

**The Role of Ecological Foundations in Promoting  
Ecotourism and the Challenges Encountered  
in Negros Occidental, Philippines**

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**Abstract**

Negros Occidental is rich in natural resources. The provincial government has seized the opportunity of using these resources to promote ecotourism. The ecotourism is indeed the fastest growing industry in the province; thus, promoting ecotourism is essential. The study sought to describe in detail how an ecological foundation had helped in the promotion of ecotourism in Negros Occidental, Philippines, using a qualitative- case study approach. Data from a series of interviews and written essays were gathered from the key informant. Results revealed six themes, namely, Attributes of Ecotourism; Programs and Projects of the Ecological Foundation; Challenges and Difficulties Encountered; Partnerships and Green Volunteers; Ecotourism Promotions; and Visitors of the Ecological Foundation. The researchers are hoping that through this study, the awareness of biodiversity and concern on the environment will be given more importance to sustainable ecotourism in the province.

**Keywords:** *tourism management, ecotourism, case study, Philippines*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The tourism industry is an essential tool for economic development for developing countries (Mazumder, Sultana, & Al-Mamun, 2013). It can be considered one of the most remarkable socio-economic phenomena of the twentieth century (Neto, 2003). With tourism being more recognized as a real economic opportunity throughout the world, competition among nations and provinces for a share of global tourism investment is increasing by the day (Mulec, 2010). Tourism serves as a tool to foster healthy and locally-driven development in all its dimensions. It is no longer only regarded as a small industry for income generator, creator of jobs, or a socio-cultural phenomenon (Dolezal & Trupp, 2015).

The growth of the tourism industry has significantly changed as the years passed by, moving beyond ideas of economic growth towards the inclusion of social and environmental aspects. Tourism is undoubtedly essential for local, national, and international levels (Aref, 2011). Both Southeast Asia and South Asia are zones with great potential for prosperity and are expected to see further economic growth (Kaiwa, 2017). According to Krüger (2005), the increase of interest in ecotourism can be attributed mainly to the rise of the term sustainability.

Ecotourism is usually viewed and promoted as being consistent with conservation goals because it is a small-scale with limited ecological and social impacts. In contrast, nature-based tourism, because of its more massive scale, is often used to promote national development objectives rather than conservation objectives (Aguila & Ragot, 2014). The state shall establish an integrating system to focus more significant efforts to sustain the viability of ecotourism development in the country (Calanog, Reyes, & Eugenio, 2012). It is said that many governments and non-governmental organizations are eager to develop ecotourism to maximize these benefits (Matthews, 2002).

Besides, restoration is driven by societal values that are often in conflict (Lackey, 2001) and motivated by vague goals (Clewell, A. F., & Aronson, 2006) that fall within the concept of sustainability. The ecological foundation's first advocacy is to educate farmers, students, communities, and civic organizations on the importance of preserving our forests and protecting the wildlife that resides there. Neto (2003) has stated that new approaches to sustainable tourism development in these countries should not only seek to minimize local environmental impact but also give higher priority to community participation and poverty reduction.

It should be considered that the loss of biodiversity is a major environmental crisis the world is facing (Shelar, 2016) and also harmful activities that humans do deprive wild animals of their life requisites by damaging or impoverishing their environments (Paquet & Darimont, 2010). Rapidly expanding the human population, poverty, and lack of opportunities often tend to increase the dependence of people on forest resources, and that is why local communities living in the forests are one of the crucial factors to be considered in ecotourism. Today, the lack of local community enlightenment and awareness towards ecotourism has led to depleting resources (Ojong, Eja, Undelikwo, & Agbor, 2013).

Moreover, ecotourism is a sub-component of sustainable tourism (Kiper, 2013). Sustainability became a popular trend in nowadays life, concerning development and operation, also in the tourism sector (Niedziołka, 2014). Sustainable tourism indicates the supervision of tourism resources in response to economic and social needs, utilizing valuable resources and the environment prudently and wisely (Thavarasukha, 2002), for the improvement of these resources and the development of the situation.

Along with this, it is essential to consider that ecotourism can contribute to the economy in the long term, especially to the local communities due to the well-implemented conservation of natural resources (Mapjabil, Weng, Nor, Ghazali, & Rahman, 2015). Also, ecotourism creates positive economic incentives (Squires, 2013), seeks to educate travelers, helps in providing funds for

ecological conservation, benefits residents, and promotes diversity (Turcu, 2014). All the aforementioned positive impacts boast the natural resources of the Philippines and its biodiverse flora and fauna (Abat-Parducho, 2016).

The United Nations World Trade Organization predicted that ecotourism would become the world's most significant industry in the future. All societies are dared to create strategies to find an equilibrium between social, economic, and environmental impacts on their way towards sustainable progress (Koens, Dieperink, & Miranda, 2009).

