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## GOVERNANCE IN CONTEXT Boracay Island, Philippines

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**Abstract:** Case study research of community tourism planning in the developing world rarely focuses on the combined effects of history, markets, culture, legislation, and politics. This case study of Boracay Island, Philippines suggests that understanding these contextual factors is essential for sustainable tourism development. The research led to the conclusion that better planning based on a broad systematic assessment should be coupled with improved governance to move from knowledge to implementation. Better governance should clearly delineate local, regional and national roles and incorporate community input to mitigate against the adverse effects of tourism development while maximizing benefits. The lessons learned have implications for tourism throughout the developing world. **Keywords:** community development, sustainable tourism, governance, developing world tourism planning, Philippine tourism. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** L'administration dans son contexte: l'île Boracay, aux Philippines. La recherche basée sur des études de cas de la sursupplémentation communautaire du tourisme dans des pays en voie de développement est rarement concentrée sur les effets combinés d'histoire, marchés, culture, législation et politique. Cette étude de cas de l'île Boracay (Philippines) suggère qu'une compréhension des facteurs contextuels est essentielle pour le développement du tourisme durable. On conclut qu'une meilleure planification, basée sur une large évaluation systématique, devrait être ajoutée à une administration améliorée afin d'aller de la connaissance à la réalisation. Une administration améliorée devrait énoncer clairement les rôles local, régional et national et incorporer les idées de la communauté pour mitiger les effets négatifs du tourisme tout en maximisant ses bénéfices. Les conclusions ont des implications pour tous les pays en voie de développement. **Mots-clés:** développement communautaire, tourisme durable, administration, pays en voie de développement, planification, Philippines. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

### INTRODUCTION

On June 30, 1997, the people of Boracay Island, Philippines were shaken by the news from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources that the crystal clear swimming waters off Boracay's internationally renown Long Beach were contaminated with high levels of coliform blamed on inadequate sewage treatment. As a result, the dramatic 100% increase in tourist arrivals between 1995-96 was nearly matched by a dramatic 70% decline in

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the months that followed the announcement (DOT 1997). The livelihoods of residents who had grown dependent on tourism suddenly became imperiled, billions of pesos in capital investments were threatened, and the image of Philippines' tourism suffered (Figure 1).

The announcement came in the midst of the Philippines Department of Tourism's (DOT) attempt to implement a program of sustainable tourism on Boracay. In December 1996, through a partnership with the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI), The Canada-Philippines Cooperative Program on Sustainable Development for Boracay Island began a community-based and participatory approach to local development. The program was predicated on sustainable development principles widely discussed at the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development and highlighted in Agenda 21 (ICLEI 1996). Although there is still debate over the definition and significance of sustainable development, most experts emphasize the need to change human conduct in light of massive global environmental degradation and socioeconomic inequities (Trousdale 1997a). Clearly, change is needed to move tourism towards sustainability, as indicated by its many well-documented adverse impacts (Archer and Cooper 1994; Cohen 1978; Ioannides 1995; Mieczkowski 1995; Pearce 1994; Smith 1989; UNESCAP 1992; WTO 1993). Change in the near term will likely be subtle as the industry largely considers sustainable tourism within the predominant paradigm of economic growth (Nelson, Butler and Wall 1993). From this perspective, sustainable tourism can be defined as expanding development to intentionally improve the quality of the host community, provide a high quality experience for the tourist, and maintain the quality of the environment upon which they both depend (Eadington and Smith 1992; WTO 1993). Paramount in this approach to development is the identification and contribution of a full range of stakeholders (Gunn 1988) and participation by the residents in planning and decision making (Gunn 1994; Hitchcock, King and Parnwell 1993; Innskeep 1991; Long 1993; Pearce 1994) in order to determine the community's

