

# E-Governance in Local Tourism: Best Practices, Opportunities and Challenges

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## Abstract

Understanding the significance of public administration for the tourism sector can exemplify the ways in which the industry improves its quality as well as its sustainability. As the digital era reshapes governmental operations, e-governance is increasingly recognize the local government administration of the Municipality of Pulilan have seen the great potential of the town to the tourism industry, resulting in the creation of the Municipal Ordinance No. 23-2017 the "Tourism Code of Pulilan" that "aims to develop the tourism potential and resources of the Municipality, ensuring the security, enjoyment and well-being of tourists, and tourism-related business establishments in town; without compromising the integrity, morality, and the general well-being of Pulileños" as essential for overcoming the complex challenges faced by public institutions worldwide. This study is delimited only for the five residents of Pulilan from the private sector and five bonafide residents of Pulilan for a minimum of five years residing at Pulilan, Bulacan. Bureaucratic reform's goal regarding tourism increased tourist attractiveness by analyzing cultural tourism development efforts from public services. It reduces bureaucracy if the private companies will help the government in implementing policies specifically in tourism. Sustainable tourism aims to reduce the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, society and economy, and to enhance the positive impacts.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, E-Governance, Bureaucratic reform

## Introduction

Public administration is involved in many aspects that define the tourism sector and influence its success. Understanding the significance of public administration for the tourism sector can exemplify the ways in which the industry improves its quality as well as its sustainability. By providing necessary services, monitoring economic activity, and managing resources through tourism, public administration ensures effective governance. s a sector focused on goods and services, tourism has the potential to have a positive impact on the economy and society as a whole. E-governance and e-government are different; e-governance refers to the technology-mediated relationship between the government and its citizens, while e-government provides routine information and allows ordinary transactions between the government and its citizens through electronic means (Bilquis M. 2018). As the digital era reshapes governmental operations, e-governance is increasingly recognized as essential for overcoming the complex challenges faced by public institutions worldwide (Inakefe GI, et al. 2023). Despite these challenges, e-governance offers significant opportunities for improving public administration efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Public Organ Rev. 2021).

As in Public Administration, it recognizes tourism as a vehicle for social connection, opportunities, and community empowerment. The strong link between public administration and tourism has an increasing interest that may help to sustain tourism development (Trousdale, 1999). According to the Department of Tourism (2024), there are a total of 1,405,814 visitor arrivals as of April 1, 2024, where most of the visitors came from East Asia, Korea in particular. This may be attributed to the warm weather of the country relative to their countries of origin. Thus, it gave birth to the “Tourism Act of 2009”, also known as the Republic Act 9593 that was approved on May 12, 2019: “An Act declaring a National Policy for Tourism as an engine of investment, employment, growth and national development, and strengthening the Department of Tourism and its attached agencies to effectively and efficiently implement that policy, and appropriating funds therefor”. The significance of tourism as stated in the general provisions of Republic Act 9593, Section 2, paragraph 2 “recognizing sustainable tourism development as integral to the national socioeconomic development efforts to improve the quality of life of the Filipino people, providing the appropriate attention and support for the growth of this industry”. According to Bulilan (2020), tourism is a major global industry. Governments in developing countries have developed tourism as a means for economic progress. The role of the government is crucial in making tourism beneficial for local people. The traditional functions of government involve crafting legislation and regulating tourist activities in local destinations. The business and marketing aspects of tourism are often entrusted to the private sector. Today, local governments are directly involved in the tourism business. Tourism sector is considered as one of the fastest-rising industries and a major contributor to the Philippines' gross domestic product. According to Coutinho and Nobrega (2019), tourism governance in tourist destinations has been a widely debated topic in the literature and despite advocating several benefits, studies demonstrate gaps in its constitution. It is understood that in a context of seeking sustainability in tourist destinations, it is necessary to know how to manage them, considering their weaknesses. The local government administration of the Municipality of Pulilan have seen the great potential of the town to the tourism industry, resulting in the creation of the Municipal Ordinance No. 23-2017 the “Tourism Code of Pulilan” that “aims to develop the tourism potential and resources of the Municipality, ensuring the security, enjoyment and well-being of tourists, and tourism-related business establishments in town; without compromising the integrity, morality, and the general well-being of Pulileños”. Community-based tourism initiatives emerge as vital for empowering local communities, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable practices (Moreno, 2023). According to Badurina and Frleta (2021), efficient, transparent, and participatory local tourism governance should envisage mechanisms for the active involvement of residents in tourism-related decision-making at the local level. Public consultation is an appropriate means for engaging the public in policy-making and opening up opportunities for every citizen to have their option in following various governance processes. The collaboration of government and citizens as a form of public consultation is a process of strengthening the capacity to build sustainable cooperation among various interest groups (Retno and Asra'i, 2018). According to Anacan (2021), it may be beneficial to the residents in every municipality. Residents should have an awareness and deeper understanding regarding the tourism destinations and a deeper engagement in the development and familiarization process. This approach ensures that tourism development is sustainable, beneficial, and enriching for both residents and visitors.