Besides, the Southeast Asian countries endowed with improved tourist resources and attractions, which are allowing these countries, the Philippines, for example, presenting comparative advantage than others (Mazumder et al., 2013). Nature preservation is among the top priorities of most members of the international society in the 21st century (Kolahi, Sakai, Moriya, & Majid, 2012). Indeed, the Tourism Master Plan and Philippine Agenda (PA) 21, a sustainable tourism development framework, was prepared by the Department of Tourism in 1998, providing for ecotourism as a form of tourism that can sustainably use natural and cultural resources while providing employment opportunities for local communities (National Ecotourism Steering Committee Group and Ecotourism Technical Working Group, 2002).

In particular, the ecological foundation covered in this study is a non-government conservation group established in 1986 that is involved in the conservation of threatened endemic species and their habitats in Negros Island. The foundation receives financial assistance from Melbourne Zoo and Rotterdam Zoological Society. In addition to the maintenance of a captive breeding facility, the foundation conducts a community educational program and reforestation activities of the Bacolod hills (Maala, 2001). One of the main goals of the foundation's projects is to conduct a complementary field-based study into the habitat requirements and ecology of the species currently included in the foundation's captive breeding program, the objective of which is to produce guidelines for

active forest management to aid in-situ conservation of specific species (Turner, Ledesma, Maunder, & Raines, 2002).

Therefore, based on the role of the ecological foundation, the researchers hope to enlighten tourism key players on the advocacy of promoting ecotourism in Negros Occidental, Philippines.

### **Objective**

The study sought to describe the role of the ecological foundation in promoting ecotourism and the challenges encountered in Negros Occidental, Philippines.

### **Framework of the Study**

In light of the role of ecological foundations in promoting ecotourism, the study was patterned to the work of Seifi and Ghobadi (2017). They emphasized that the primary goal of the environmental protection organizations is to protect the nature and also to establish frameworks and regulations concerning the presence of people in nature and to put a limit on their influence and intervention in it to minimize exploiting the environment by humans (Fennell & Eagles 1990).

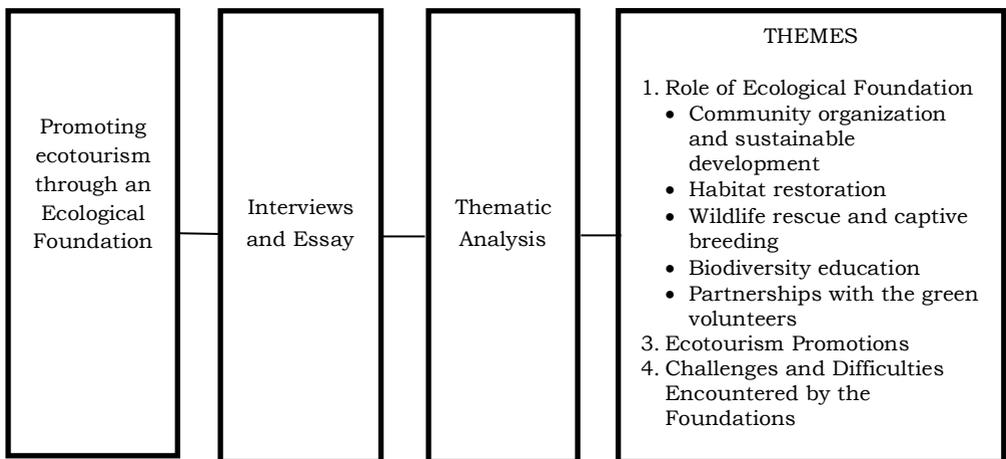
In the same way, the non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are assuming an increasingly important role through formal and informal political lobbying, buying or covenanting land for conservation; and forming partnerships to undertake specific conservation projects (Buckley & de Vasconcellos Pegas, 2014). Establishing conservation-oriented ecotourism enterprises is one such approach. These enterprises aim to switch land and resource use from consumption to conservation and to resist external threats such as large-scale land-use change associated with primary industries (Romero-Brito, Buckley, & Byrne, 2016).

Tourism is a vital management issue for many protected areas, as the actions and presence of visitors can present severe problems for biodiversity conservation. Therefore tourism industry has to be managed with care, and site managers must assess and balance the costs and benefits of tourism (Candrea & Ispas, 2009).

Clearly, ecotourism is said to be the leading concept in the country's development strategy (Koens, Dieperink, & Miranda, 2009), and the environment is the basis for economic and social development; wildlife and other biological resources make a significant contribution to the well being of humanity. Accordingly, ecotourism aims to extend positive impacts through a particular focus on conservation, providing benefits to host communities and education to visitors (Wickramasinghe & Takano, 2009) utilizing promoting sustainable tourism to them.