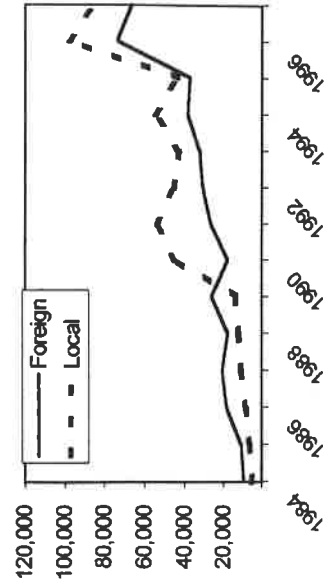


Figure 1. Historical Tourist Arrivals in Boracay. Source: Adapted from DOT Annual Surveys (DOT 1997)

long term interest rather than the limited short term goals of an elite minority (Brohman 1996).

Despite the need for more sustainable development in tourism, there remains a large and growing gap between sustainability doctrine and actual achievement in the developing world. Some of the more salient reasons are highlighted in the work of Morah (1996). He cites nearly a half dozen program assessments going back to 1964, all concluding that implementation and administration were the most significant challenges in developing countries. Similarly, Richter (1989) has identified political and administrative action as a key determinant of the success or failure of tourism. The international development community has recently subsumed politics and administration under the concept of governance, where it is beginning to receive attention. More cash is now being spent by development organizations (such as the World Bank) on creating institutions, improving management skills and building governance capacity (The Economist 1994; Frischtak 1994). Governance is defined as the ability to coordinate the aggregation of diverging interests to promote policy, projects, and programs that credibly represent the public interests. Public involvement, institutional development, transparency of decision making procedures, interest representation, conflict resolution, limits of authority, and leadership accountability are all issues of governance (Frischtak 1994). This case study of tourism on Boracay Island supports the assertion that governance is the critical issue in moving development towards sustainability.

A key consideration in promoting sustainable tourism through effective governance is the development context, including factors such as historical experiences, market forces, sociocultural influences, politics, and legislation. Emphasizing context helps avoid the criticism that many researchers have over-generalized findings assuming that their conclusions are widely applicable (Wall 1993). Therefore, the discussion and analysis in this article revolves around the changes that are taking place on Boracay and how they can best be managed. The research presented here is based on analysis, a review of relevant literature, and broad-based participatory research including over 60 interviews, meetings, and workshops. It satisfies the need for more case study research that examines institutional and organizational development (such as Selin and Beason 1991), a need that is especially important in the developing world. Work highlighting the role of local politics and governance is rare, making this case study of Boracay valuable for other rapidly developing destinations. Understanding sustainable development in the Philippines is especially relevant and important from a regional perspective. Arguably the most democratic nation in Asia, and considering progressive national legislation that gives greater power to the local residents, the Philippines is providing an Asian model for participatory government.

## BORACAY AND TOURISM

Boracay is a small island, only seven kilometers long and slightly over 1,000 hectares (see Figure 2). It is most famous for Long Beach (also known as White Beach), four kilometers of white powder sand gently extending into the crystal blue waters of Sibuyan Sea. It can be accessed by air from Cebu, Manila, and Palawan in less than an hour. Larger planes land in the provincial capital of Kalibo, one and a half hours to the south. Smaller planes land in Caticlan, directly across the strait from Boracay. Sea transport is possible from locations all over the Philippines, and ground transportation is possible throughout the large island of Panay. A short 20 minute pump-boat ride is required to get from the main island of Panay to Boracay.