Additionally, Johnson and Smith (2018) highlights the importance of stakeholder collaboration in promoting community involvement, fostering social cohesion, and supporting the long-term sustainability

of tourism initiatives. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership among community members, empowering them to actively participate in shaping tourism initiatives that directly impact their lives.

### Statement of the Problem

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions.

1. How will the implementation of the tourism program in the Municipality of Pulilan contribute to the lives of residents?  
Stakeholders Collaboration
2. What are the challenges faced in local tourism that Pulilan, Bulacan encounter in terms of implementation?

### Theoretical Framework

#### Social Exchange Theory

It indicates that a destination's ability to successfully build its tourism industry is influenced by the good perception and attitude of its citizens toward tourism. Social exchange theory provides the greatest explanation for why positive impressions and attitudes among stakeholders typically result in real support, partnership, and collaboration. The Social Exchange Theory (SET) is considered a significant tool to be adopted in this undertaking in understanding the perceptions of local residents in a host community. The SET is considered the most suitable framework in understanding residents' perceptions of the impacts of tourism (Nash, 1989; Ap, 1990, 1992; Allen, Hafer, Long & Perdue, 1993). The modern social exchange theory has evolved from the works of Homans (1961), Blau (1964), Levi-Strauss (1969) and Emerson (1972). It is a general sociological theory that aims to comprehend how resources are exchanged in an interaction setting between individuals and groups. It is believed that interactions constitute a process in which participants give valuable resources tangible or intangible benefits to one another. The SET suggests that residents are likely to support tourism developments, as long as perceived benefits are greater than the perceived costs. Skidmore (1975) argues that by nature. Thus, individuals are pleased to take action primarily due to anticipated good returns. This principle about the nature of human beings underpins the theory of social exchange. Setting performance goals in addition to utilizing SET is essential for a successful performance management program in tourism governance. The public's performance will improve if the tourism governance receives insightful input regarding their targets' progress. It involves pointing out to someone where they still need to make improvements.

### METHODOLOGY

This study is delimited only for the five residents of Pulilan from the private sector and five bonafide residents of Pulilan for a minimum of five years residing at Pulilan, Bulacan. This study is qualitative research and will use a purposive sampling method to gather the data. The research instrument that will be utilized is an interview provided among the residents of Pulilan, Bulacan.

The researchers used a qualitative approach to gather reasons and knowledge. Qualitative research prioritizes understanding the meanings people assign to problems, rather than simply measuring them. This method allows research to be flexible, with questions and approaches evolving as the study progresses, (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative research method is a subjective approach to data collection and analysis that includes observations and interviews. The process comprises gathering and analyzing non numeric data such as texts, videos or audio to comprehend the ideas, feelings and experiences. It is

possible for it to get a more profound understanding of a problem or generate additional areas for research, (Bhandari, 2020). It also provides the opinions or insights of the respondents, and it will serve as the main information for this study.

### **Sampling Plan**

The researcher used a non-probability sampling technique in which “not all members of the population have a chance in participating in the study. Non-probability sampling encompasses a diverse set of techniques where research participants are selected through non-random processes, and it relies on the researcher's judgment or specific criteria to curate a sample.

This sampling method depends heavily on the expertise of the researchers. It is carried out by observation, and researchers use it widely for qualitative research (QuestionPro Survey Software, 2024). This method of sampling is considered less expensive, less complicated and easy to apply as compared to its counterpart (Showkat, et. al, 2017).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to conducting the research, the researcher asked the respondents' permission to be involved in the research study. Participation was voluntary thus, all respondents were not forced to participate and were given complete consent before any data-gathering procedure. Respondents also had the right to refuse participation at any time if they would choose to do so. All information including the data from questionnaires and personal information of selected respondents will be kept confidential to non - authorized people. Being biased is also not tolerated and not approved. All work will be done efficiently and accordingly, thus, the paper will not show any misleading and deceitful information.

