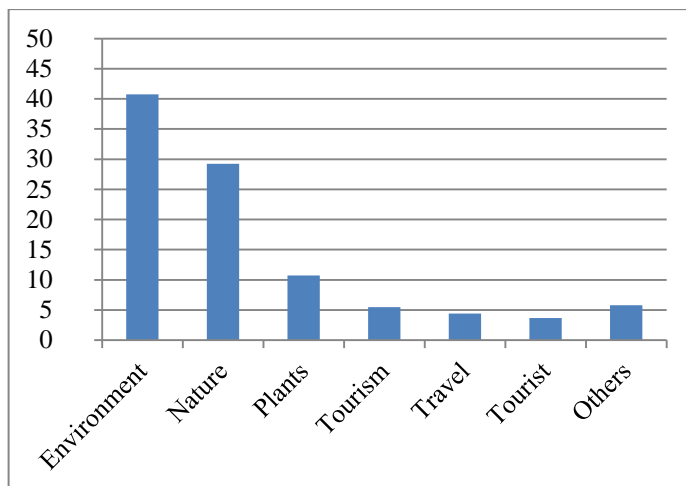
The author, because of continuous reading and conversation with people, has found out that people are aware of Ecotourism and its importance to the world; however, instead of becoming proud, this discovery made him confused and disappointed. How Natural Areas such as Land and Water formations became polluted with people aware of environmental conservation practices? How did Pasig River turned Biologically Dead and one of the world’s most polluted rivers<sup>15</sup>, how did the forest cover of the Philippines dropped from 70% down to 20% over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup>, and how did Metro Manila suffered from Air Pollution<sup>17</sup>, if the public knows the importance of conservation? As awareness plays a vital role in achieving environmental sustainability<sup>18</sup>, these questions made the researcher wonder if the knowledge and perceptions of people are being put into practice, which has led to this study.

### Methodology

This research used a descriptive approach since it involves description, recording, analysis, and interpretation of the attitudes and practices of people towards Ecotourism. Although this research is highly accurate, it does not gather solutions to current problems aside from the recommendations of the author. Respondents were limited to 383 residents of Los Baños, a Municipality in the province of Laguna known to be rich with natural areas, while data were gathered through an online survey and printed questionnaires. Data collection lasted for 1 month that started on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of June 2017 and ended on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the following month. The survey was consisted a total of 40 questions that had 100% response rate from respondents. Results are expected to be the same if the entire population is asked.

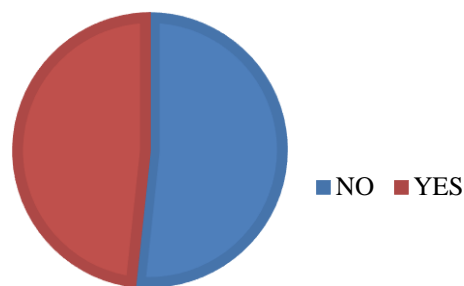
### Results and discussion

Figure-1 presents the words usually used to describe ecotourism. 40.73% of the respondents said they will personally use “Environment” to describe Ecotourism, 29.24% prefer the word “Nature”, and 10.70% wrote “Plants”. 21 out of 383 respondents said they’ll use “Tourism”, 17 respondents prefer “Travel”, and 14 of them responded “Tourist”, while the rest has their own terms which differ from each other.



**Figure-1:** Respondents’ perception on best words to describe Ecotourism.

Figure-2 presents respondents’ awareness towards the term “Ecotourism”. Majority of the respondents said they’re not familiar with the term “Ecotourism” with a percentage of 51.7%, while the remaining 48.30% are familiar.