Besides, ecotourism generates income for conservation programs and economic benefits for communities living in rural and remote areas (Drumm & Moore, 2005). Ecotourism supports community development by providing an alternate source of livelihood to the local community, which is more sustainable (Kiper, 2013).

A model was developed and shown in the diagram below:



The first theme of the study is the role of the ecological foundation, which is divided into five sub-themes, namely: community organization and sustainable development, habitat restoration, wildlife rescue, and captive breeding, and biodiversity education, and partnerships with the green volunteers. The second theme explained the ecotourism promotions, and the third theme narrates all the challenges and difficulties encountered by the ecological foundation.

### **Scope and Limitation**

The range of this study covered the concern of the researchers on seeking how an ecological foundation gave awareness to the people of Negros Occidental about the importance of biodiversity and ecotourism. The conversation partner participated in three series of recorded interviews and written essays, which was administered at the ecological foundation in Negros Occidental.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design and Approach**

The study design involved the utilization of qualitative research methods in addressing the research objective. Qualitative research includes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, and this means that qualitative researchers analyze things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them (Lincoln, 2005).

In addition to this, the case study method of research was used and utilized. According to Yin (2009), a case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events - such as individual life cycles and organizational and managerial processes. According to Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, and Sheikh (2011), the conceptually-related case study approach can be used, for example, to describe in detail the

organization processes and organizational operations, to explore professional attitudes, and to investigate contemporary phenomena within its real-life context.

### **Key Informant and Inclusion Criteria**

The data were taken from one key informant who met the following inclusion criteria: a Filipino Citizen, male, 60 years of age, and is the manager of the ecological foundation for more than 30 years.

### **Data Gathering Instrument and Materials**

The researchers provided possible guide questions on how the ecological foundation promotes ecotourism for a recorded face-to-face interview and a written essay. The data were transcribed, analyzed, recoded, clustered, and finalized using the spreadsheet.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The information that researchers took was from the written essay and series of face-to-face recorded interviews with the key informant. Also, the key informant was requested to write about the knowledge and experiences in the roles of the ecological foundation in the community in general.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The researchers provided the informed consent form, which stresses that participants should not be subjected to harm in any way whatsoever. Respect for the dignity of the study informant was given the utmost attention, and full consent was obtained from the key informant before the conduct of the study.

### **Trustworthiness (Ensuring the Quality of the Findings)**

Trustworthiness consists following components: (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c) confirmability; and (d) dependability.

**Credibility.** According to Holloway and Wheeler (2002), credibility refers to the self-esteem that can be placed in the verity of the research findings. Member checking was used for improving the quality of qualitative data. In this study, the researchers continually went back to the conversation partner for verification of the analyzed and interpreted data. Aside from the formal interviews, the researchers visited and spoke with the conversation partner several times for clarifications and questions about the data that had been gathered in a written essay and a series of interviews. Then, the researchers evaluated and confirmed the accuracy of the data.

**Transferability.** According to Anney (2014), transferability refers to the result of the research paper if it can be transferred to another context with other respondents. The researchers used purposive sampling for making sure the transferability of the quality of the findings. Purposive sampling is the technique used in naturalistic inquiry studies and defines as "selecting units based on the specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions" (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This technique helped the researchers focus on the crucial informant, who is particularly knowledgeable of the issues under investigation (Schutt, 2006). In this process, the researchers asked for the profile of staff of the management from the gatekeeper of this study. After discussing with the gatekeeper of what this study was all about, the gatekeeper then recommended the manager of the ecological foundation to be the researchers' conversation partner. The recommendation by the gatekeeper for the researchers' conversation partner is based on work experiences, specifically on the management and operations of the ecological foundation for conserving and protecting the forests and wildlife of Negros. Based on the profile provided, the researchers found the suitability of the ecological foundation's manager to be the conversation partner of this study.

**Confirmability.** According to Tobin and Begley (2004), confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not inventions of the inquirer's imagination, but are derived from the data." For this rigor, an audit trail was used. It includes an examination of the inquiry process

and product to validate the data, whereby a researcher considers all the research decisions and activities to show how the data were collected, recorded, and analyzed. The raw data, interview, and observation notes, documents, and records gathered from the field were kept by the researchers for cross-checking (Bowen, 2009).

**Dependability.** According to Bitsch (2005), dependability applies to the stability of the findings over time. It involves participants evaluating the results, interpretation, and recommendations of the study to see to it that all indicated by the data received from the sources of the study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The researchers used the combination of stepwise replication and the code-recode strategy in conducting the dependability of the study.

### **Procedure for Data Analysis**

Data generated through interviews and the written essay was analyzed using the Braun and Clarke (2006) guide to conducting a thematic analysis, which is divided into six phases which the researchers should familiarize the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes and producing the report.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Environmental foundations can play a unique and constructive role in helping the ecotourism sector mature, with an understanding of the nuanced challenges and enormous potential that ecotourism presents. Private foundations can play a critical function in addressing challenges and realizing ecotourism's full potential (Environmental Grantmakers Association, 2015).