Boracay naturally evolved as a tourism destination, resulting from the entrepreneurial Filipino spirit infused with European

expertise and tastes in leisure. Initial development regulations suggested by the DOT also helped to foster a distinct ambiance, highlighted by native-style cottages, a healthy 25-meter building setback from the beach and a pedestrian-only beachfront promenade. Today, the result is a unique international tourism destination with many of the original Boracay families, or those who bought land before tourism became popular, still owning small resorts on the island. These typically are a simple combination of an eating area and rooms/cottages. The strong European influence came from those who had visited the island and decided to stay in "paradise." Mostly male, they married or took on Filipino business partners and provided working capital to service the largely European and Filipino market (Nicholson 1997). A special appreciation is required when visiting Boracay, including the experiential subtleties of getting one's feet wet upon arrival (there is no pier on the beach), walking to the sound of roosters, and watching cows graze next to the beach. This scene can be absorbed from a French restaurant serving crepes, a German restaurant serving sausages, or a Greek restaurant serving suvlaki, making this somewhat paradoxical world of Boracay a very special place. However, as growth pressures increase and the quality of the natural environment declines, the "hands off" approach to development that helped to create the attractive ambiance is proving to be a dangerous planning technique.

The DOT considers Boracay Island to be the jewel of the Philippines and the pride of the country's booming tourism sector. Planning is difficult due to a continuum of perceptions about tourism development on Boracay, supporting Butler's (1993) observation that communities rarely have a single unified viewpoint about the industry. At one end are the optimistic who saw an astonishing 100% increase in tourism arrivals to Boracay between 1995 and 1996 (Figure 1) and relish the investment and income that follows this kind of success. More importantly, they believe that the growth can continue far into the foreseeable future. The impacts, they insist, are well under control. As indicated in this article, the major developers who have recently come to the island, many local politicians, and some business interests hold these perceptions. At the other end are those who have become disillusioned with the changes in Boracay. They have thrown up their hands and turned their backs on the "paradise island". They see Boracay as a place consumed with greed—where shortsighted political and business decisions are being made at the expense of the island's unique ambiance (Trousdale 1997c). People are too busy making money to care, they lament. To them, the only efforts being made to save the fragile island ecosystem and vulnerable local community consist of "lip service" and "band-aids" (Trousdale 1997e). They look nostalgically back at a time when friendly people provided food and lodging for only \$3.00 and when they could swim in crystal clear waters or play on the pristine white sand of Long Beach (Nicholson 1997).

Somewhere in the middle of the continuum, there are the hesitant and concerned. They appreciate the special qualities of