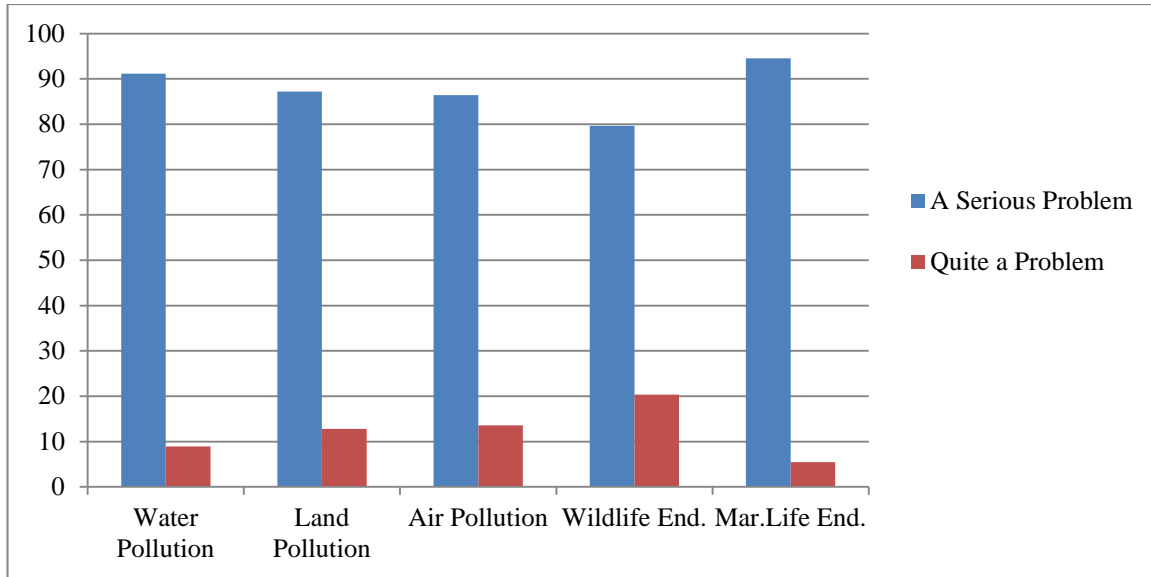


**Figure-2:** Respondents’ awareness towards the term “Ecotourism”.

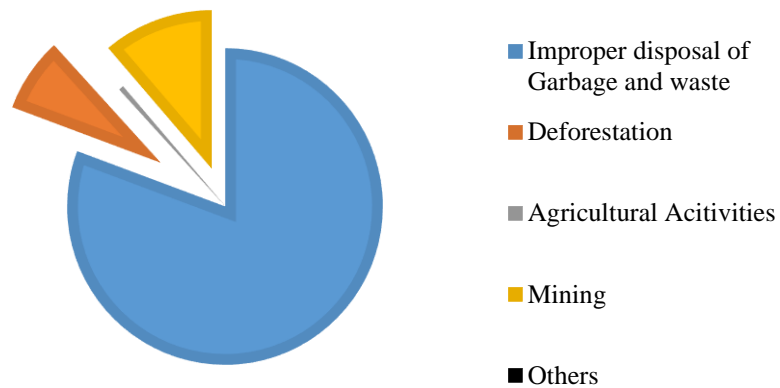
Figure-3 presents respondents’ attitude towards Land Pollution, Water Pollution, Air Pollution, Wild Life Endangerment, and Marine Life Endangerment. Based on data shown, majority of the respondents see the aforementioned events as a serious problem with a percentage ranges from 79.64% to 94.52%.

Figure-4 present Respondents’ perception towards the major cause of Land Pollution. Out of 383 respondents, 309 or 80.68% believed that improper disposal of garbage and waste is the major cause of Land Pollution.

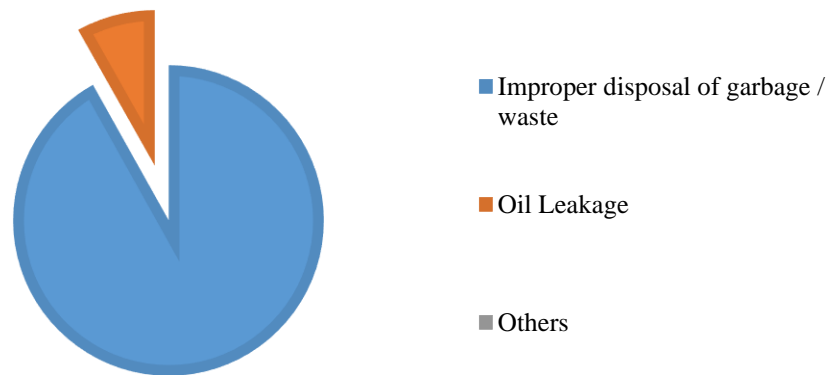
Figure-5 presents respondents’ perception towards the major cause of water pollution. 352 respondents said that the major cause of water pollution is improper disposal of garbage and waste while the remaining 8.1% said it is oil leakage from water vehicles and factories.



**Figure-3:** Respondents’ attitude towards Land Pollution, Water Pollution, Air Pollution, Wild Life Endangerment, and Marine Life Endangerment.



**Figure-4:** Respondents’ perception towards the major cause of Land Pollution.



**Figure-5:** Respondents’ perception towards the major cause of water pollution.

Figure-6 presents respondents' perception towards the major cause of air pollution. From the total number of respondents, 77.02% said they believe that exhaust gas from vehicles and factories is the main reason behind air pollution.

Figure-7 presents respondents' perception towards major cause of wildlife endangerment and habitat destruction. Most of the respondents said the main cause of wildlife endangerment and habitat destruction is Habitat destruction through conversion of rice fields and forests into commercial zones with a percentage of 51.17%.