One fundamental goal drove the collection of the data and the subsequent data analysis, and that developing a base of knowledge about how the ecological foundation has helped in promoting ecotourism in the province of Negros Occidental. It accomplishes its objective through the products from the collection

of data. The researchers had come up with seven themes based on the data collected using recorded interviews and written essays. The seven themes were as follows: attributes of ecotourism; programs and projects of the ecological foundation; challenges and difficulties encountered; personal and work experiences; partnerships and green volunteers; ecotourism promotions; and visitors the ecological foundation.

### **Role of Ecological Foundation**

The first theme is concerned with the role of the ecological foundation. It is committed to preserving, conserving, and protecting forests and endangered animals that are endemic only in Negros and Panay Islands. To protect the forests and wildlife, environmental programs and projects were administered, which are; community organization and sustainable development, habitat restoration, biodiversity, and conservation education; and wildlife rescue and captive breeding, for the benefit of forests and wildlife habitat, and the livelihood of local communities.

Sufficient projects in support of the residents contribute to the enhancement of the well-being of the local people and the environment conservation (Ndahimana, Musonera, & Weber, 2013). Environmental protection is the core content of ecotourism development (Wang, Zhong, Zhang, & Zhou, 2014). While some ecotourism projects can support such claims of environmental protection, many of these ecotourism projects do not generate the same benefits ecotourism is intended to provide and failed to address some fundamental issues. Buchsbaum (2004) stated that when programs and projects for ecotourism are poorly planned and implemented, ecotourism can quickly turn economic gains into social and environmental disasters.

Moreover, Turcu (2014) stated that responsible ecotourism includes programs that reduce the negative features of the environment and improve the aesthetic integrity of local people.

### **Community Organization and Sustainable Development.**

The ecological foundation does not only focus on the protection and

conservation of forests and wildlife of Negros Occidental, but local communities are also given attention using the “Community Organizing and Sustainability Development” program.

Theorists maintain that ecotourism can offer opportunities for local communities to benefit from tourism and the environment while minimizing undesirable effects (Ondicho, 2012). Many people view ecotourism as a viable and reliable way to protect the natural environment and create benefits in the aspects of social and economic, for local communities (Buchsbaum, 2004). Environmental education provides experiences, knowledge, and skills that are essential to become successful community leaders, as well as making intelligent decisions about the management of their natural resources (Reilly, Petrillo, & Demchik, 2008).

Helping local communities may lessen their social problem and could enjoy the risen of their standards of living. The key informant said:

*“So, community organizing and sustainable development are focused on capacity building for the local community. Because of these people, they are considered to be marginalized. They suffer poverty; they have a social problem”.*

*“As to the problems with forests, we educate upland communities. We organize them and then teach them how to grow our native trees or indigenous trees; we call that endemic”.*

Livelihood education and environmental lectures encourage local communities to be empowered by their skills. The key informant stated that:

*“We provided them education, values education. Give them more self-confidence, empowering them that they could decide amongst themselves”.*

*“And then we teach communities for their livelihood. We show them, and we train them on how to grow vegetables, and on how to grow fruit-bearing trees”.*

*“Like for example, if these are groups of farmers, they should plant fruit-bearing trees. And then we now have trees which could provide us shades, for watershed and we have now trees that could bear fruits that could be harvested, and even wildlife, wildlife could also benefit.”*

*“Aside, of course, that we teach them on managing the nursery. These are nurseries for the plant so that they could also utilize this as a planting material during tree planting activities for the restoration program that we have”.*

*“And of course, at the community level, we teach them how to manage and how to grow indigenous trees species. These are being used as planting materials for our restoration program in the watershed rehabilitation and also in the forest conservation program”.*

Empowering and organizing the local communities could enable them to bridge themselves as partners of the ecological foundation and the local government agencies of Negros Occidental in protecting the forests and conserving the wildlife habitat.

*“Guide them to do things that just not to confine in their home and their community. And then give them opportunities to interact with other agencies and government officials”.*

*“So these are the things that can benefit not only the farmers (of our local communities), but it can also benefit wildlife; it could also benefit the environment.”*

A large part of the literature analyzing the links between biodiversity conservation and community development assumes that nature-based tourism managed by indigenous communities will result not only in the conservation of natural resources but also in increased growth (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). Although poor access and remoteness of some communities often limit their access to the services of development partners/agencies and inadequate options often “force” rural people to exploit resources in unsustainable (Kuuder, Bagson, & Aalangdong, 2013).