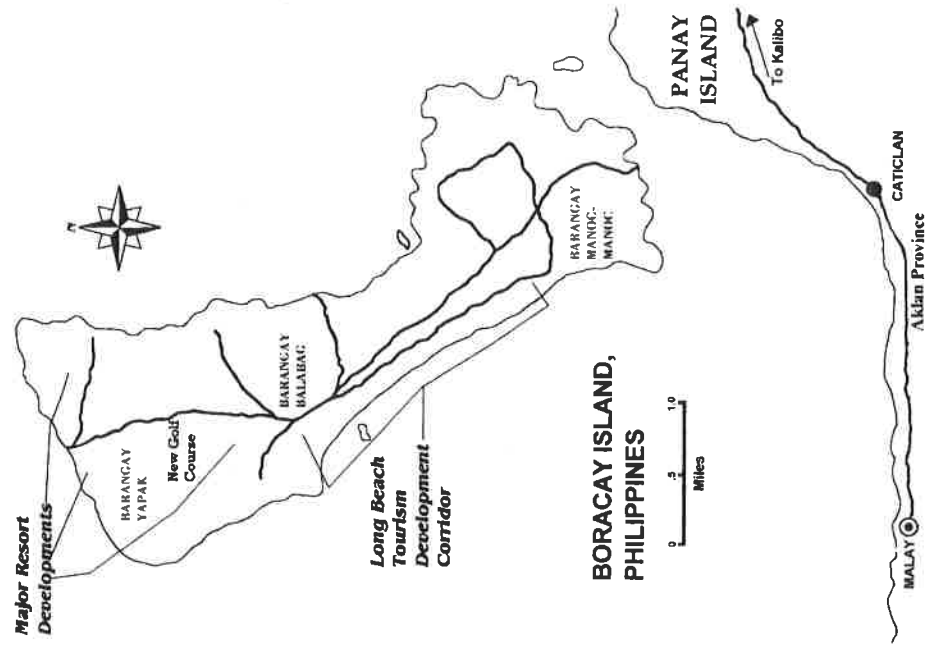


Figure 2. Boracay Island, Philippines

Boracay but see recent trends as harbingers of disaster if dramatic steps are not taken soon. This group believes that Boracay is on the verge of over-development, having already exceeded many indicators to acceptable limits of growth. Still, they are hopeful, arguing that it is not too late for Boracay. Important stakeholders in this group include the highly qualified DOT officials, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Boracay Foundation, a non-governmental organization that represents a part of the business community (Trousdale 1997e). Table 1 reports the views of residents and tourists, which are surprisingly consistent. Regarding attitudes towards tourism induced change on Boracay, there appears to be a great deal of disagreement with only 50% of the residents and 43% of the tourists surveyed indicating that they are happy with the trends. However, there is general agreement among each group (95% of the residents and 86% of the tourists) that Boracay is undergoing rapid change and that there is a need for better control over development (Trousdale 1999). Driving the change is tourism economics.

#### *Economic Considerations*

Before tourism, Boracay was a largely subsistent agricultural community, typical of many other parts of the Philippines. The few local opportunities for cash income came from the sale of copra and fish on the big island of Panay. Like so many other places in the Philippines, local fishing began to suffer due to over harvesting and the degraded coral reef, a result of cyanide and dynamite fishing. In the early 80s the price of copra significantly declined, limiting that economic alternative as well. These experiences combined to make the advent of tourism in the late 70s and early 80s a welcome opportunity (Nicholson 1997).

**Table 1. Resident and Tourist Perception of Boracay<sup>a</sup>**

Residents		Tourists	
Are you happy with the changes (trends) you see taking place on Boracay?			
Yes	50%	No	No
		32%	57%
	18%	Yes	Somewhat
		43%	0%
Do you feel there is a need for more or better control over development in Boracay?			
Yes	95%	No	No
		0%	0%
	5%	Yes	Somewhat
		86%	14%
Should there be a limit set to growth?			
Yes	82%	No	No
		18%	0%
	0%	Yes	Somewhat
		86%	14%

<sup>a</sup> Source: Department of Tourism-Canadian Urban Institute: (1997) survey ( $t=8$ ,  $r=22$ ).

From its inception, the primary factor motivating tourism development in Boracay has been economic: profits, jobs, income, and government revenue. Towards this end, Boracay has done well, as indicated by job growth and in-migration. Before the tourism of the early 80s, Boracay had approximately 3,000 inhabitants. That number has increased at an average annual rate of 7%, reaching 9,000 in 1995 with the tourism industry and support services accounting for all the growth (Malay Municipal Office 1996). Temporary employment from the current construction boom is also a major contributor to the local economy, accounting for between 500 and 1,000 jobs (personal communication with Malay Municipal Planner, 1997). Using government tax revenues as an indicator of economic performance, businesses, and government have clearly benefited, with the three barangays of Boracay supplying more tax revenue to municipal coffers than the other 14 combined (Nicholson 1997). Investment has also been strong. Today, construction is omnipresent along the Long Beach corridor and three multi-million dollar mega-resorts, including a golf course, are being developed in the northern section of island. The excitement surrounding investment has likely been accelerated by the dramatic increase in arrivals between 1995 and 1996 and by the government's solemn promise of increased spending on much needed physical infrastructure. The Boracay Task Force, which is facilitating the development, is a powerful *ad-hoc* committee spearheaded by the Secretary of Tourism and composed of the highest levels of national, regional and local government (bureaucrats and politicians), private sector interests, and The Boracay Foundation. Local residents are represented by the recent inclusion of Barangay Captains (elected heads of villages).