## **Results, Analysis and Discussion**

### **Implementation of Tourism Program, Tourism Officials**

The implementation of the tourism program in Pulilan would then depend upon a spirit of collaboration - bringing in many different stakeholders, it would, therefore, be lively and sustainable. In doing so, it transcends mere attracting visitors and has a tendency to empower communities, enhance cultural heritage, and balance the sharing of tourism.

### **Tourism Officials, Promotions**

Promotions are what make tourism programs successful by forming a bridge between the offer and the potential tourist. They raise awareness of the program through various channels, raise interest by pointing out something unique, and push people to book by emphasizing value propositions. Good promotions build brand loyalty, which gives repeat visitors and word of mouth. In addition, the strategies are adapted to changing market dynamics with the possibility of targeting very specific demographics and emerging interests in travel.

**Respondent 1** states that *“Usually, when there is collaboration with a private entity, there's always promotions, of course our skills also increase because we learn how to work with private entities. So when it comes to promotion, of course the private entities have really strong marketing skills because they have hired marketing professionals.”*

Tourism promotion means trying to encourage the actual and potential customers to travel to a destination through the spreading of information. Promotion is one of the most effective marketing mix elements used in marketing a tourist product.

### Tourism Officials, Public Participation

Public participation is essential in making a tourism program successful because it makes the whole development process respond to community needs and desires. Engaging local residents in planning encourages tourism programs to capitalize on their knowledge and experience for ownership and responsibility purposes and to enhance community support.

**Respondent 1** states that *“That's actually a good question, because when we do programs, of course, we always consider evaluation. So, the evaluation has many sources. The public opinion, those on Facebook, those online, those who send messages to us. We validate them, because even if you say it's a simple bashing, they have a point of view from which and why that is what they feel. Second one of course, among us, what are the activities that are somehow still relevant or somehow not effective?. Third, what is the stakeholders' feedback, those who have become our partners, what are they seeing that could've been done better. It's always like that, because there is no perfect activity, there is always room for improvement. So those are our three sources where residents can take an active participation.”*

The view of the locals must be taken into consideration so that it will aid attain a worthy decision making process and manage resources competently and effectively (Prabhakaran et al., 2014).

### Private Sector, Programs

Zheng et al. (2021) believed that tourism programs do help to increase people's knowledge of the places they visit and that the frequency of transmission or the number of times they are received will be crucial in influencing people's desire to travel to tourist areas.

**Respondent 3** states that *“We have a semi-participation there. For example, when there's a fiesta, I think Pulilan is known for our big festival, right? So, we have a Mandala Art Festival which as you can see, we put it here when you enter. That's one of our participations or sometimes in our CSRs or in contributing to the fiesta where we have our own club. So, those are our engagements.”*

Zheng et al. (2021) discussed that the tourism program makes use of the existing local resources and presents the dazzling tourism characteristics of the local area through a single video or explanation, or even a mix of them so that the public can have a deeper understanding of the local characteristics.

### Implementation of Tourism Program, Local Residents

The implementation of Pulilan's tourism program would also depend on the active engagement and satisfaction of local residents in it. Tourism officials, when they address the concerns, enable the locals to participate in this program, and also bring equitable benefits of tourism to their places, can create sustainable, thriving tourism industries both to the community and visitors. According to Anacan (2021), it may be beneficial to the residents in every municipality. Residents should have an awareness and deeper understanding regarding the tourism destinations and a deeper engagement in the development and familiarization process. Tourism has the opportunity to bring the local communities together.

**Respondent 3** states that *“There are forums and surveys for residents to give feedback. For example, they added local handicrafts to tourist markets based on human suggestions.”*

A community forum and surveys becomes an opportunity to engage citizens in learning about a local issue and offering thoughtful opinions and suggestions about how a problem might be solved. Therefore, opportunities to involve people in local environmental concerns must offer clear and useful information, clarify any misunderstandings, respond to their inquiries, offer different degrees of engagement, and allow them to participate in decision-making without feeling ashamed or powerless.



### Tourism Officials, Reduce Bureaucracy

Bureaucratic reform's goal regarding tourism is to increase tourist attractiveness by analyzing cultural tourism development efforts from public services. It can reduce bureaucracy if the private companies will help the government in implementing policies specifically in tourism. Sustainable tourism is a concept that aims to reduce the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, society and economy, and to enhance the positive impacts. However, the implementation of sustainable tourism is not an easy task, as it faces various barriers at different levels and scales (Bramwell & Lane, Citation 2011). There is a need to foster tourism development that respects the future generations, the natural resources and the local communities (Insch, Citation 2020).