An example of these is cutting down trees, which some communities are still doing as their primary source of livelihood. This unsustainable way of living leads to the damage of the environment, more specifically to the wildlife habitat that the forests have. Therefore, an alternative source of livelihood and environmental lectures should be educated to the local communities. Moreover, sustainable livelihood reduces the poverty of society.

**Habitat Restoration.** “Habitat restoration” is a frequently used term that appears in a variety of areas. The term covers the universal topic of restoring ecosystems for the particular purpose of providing habitat—either for the individual species or for the complete suite of species likely to be found in an area (Miller & Hobbs, 2007). Conserving biodiversity is a central tenet of conservation, in part because of biodiversity influences ecosystem functions across terrestrial, freshwater, and marine systems. Biodiversity-ecosystem function relationships have clear relevance for the design of habitat restoration efforts, yet the degree to which biodiversity has been incorporated into restoration practice is unclear (Hughes, Grabowski, Leslie, Scyphers, & Williams, 2017). The key informant stated that:

*“Habitat Restoration is essential to us in modern times. Because we helped in forest protection problems that started in the early 1900s, where most of our forest areas were devastated, we have only at the moment approximately 4.5% forests cover that supposedly the ideal one would be 40 or above percent”.*

*“As I’ve said earlier, our forest is essential. This is a life-support system. Without the forest, all will be affected because forests serve as the source of water - downstream. It will support the water in the rivers, springs, and then people will benefit, agriculture will help, and wildlife will benefit”.*

*“Also, we have a program called the watershed rehabilitation program. So one leading project site that we have undertaken before and even until now is what we called Bacolod City Watershed that is found in Campuestuhan, beside the boundary of Talisay and Murcia.”*

New programs and projects by the ecological foundation, both in the Northern and Southern Negros, are on the plans of the manager and the ecological foundation’s associates.

*“I am conceptualizing new projects in the south (Southern Negros Occidental), what we will call “The South-Western Negros Forests.” It is located mainly in Cauayan, Sipalay, and Hinobaan. The last frontier of the Negros Island where patches of forests remain.”*

*“According to reports and validated information, there are still several warty pigs, spotted deer, hornbill, sparrows that exist in that small, scattered, and patches of forests.”*

*“That’s why I am conceptualizing a proposal that hopefully, this could be approved, that in the South-West island of Negros, will be protected, the forests and then the mini-forests. And eventually, this could be shed off; and it could be declared as a protected landscape with protected wildlife habitat or protected area”.*

*“Aside from that, we also have The Northern Negros Natural Mounts; those are Mt. Mandalagan, Mt. Silay. It consists of eleven cities and municipalities around, from San Carlos down to Don Salvador, Murcia, Talisay, and then goes to the North, Cadiz, and Sagay. So we need to secure these remaining forests covered. Because if not, these might be gone”.*

Around the world, restoration and protection of the environment form the foundation of long-term conservation strategies for threatened species recovery (Barnas, Katz, Hamm, Diaz, & Jordan, 2015). In many countries, protected species laws require improvement and management plan to incorporate habitat restoration (Bottrill et al., 2011). The province of Negros Occidental is mostly composed of forests. These are one of the treasures that people of Negros Occidental should be taken good care of to reduce the forest problems and wildlife disturbances.

Concern on this matter should be given attention to the development and protection of Negros’ forests and the wildlife that live there. The ecological foundation is engaged in protecting, conserving, and preserving the environment and safeguard the sustainable use of Negros Island’s natural resources. The organization, as mentioned above, dramatically helps in minimizing the forest problems and wildlife disturbances that both people and nature could create.

**Wildlife Rescue and Captive Breeding.** More than other types of tourism, ecotourism uses wildlife and habitats as essential resources and involves protecting and preserving areas (Choi, Song, Kim, & Lee, 2017). Recovery plans and preservation intended for the well-being of endangered species around the world, including the US Endangered Species Act (ESA), rely on habitat assessments for data, conclusions, and planning of short and long-term management strategies (Barnas et al., 2015).

According to the key informant, there is still wildlife including, several warty pigs, spotted deer, hornbill, and parrots that

are found in the small patches of the forests in Southern Negros. These animals are living in the woods without getting special protection and conservation to live healthily. The animals could get help through the wildlife and rescue program that the ecological foundation's management is doing. The stated plan helps the species to have a chance to survive, to be away from injury, or to be captured by hunters.