Overall, observers agree that Boracay is better off with tourism than without it (Nicholson 1997; Trousdale 1997b, 1999). These opinions are largely derived from a review of current statistics and general resident surveys suggesting that the positive economic benefits outweigh the adverse sociocultural and environmental impacts. However, the problem with most economic analysis is that it tends to be based on historical trends, aggregate numbers and focus on the big picture while ignoring the individual, minimizing the influence of the environment, and maintaining short analytical time horizons. The problem with boom cycles is that they tend to bust. The stakeholders involved with Boracay should be wary of both issues.

Because a prominent issue on Boracay is sustainability, it is worthwhile to cite observations of anthropologists who have studied the island. They are quick to point out that free market capitalism has not promoted an equitable distribution of benefits (Nicholson 1997; Smith 1989). Much of this is due to the available work force in the Philippines, especially of unskilled workers, that has kept wages down and made them vulnerable to the highly competitive labor market. Unfortunately, most Boracayons have a fairly low level of education and training and must compete with workers coming from elsewhere. Thus, in spite of the increased employment

opportunities and enhanced revenues, low wages and price increases have minimized many potential benefits for those Boracaynons without land, capital or skills.

Equitable distribution of benefits is further exacerbated by another common economic phenomenon, the ever-increasing consolidation of key businesses and control of scarce resources by well-capitalized investors. This can be dramatic as tourism boom cycles begin to level. The typical evolution is graphically displayed in Butler's (1980) tourism area life-cycle. Greater control by fewer business interests, generally from outside the local community, opens opportunities for capital to flee the local or regional economy (as opposed to national or international), and increases chances for exploitation of the environment and host population. Conceivably, consolidation could have benefits, based on the idea that it would be much easier to regulate one or two major development interests on the island than the many small businesses. Of course, this is absurdly hypothetical on the democratic island of Boracay that includes a strong local governance, many local landowners and businesspeople who want to be their own bosses, an historically rooted distrust of large corporations, and the questionable ability of the government to effectively regulate a powerful entity.

Where consolidation has taken place, even on a small scale, the results are discouraging for the host community. One local researcher has pointed out that a single, non-Boracaynon entity owns the main market area. Competition for stalls at the market has caused rents to skyrocket 100% in a year, from P500 (\$15) to

P1000 per month, leaving many of the vendors concerned about the viability of their businesses (Nicholson 1997). There is a fear that they may soon be working at the same stalls, but as employees for less money rather than proud independent business owners.

Of course, that is how markets work, revealing a concern many have with unfettered capitalism in general, and tourism development in particular—that is, capitalism's ability to undermine important community values (Mieczkowski 1995; Williams and Gill 1991). Research has demonstrated that poorly managed capitalism can actually hinder economic prospects, as the Philippines' policies of protectionism designed by and for the economic and political elite—popularly termed “crony capitalism”—have been accused of doing (Richter 1989). The drop in tourism arrivals in Boracay from environmental contamination described at the beginning of this paper is still another example of unmanaged capitalism adversely impacting local economic viability. But capitalism, when used within wisely regulated market and governance systems, is very successful at promoting a higher quality of life at all social levels, the ultimate goal of development (e.g., special training for Boracaynons, priority hiring requirements, environmental protection, and reinvestment strategies). A review of market statistics supports the fact that Boracay has qualities that make it an attractive destination, providing an opportunity to manage economic growth in a way that promotes sustainable development.

#### *Market and Cultural Considerations*

The market statistics on Boracay are revealing. Perhaps most striking is the rapid increase in the number of tourist arrivals. Figure 1 shows that in 1984, only 14,000 arrivals were registered with the DOT. In 1995 that number grew to more than 80,000 and by 1996 reached 172,000. Both domestic and foreign tourists have fueled this growth. In the early days, domestic tourists accounted