Figure-8 present respondents' perception towards major cause of Marine Life Endangerment and habitat destruction. Majority of the respondents with a percentage of 71.28% said coral reefs destruction is the major cause of Marine Life Endangerment and Habitat Destruction.

Figure-9 presents respondents' awareness towards the need to follow the 10 commandments of ecotourism. 66.84% of the respondents said they are aware that there is a need to follow the 10 commandments of ecotourism, while the remaining 33.16% are not.

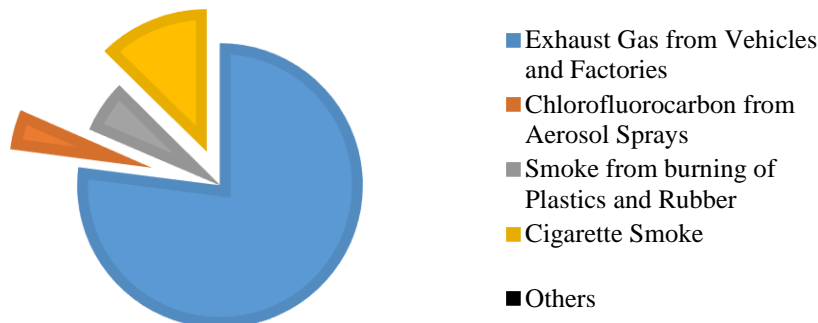


Figure-6: Respondents' perception towards the major cause of air pollution.

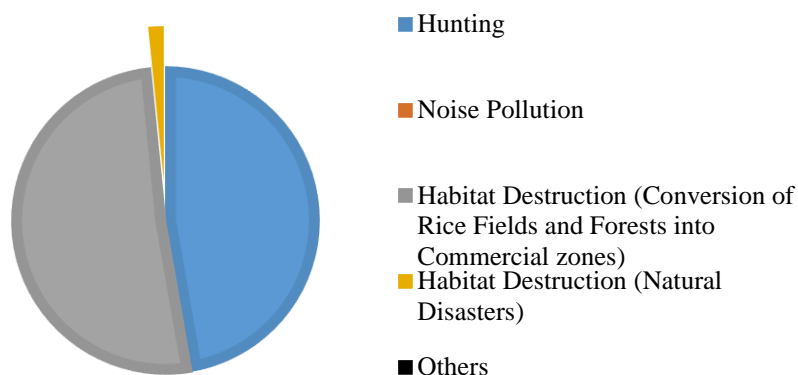


Figure-7: Respondents' perception towards major cause of wildlife endangerment and habitat destruction.

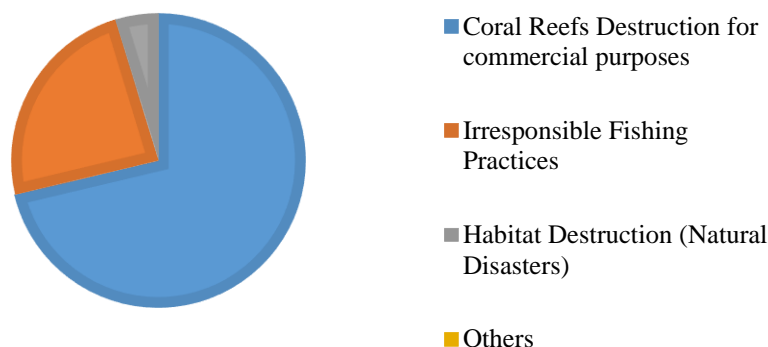
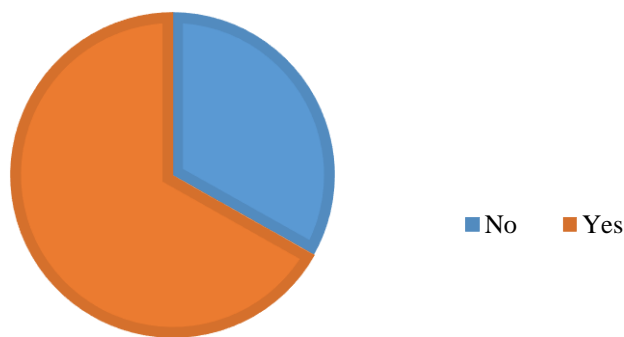


Figure-8: Respondents' perception towards major cause of Marine Life Endangerment and habitat destruction.



**Figure-9:** Respondents’ awareness towards the need to follow the 10 commandments of ecotourism.

**Table-1:** Respondents’ responses toward questions that have determined their attitude and have identified their practices toward Ecotourism.