The key informant explained that:

*“Wildlife rescue and captive breeding is one part of the programs that we have because there are instances when wildlife has suffered from an injury, or captured by the hunters. So we have to do this (program) just for the sake that a particular species that can have a chance to survive.”*

*“Part of the program that we have is the release program. We’ll be releasing them back into the wild when the appropriate time comes.”*

*“Before, people are allowed to disturb the animals because no one is protecting them from harm. But now, they’re (people) not allowed, and nobody’s allowed to interrupt these animals because it might cause the animals to transfer to some other places if further disturbed now and then.”*

*“So one of the recommendations that we have done before is to commit these animals, that they will feel comfortable even there are people around enjoying the site.”*

*“There are what we call protocols or requirements to comply. So, although there are candidate sites, and yet there are still a lot of things to consider and preparations. So one of them is the forest itself. Is it healthy? Is it enough? Is it favorable to release the animal on that particular site? Are the communities*

*around ready to accept that there is a crucially releasing of endangered animals on the site? If the community's not ready, it might be endangered again for that particular animal. That's why it needs a lot of preparation”.*

The fast pace of tourism development throughout the world is causing untold damage to some of the most endangered ecological systems, and the environmental conservation is increasingly occupying an important role in ecotourism (Blangy & Mehta, 2006). With the number of endangered species in rescue centers rising, scientific reports on the functioning and success of such centers are essential (Moore, Wihermanto, & Nekaris, 2014).

Together with the ecological foundation's management, partners, volunteers, and the communities living near the forests are once again, have roles in the protection and conservation of animal species for the success of the protection and conservation of the endemic endangered animals of the province of Negros Occidental. Thus, ensuring the sustainability of having functional biodiversity in the area.

**Biodiversity Education.** Biodiversity education often represents a very high-quality science education. The primary focus of biodiversity education was to create knowledge, interest, and necessary skills to solve various biodiversity problems regarding the local context (Ramadoss & Poyyamoli, 2011). Most of the endemic plant and animal species that are dependent on forest ecosystem health are at risk owing to degradation and habitat loss (Squires, 2014).

The importance of protecting biodiversity has a lot of benefits, especially to the people, and these significances could only be communicated through biodiversity education. This program needs the participation and volunteers of all people.

*“That is why this is one of the leading programs that we are doing. That's why we are calling volunteers to help- us. Calling people starting from a young age, elementary to high school, college or*

*even professionals, even civic groups, and individuals. We could not do this just alone. The government could not do that alone.”*

The importance of biodiversity was also briefly discussed.

*“It (Biodiversity) attracts many visitors. That’s why we are educating biodiversity because, during the past several years, it was not then being given so much importance.”*

*“What will be the effect if these endangered animals and our forest will start to lose? Yes, of course, it will affect the endangered animals.”*

*“Biodiversity is significant. Without biodiversity, ecotourism would be worthless. So, biodiversity certainly has to be taught to people starting from a very young age, or we have to tell people about how important they are. But then without those trees there in the forests, it will be nothing. That’s why biodiversity conservation education is necessary.”*

It is necessary, both to give children early experiences of biodiversity in nature and to consider students’ initial ideas in teaching for lifelong learning and a sustainable future (Helldén & Helldén, 1970). According to Squires (2013), habitat conservation remains the centerpiece of biodiversity conservation. Therefore, the more knowledge and education that we have on biodiversity and its impact, the longer the lives of our forests and wildlife will survive.

**Partnerships with the Green Volunteers.** O’Brien, Townsend, and Ebdon (2008) defined environmental volunteering as the engagement of volunteers to achieve environmental gains. A partnership means that people need to make together to achieve a goal while developing trust and a mutually beneficial relationship. It signifies the partnership signifies agreement upon by all of the partners that will be involved, built on the desire to have trust in one

another in managing and developing the organization and based on agreed-upon mutual benefits (Dent, 2006).

The ecological foundation has domestic and international partners, as well as volunteers to support the management. With the help of the corresponding partnerships involved with the environmental foundation, the biodiversity conservation center is successfully running up to this time. Advertising the ecological foundation in foreign lands is also because of the partnership or membership between the ecological foundation and network of International Zoos from around the world. Therefore, building a strong partnership is essential in an organization. Foreign scientists and tourists are also becoming the ecological foundation's partners in conserving the animals and biodiversity. The key informant stated:

*“The wildlife center that we have is a member of the network of international zoos. That’s why many zoos are inquiring or providing us information or even giving us some minimal donations like, for example, \$1000 from one zoo in Europe probably or one zoo from the UK. So it provided us breathings spell where we could also generate some donations out of these group of zoos. And aside from that, there are scientists and the international association of scientists who also help us because they have the concern to conserve these animals.”*

*“We worked with hundreds of volunteers from Europe, especially super headed by the group in the UK. We work with them for eight years. Young scientists, young individuals from London, from Europe come here and then work with us in the forest project. We stayed in the forest for a week, and then studied the biodiversity and conducting a survey. And then some of them, when they return to their places, they communicate with us and then acknowledging us. Some of them come back. Some*