**Respondent 3** states that *“These benefits may include a more streamlined approach for project implementation, reduced bureaucracy and more sustainable practices.”*

Finally, there is the excess of bureaucracy, which is pointed out by several authors as one of the main causes of barriers to the implementation of sustainable tourism (Dodds & Butler, Citation 2009; Hatipoglu et al., Citation 2016). The authors emphasize that the complexity of bureaucratic processes can hinder the adoption of sustainable practices, as well as the implementation of policies and regulations necessary to promote sustainable tourism. The lack of clarity and delay in bureaucratic procedures can discourage entrepreneurs in the tourism sector from adopting sustainable measures. On the other hand, the respondent states about the streamlined approach, this approach is a method that focuses on simplicity and efficiency to achieve a desired outcome more effectively. It involves identifying and removing unnecessary or repetitive steps in a process to increase productivity, reduce waste, and improve efficiency. In tourism governance, streamlining plays an important role since it can increase efficiency, cut down on duplication, and boost revenue. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) objective 8.9 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to "develop and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products." With their emphasis on fostering sustainability, lowering inequality, and guaranteeing long-term gains for all parties concerned, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are needed in the tourism industry.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The implementation of the tourism program in the Municipality of Pulilan improves the lives of its residents through its contribution to an amiable working environment among the local business entities, community organizations, and government offices. By following best practices such as private partnerships and active participation of the stakeholders, this program would not only develop the economy but also advance community involvement and cultural heritage. The Kneeling Carabao Festival, being the most prominent tourism program currently being implemented in Pulilan, is an event that represents how joint planning and implementation can attract people, increase revenue, and create jobs, thus contributing to better living standards of the residents. Instilling community pride and spurring new economic activities in the local setting, incorporating heritage preservation activities and promoting local crafts and farm tourism can be incorporated into a program that would not only portray Pulilan's rich culture and its history but also encourage actively involved participation from residents. In the end, the tourism program becomes a catalyst for community development, making Pulilan a more vibrant and united town that would improve the quality of life for its residents.

The implementation of the tourism program in the Municipality of Pulilan would very much be helpful to

residents to heighten their participation in matters about decision-making, creating pride and ownership in community efforts. With public hearings, consultations, and forums among other mechanisms, the ideas and proposals will directly impact the direction in the tourism efforts. The engagement of residents in planning and execution, such as through cultural olympics or promoting local products, increases local identity and economic opportunities. It builds a stronger, more connected community that benefits all the residents by enriching the tourism experience in this inclusive decision-making framework. Furthermore, through the use of social media, attending events, engaging in local tourism councils, and showcasing talents and crafts during cultural programs, residents can significantly contribute to boosting tourism. These collective efforts not only enhance the town's appeal but also preserve and celebrate Pulilan's culture. Encouraging inclusive involvement ensures sustainable growth while creating opportunities for residents to take pride in their culture and share it with a broader audience.

Collaboration is influential for the success of tourism and development programs, as it addresses challenges such as limited funding and resource gaps. By utilizing proper mechanisms, technology, and active stakeholder involvement, collaboration ensures mutual benefits for all parties, including local governments and private entities. It fosters the promotion of local products, infrastructure development, and sponsorship opportunities while preserving cultural heritage and local identity. Ultimately, collaboration not only drives sustainable growth but also enhances community engagement and teaches valuable lessons on resource efficiency and effective management.

The key component of the development and sustainability of tourism has been through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). They harmonize both the public and private sectors and provide the optimal usage of resources by developing infrastructural structures and services that have better innovations. Through PPPs in municipalities such as Pulilan, the overall enhancement of governance and decision-making systems is highly anticipated. Tourism increases cultural and economic growth in support of the livelihood of the community. Community involvement and participation also take center stage in effective tourism development, with the emphasis on local pride for the culture and increasing numbers of locals who are being engaged in the preservation and promotion of tourism resources.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) also play a critical role in the development of tourism infrastructure because it provides an avenue for the funding, implementation, and operation of projects for the betterment of both the public and private sectors. Private sector participation in tourism in terms of investment, eco-tourism, training, promotion, and financial incentives can be viewed as fostering economic growth, employment, and cultural and natural resource preservation. PPPs in tourism require a clear risk allocation, shared responsibilities, and mutual trust between the public and private partners. Training and capacity building will ensure cooperation is effective and that the two sectors are solving problems such as the poorly developed infrastructure, the lack of credit, and even poor promotion.