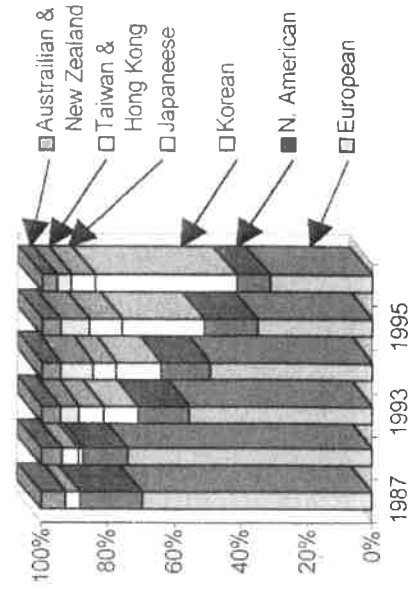


Figure 3. Location of Boracay in the Philippines

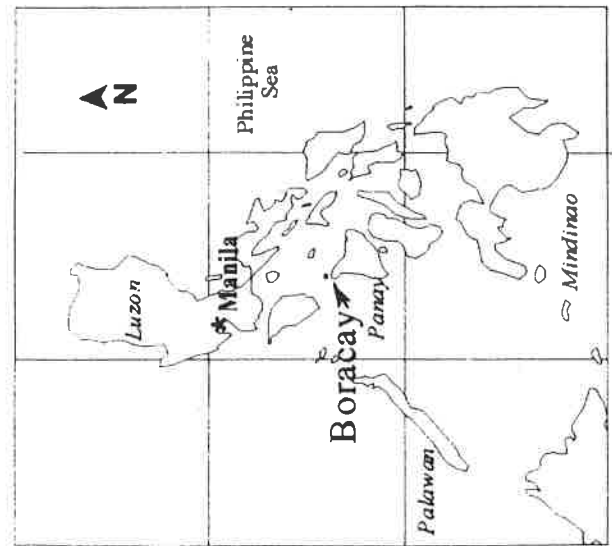


Figure 4. Visitor Distribution for Boracay. Source: Adapted from DOT Annual Surveys (DOT 1997)

for between 30% and 40% of the total. These distinct market segments have proven to be advantageous. The most popular months to visit Boracay are December to May due to the winds and rain that seasonally affect Boracay. A favorite time for Europeans to make holiday excursions is during the Christmas/New Year season of December and January while more Filipinos visit between April and June. The tourist diversity has proved to be a welcome stabilizer in the fickle international marketplace besides dispersing these two important tourist groups to maximize occupancy during the tourist season. For example, in 1990, the domestic arrivals accounted for over 70% of the total, making up for an absolute decrease in foreign arrivals, mostly from the United States, Europe and other parts of Asia (Figures 4, DOT 1997). It is anticipated that Filipino arrivals will continue to provide about half of the arrivals to Boracay as long term domestic incomes rise with increased national prosperity.

An important trend is taking place within the foreign tourist segment. The relative importance of the European countries was diminished while that of the Asian countries, notably Korea, has expanded considerably (Figures 4, DOT 1997). By establishing a strong link with the Korean marketplace the tourist base in Boracay has become more diverse, insulating it against the potential market impacts such as a poor economic performance in Europe or Asia. One main benefit of the Korean and Japanese markets is their local reputation for being willing to spend more money without the trouble of bargaining (Nicholson 1997). It is also important to recognize the Korean market as an opportunity for growth, provided that is what is desired in Boracay. Arrivals from Europe and North America have recently increased at a slow rate (many are expatriates) and provide less opportunity for growth over the long term than the geographically closer Korean market (Figure 4).

However, there are some potential adverse implications from this trend. First, Koreans do not tend to speak English, a common language in the Philippines. Thus, there are fewer opportunities to communicate, minimizing host-guest interaction. Second, the values of the Korean guests tend to be different than the European ones who have a very positive reputation among the Boracaynons (Nicholson 1997). Value-based conflict with Koreans is not unique to Boracay. Although not comprehensive, field research compiled in 34 countries supports the findings in Boracay. This research indicated that local hosts felt the Koreans were often rude and discourteous (McGahey 1994), suggesting that the results are not a gross overgeneralization but reflect a legitimate clash of values and culture. Other studies indicated that Korean (as well as Japanese) tourists are less tolerant of wilderness and ecotourism type activities important to Boracay (such as scuba diving, trail hiking) (Cha, McCleary and Uysal 1995; Higham 1997). They prefer more controlled outdoor experiences (e.g., gardens), and they do not mind crowding as much as European guests. Further, Korean and Japanese tend to be part of group tours and according to resort owners on Boracay, the "mass tourist" on a group tour stays for a