*of them come back for further studies, (and) for further exposure to nature.”*

The government of Bacolod City helps in the management and operation of the ecological foundation, especially in achieving its goals and advocacy for the environment. On the other hand, the ecological foundation also helps in the tourism industry of Bacolod City in many ways, especially in bringing local and foreign tourists to the city. Partnership, collaboration, and involvement of individuals are essential in securing the forest's cover. The key informant explained that:

*“So forests, because it's reducing in its total area, we collaborate with government, local government units, and agencies to do a massive reforestation program. So we are one of the groups who are loving, encouraging citizens to do our part.”*

*“Yes. Green volunteers, including you (students). You have to lend a hand, and you could just feel how happy you are (that) you are also being involved in this kind of conservation work. You can help in slicing and preparing the food for animals. It's a thing that you can gain reward on, that's a personal achievement that you cannot trade.”*

They are also partners of the ecological foundation because they are the ones taking voluntary actions in helping maintain functional biodiversity.

*Even you have to do your part that's only in your school. But you have to go out and be involved even just for one or two or maybe ten trees to plant and then leave it there then after several years, just think that once upon a time, you contributed to the environment.*

Through a partnership, more people, volunteers, and potential partners would come to the province of Negros Occidental

to see the endemic endangered animals that Negros have. The connection and collaboration between different types of organizations can provide previously unimagined solutions (Gray & Stites, 2013). Besides, cooperation within an organization is collaborative; it will be useful if the partners share a strategic vision, pursue compatible targets, and are all equal members in a predetermined organizational structure. Participation in ecotourism draws mixed effects on biodiversity conservation and community livelihoods due to the involvement of varied stakeholders in the design, planning, and implementation of ecotourism projects (Stone, 2015).

Many individuals thought the government should allocate funds to protect and to study biodiversity, and many people perceive a conflict between protecting biodiversity and economic growth. It will be critical to conservation efforts that the locals not only learn to recognize biodiversity but is also aware of the values and reasons in efforts to preserve and protect it. In this theme, the researchers concluded that building partnerships are essential in every organization. The partnership and volunteers should be able to bring together different actors in collaborative action as well as in collaborative efforts to effect change.

### **Ecotourism Promotions**

Promoting an ecotourism site also means educating tourists for one primary reason, and that is to be aware of caring and giving importance to the environment. Through other access that was used in promoting the ecological foundation, it became known to the tourists what the ecological foundation and their advocacy are all about, not just locally but as well as internationally. Promotional strategies such as Facebook page, website, or even posters and flyers can be a helpful way of promoting eco-tourism with the help of several individuals, especially the tour guides, and repeat visitors, and locals.

Importantly, educating through communication using mass media, in this regard, can have a prominent role to play and inform communities (Puja & Amit, 2016). The involvement of the local

communities not only benefits the community and the environment but also improves the quality of the tourist experience. The study of Agarwal, Bhatt, Kapoor, Moutinho, Van Herwarde and Walker (2013) showed that most respondents would be more willing to engage in ecotourism if the government promoted it. Only successful promotion can entice and attract potential travelers to visit the destination (Mulec, 2010).

The promotional strategies about the ecological foundation have stated according to the key informant:

*“Of course, every day, every month, now and then, our visitors are coming here. We also tell them, “Okay, please tell your friends.” We also give flyers; we also give or provide them what do you call that environmental conservation such as materials, templates, and posters to any visitors who comes.”*

With the help of internet websites and tourist destinations maps, the ecological foundation is now one of the tourist destinations in Negros Occidental.

*“One of the visitors last time, I asked him, -Where have you heard about the place (the ecological foundation)?” And he showed me the map he used, and then he’s like “Here.” Because there is a list of sites to you can visit, so it’s up to you where to go, so the center is one of the destinations international for local tourists. There are also cable TV stations that featured us several times.”*

*“The government is promoting tourism or ecotourism because it is one of the main earners or the revenue earner of the government. So this place is one of the tourist destinations.”*

It should be noted that biodiversity education is an efficient way to promote or create awareness about the importance of ecotourism. The key informant stated that:

*“Some schools are requesting us to go to their schools for lectures. Sometimes we are invited to have some talks and presentations on the conservation of our wildlife. We are also sending the invitation to schools, to some companies, and private businesses. So we are one of the groups which are encouraging citizens to do our part. So by disseminating information to students, teachers, visitors, and tourists about the importance of biodiversity, we are making people conscious of the importance of ecotourism.”*

In promoting ecotourism, it is necessary to have effective and efficient tour guides. According to the key informant:

*“The tour guide’s role is to enlighten as long as they are fully-equipped and knowledgeable about their job. First, he has to learn many things; he/she should stock the learnings in his/her “mind-computer” and to continuously practice the learnings. And then one of the tour guides’ role is to give explanations that could captivate the audience as if you are telling a good story.”*

In particular, Rabotić (2010) clearly said that the role of guides in the tourism system is to manage and organize tourist experiences, enhance destination image, and implement the goals of responsible tourism. Tour guiding is one of the essential factors of successful presentation of destinations in contemporary tourism, affecting the resulting economic and social benefits. One opportunity to reduce these negative consequences is by our tour guides, who have the potential to provide to the protection of natural areas in which they operate by educating their customer through interpretation and modeling environmentally appropriate behaviors (Randall & Rollins, 2009).