Local residents participating in tourism development, especially with PPPs, enhances the entire experience of both the visitor and the local community. Local residents' perceptions and quality of life will be the cornerstone of ensuring that tourism development creates mutual benefits to create a sustainable and enriching environment. Such cooperation between public and private entities allows innovation, facilitation of greener practices, and generation of economic benefits contributing to the common good of a community. This involves eco-tourism projects focused on sustainable, nature-based experience without sacrificing natural ecosystem preservation with livelihood alternatives of the local resident.

The Pulilan Tourism Department faces several major challenges in promoting local tourism. Including budget constraints and lack of community participation. This is despite implementing policies consistent

with Republic Act No. 9593, including unregistered businesses. Inadequate cultural heritage documentation and inadequate infrastructure Although seasonal fluctuations and taxation are seen as less important obstacles, But a good marketing strategy infrastructure development and promoting local participation It remains vital to sustainable tourism growth and economic stability in Pulilan, Bulacan.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were considered necessary by the researcher: Stakeholder engagement and collaboration should be improved. This would involve developing a good relationship and effective communication with all stakeholders. There is a need for regular meetings, workshops, and feedback mechanisms. Regular forums must be organized where stakeholders can share ideas, discuss challenges, and come up with solutions together, and online platforms for communication and information sharing must be considered.

Cultural authenticity experience should be promoted. That is to say, one should concentrate on developing the kind of products and services that will really show off the unique culture and traditions of Pulilan. Examples of this can be through traditional arts and crafts demonstrations, cultural performances, and local community interaction for visitors.

The aspect of public consultation and proposals in projects should be intensified. This would include hosting of public forums and consultations towards gathering ideas and proposals about tourism projects from residents. In addition, giving straightforward guidelines on the presentation of proposals, such as qualification criteria, budget, and timelines, should also be considered.

To enhance tourism development in Pulilan, it is recommended to utilize social media for promoting local attractions, encourage residents to actively participate in events and programs, strengthen local tourism councils, and provide platforms for showcasing and selling local crafts and products. Expanding tourism programs, preserving Pulilan's cultural heritage, offering incentives for participation, and fostering collaborations with local businesses and organizations will further boost community engagement and sustainable tourism growth.

To strengthen collaboration in tourism and development programs, it is recommended to establish clear processes for resource management, utilize modern technology to streamline operations, and actively engage stakeholders through inclusive partnerships. Additionally, fostering strong public-private collaborations, promoting cultural preservation, encouraging community participation, and providing platforms for stakeholders to showcase their contributions will ensure sustainable growth and mutual benefits for all involved.

Public-private partnerships (PPP) should be prioritized in using resources and expertise. This is because PPPs drive sustainable tourism through strong collaboration between government agencies, private sector entities, and the local community. A common vision for tourism development, one that is aligned with both local priorities and global sustainability goals, should guide the decision-making and resource allocation. Mechanisms for sharing risk and benefits equitably can help all stakeholders be part of the success of tourism and benefit from it. Capacity building is an investment in enhancing the skills and knowledge of stakeholders in tourism, helping them to apply sustainable practices and innovative strategies.

Consider local residents and implement policies that will benefit the public. Local citizens' significance is not usually taken into account while designing tourism governance. Resident involvement in destination design serves as essential for the future and can be encouraged by workshops, information exchange, and



collaborative strategy development.

Strengthen the collaboration between the private sectors and the community. Strengthening the collaboration between the private sectors would help with the development of the local tourism with the initiatives that could develop sustainable tourism projects, contributing to the growth of the tourism. The community could also participate, strengthening the marketing and promotion of tourism.

The lack of infrastructure as identified as a major barrier to local tourism growth can be addressed through developing comprehensive tourism infrastructure. Investing in modern roads transportation hub visitor center and public amenities can enhance the tourism experience and access to local attractions. Upgrading and maintaining facilities will promote tourism development and support local businesses. Moreover, promoting unique local tourist attractions will help set Pulilan apart from other destinations. By emphasizing cultural attractions, history and unique nature This strategy should maintain tourism demand and improve the overall tourism experience. Following these instructions Pulilan can strengthen the tourism sector. It promotes the local economy and improves the quality of life of residents. Furthermore, promoting local business registration since unregistered businesses reduce tax revenue and hinder the development of the formal tourism sector. Using business registration incentives, such as reduced fees or promotional opportunities. Compliance can be promoted. This measure will improve local governance and ensure better economic governance.

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