Attitude	Practices	Interpretation
Throwing of garbage anywhere on land is not okay (100%)	In the absence of trash bins, trash is put inside personal bag/ pocket (92.95%)	Consistent
Deforestation is not okay (69.19%)	Inactive towards tree planting activities (89.82%)	Inconsistent
Mining is not okay (64.23%)	Buying authentic jewelries if need arises (55.35%)	Inconsistent
Throwing of garbage into bodies of water is not okay (99.48%)	Threw garbage into bodies of water in the past weeks (76.50%)	Inconsistent
Exhaust Gas from vehicles is bad for the environment (100%)	Uses vehicles on a daily basis (90.34%)	Inconsistent
Chlorofluorocarbon from Aerosol Sprays pollutes the air (56.66%)	Uses aerosol sprays o eliminate unwanted smells in households and offices (63.97%)	Inconsistent
Cigarette Smoking will pollutes the air (50.65%)	Smokes cigarette or e – cigarette (78.59%)	Inconsistent
Cosmetic products are harmful to marine life (52.48%)	Puts cosmetic products on skin when about to swim into bodies of water such as oceans, seas, and lakes (74.67%)	Inconsistent
It is ok to take away souvenirs from Natural Areas (60.05%)	Gets or buys souvenirs from Nature (56.40%)	Consistent
Tourists should prioritize Ecotourism destinations rather than man – made structures (53.79%)	Goes to Ecotourism destinations more often than to man-made ones (85.12%)	Consistent
Tourists should prefer to stay in lodging establishments concerned with Ecotourism than other types of Hotels (50.91%)	Usually stays in Commercial Hotels (41.77%)	Inconsistent

Table-1 shows that respondents have 27% consistency rate towards their attitude and practices on ecotourism. It also shows that taking away portions of natural resources is okay to people, reason why most are used to getting such as souvenir. It further shows that despite the right attitude towards the environment, people’s practices do not corresponds to responsible tourism.

This study clearly shows that people of Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines is fully aware of ecotourism from the concept itself to the cause and effects of internal and external factors that play roles in the industry. Based on the attitude of people, environmental issues; land pollution, water pollution, air

pollution, wild life and marine life extinction, are considered as serious problems, thus, theoretically are taken seriously. However, practically are not; it has been proven that one of the probable reasons behind the continuous degradation of the environment is the inconsistency of the people’s attitude with their own practices, whereas, most people despite of having the right attitude, do actions that are detrimental to nature. It was also determined that from where people have acquired the knowledge and have established their attitude towards ecotourism are reliable since these have provided accurate information and have instilled the right perception, however, needs improvement to be a tool in converting the right attitude

into right practices. One of the reasons why bodies of water are severely polluted was also identified; a very high response rate from the respondents was recorded in the question where the main cause of water pollution was asked, 92% said it is the dumping of garbage into the waters, while 99.48% said that doing such is environmentally unacceptable, yet surprisingly, 75.50% said they have thrown trash into waters in the past weeks. Likewise, the reason why air pollution is a problem in the country has been identified; 77% of the respondents believes vehicles are the major cause of air pollution and 100% is certain that the exhaust gas from it is not good for the environment, yet 90.34% said that they use fuel-powered vehicles on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the country, particularly the municipality could still be a potential center of ecotourism for there is a very high percentage (85.12%) of people preferring nature-based than mass tourism destinations since it has been proven that the more a person visits nature for recreation and the more they appreciate the natural world, the more pro-environment behavior they show, thus, the Philippine Tourism Industry has to give more emphasis on ecotourism promotion.

## Conclusion

Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines though boasts a number of natural areas and potential ecotourism destinations does not deserve the title "Special Science and Nature City of the Philippines, thus, the author suggests it to be changed into "Special Science City of the Philippines". With majority of the population ignorant towards green practices, the municipality, particularly nature-based destinations, will soon be severely damaged. It is also concluded that a person who has the right attitude is not guaranteed to do the right thing. The local government unit of Los Baños, Laguna is hereby advised to come up with programs that would convert the right attitude of people into practices; trainings, strict law enforcement, and tourism planning among others, especially that the community has high potential to safeguard the natural beauty of the place evident to their preference between mass tourism and ecotourism destinations. Other provinces are hereby suggested to conduct their own research with the same approach to determine if the local community who should be spearheading the success of the tourism industry are guided by ethical principles. It is hereby concluded that the people theoretically understand the purpose of environmental conservation efforts such as ecotourism, but do not fully appreciate it for this understanding does not reflect on their actions. The execution of a research that will determine the reasons why there is an inconsistency between attitude and practices of people towards ecotourism is highly recommended.

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