## **Challenges and Difficulties Encountered**

The ecological foundation is a non-profit organization that relies on donations and sponsors to continue and to maintains its mission; to protect and conserve the forests and endangered species endemic to Negros and Panay Islands.

The financial sustainability of non-profit organizations is one principal factor to be considered as a problem. The scarcity of resources is a common aspect when considering the financial management processes of not-for-profit organizations (Omeri, 2015). Funding the conservation and restoration of forests and wildlife is a challenge in many countries and contexts. According to Secret, Abell, and Berlin (2011), the support for ecotourism perceiving worldwide and international organizations facilitating the development of ecotourism models, and promote the sharing of tools and success models for operators to learn from.

Therefore, the challenges and difficulties encountered by the ecological foundation can overcome with the help of partnerships and volunteers that willingly wanted to help the environment.

The researchers asked the key informant of what are the challenges encountered in managing the foundation, and he specified that:

*“In every organization, there are challenges, there are problems, and there are concerns. One is how to maintain the team financially stable. How can we operate without resources, and then how can we manage the different concerns of the office like communications, water, electricity, building? Then the wildlife center, of course, is a unique destination. We have some partners collaboration with some other conservational organizations which work with us closely, a partnership that they help us running the biodiversity conservation center”.*

*“We have some partners that collaborate with some other conservational organizations which work with us closely. A partnership that they help us running the biodiversity conservation center. Yeah, of course, they assist.”*

Also, one of the challenges that were encountered by the management of the ecological foundation is the disinterestedness by the Filipinos about environmental awareness.

*“Sad to say that a handful of Filipinos are disinterested to help and most of them are not doing their part. These are Filipinos.”*

But despite challenges, setting goals is a must. The key informant said:

*“Goals will propel you to drive more for these to achieve. So this kind of work needs a personal touch, passion, dedication, patience, and everything.”*

But according to the key informant, challenges and difficulties help in the development of the ecological foundation and to conceptualize plans. He mentioned:

*“We still have so many plans. But in every plan, there is what we call resources needed and then power. But then it will not stop us from moving forward. It will not stop us. It will compel us to think about a new horizon, new projects, and new programs.”*

Indeed, the ecological foundation, just like any other organizations, also need resources to operate, more specifically in the financial aspect of the organization. Ecotourism can give direct financial support for nature conservation as well as for local communities where it occurs (Tisdell & Wilson, 2003). For the ecological foundation to continue their advocacy for ecotourism,

people should also consider to help the management and to be a volunteer. The extent of collaboration and cooperation, especially of partners and volunteers, is an essential determinant of the development of a tourism destination (Baggio, 2010).

In general, problems, challenges, and struggles are part of the organization's development. These factors contribute either to the success or the failure of the workplace. But these challenges and difficulties can be overcome with the enthusiastic staff who are willingly giving their time and effort for the sake of helping on the protection of biodiversity in which it includes the forests and wild animals. Overcoming challenges will put one's organization to the next level and move forward, with the full knowledge and active participation of people that surround the ecotourism destinations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provided informative knowledge about the role of the ecological foundation in gaining awareness on biodiversity and its importance in promoting ecotourism in Negros Occidental, Philippines. The promotion of ecotourism, as a whole, and on how the respective biodiversity conservation center helped and provided benefits to a lot of individuals, in particular in the local communities of the province of Negros Occidental, through the programs, projects, and services implemented through the gathered data.

For more than 30 years, the key informant of this study is still willing and motivated on his work to manage and operate the ecological foundation and the forests project sites, despite the challenges and difficulties faced, and especially to the death threats getting by the conversational partner. Willingness, motivation, and dedication to work bring new ideas to create more projects and programs for the development of the ecotourism industry of Bacolod.

Without a doubt, the involvement and participation of all individuals towards the conservation and protection of forests and wildlife is crucial in maintaining sustainable ecotourism.

Partnerships and volunteers help in keeping the organization stable, and to continue the works and services implemented by the management in which all individuals can benefit.

Finally, one way to help in preventing habitat loss in the province of Negros Occidental is being committed on the environmental programs and projects that the management of the ecological foundation is implementing; calling out volunteers to help them in their advocacy and to help restore the forests of Negros Occidental and to rescue the wild and endangered animals. This small but helpful gesture could help save, develop, and improve the ecotourism industry of Negros Occidental.

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