shorter period of time, is reported to be more demanding of the service staff, and is less understanding when things go wrong (Trousdale 1997e). This is in contrast to many of the independent tourists who develop personal relationships and regularly revisit Boracay (Nicholson 1997).

The cultural schism is growing as businesses begin to cater to the new and growing Asian markets (such as Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong). The recent construction of resorts in the Long Beach corridor tend to favor sparse landscaping and high-density exposed concrete structures, generating much informal criticism. Many developers are from other countries in Asia. However, it is important not to get blinded by color or nationality in the review of culture and conflict. The Boracaynons are often described as a relaxed, friendly island people. This sharply contrasts with the aggressive business and political cultures of Manila, Cebu, Iloilo, and other Filipino centers of commerce that have been attracted by the opportunities on Boracay. Here, family, friends and economic interests take on national significance.

It is not just group tours that are having this impact but also the overall shift in tourists to Boracay. Whereas the "backpacker", as the Boracaynons call them, would land in Boracay looking for a good deal, the new brand of tourist has made a reservation in Manila or abroad. The original businesses that sprang up during the backpacker heyday are finding it increasingly difficult to do businesses without a phone and contacts with travel agents in Manila. As some of these original businesses lose market share, they also lose the capital it takes to upgrade and compete (including environmental upgrades such as septic tanks) and may disappear along with the "backpacker" they once serviced. Managers and owners of competitive resorts that use travel agents complain that they do not know who their tourists will be, but must accept them because of the arrangement with the agency. The new guests may be rude or inconsiderate, or bring along a prostitute (1997 interviews with resort owners). Though these resorts are competing, they are losing some control of their businesses and job satisfaction is declining, degrading the overall quality of life for the host community.

Perhaps the greatest change is occurring away from the traditional Long Beach tourism corridor. Three major Filipino developers are introducing large enclave resorts on the northern section of the island (Figs 2 and 3). These developments will more than double the current tourism capacity on Boracay. The impact of these developments on the community and on ecological dynamics is only beginning to be realized. The further consolidation indicated by these large developments, and the lack of development control and infrastructure support, suggest that Boracay is about to reach the stagnation phase of a tourism-area life cycle. Without effective implementation of sustainable development programs, the deterioration of Boracay is unavoidable.



induced efforts of the task force can only address the big problems, as key people like the Secretary of Tourism have an entire country to oversee. By the time another crisis reaches the scale that will force attention, it may be too late. Responsive management is clearly needed, and is being addressed to some degree, in the short term. However, the long term threat to future generations comes from the adverse cumulative effects of development resulting from an absence of day-to-day management of the island. Alone these changes may be insignificant, but combined with other projects or activities they may be unacceptable or even devastating. In slow-moving communities, changes are much easier to handle (Peterson, Chan, Peterson, Constable, Caton, Davis, Wallace and Yarranton 1987), and officials and the government bureaucracy can learn from their mistakes. However, in Boracay the pace of change is remarkable, evidenced by the 200% increase in permanent residents in 15 years and the 100% increase in tourists in one year (DOT 1997; Malay Municipal Office 1996). Because of the pace of change, unregulated, uncontrolled development is overwhelming the physical social and ecological systems. The impacts from development, including cumulative effects, require the increasingly difficult task of instituting consistent, fair, and effective governance.

Local governments and community leaders should take ownership over their problems and the challenges facing the future of Boracay. The community agrees. Residents and tourists surveyed strongly support the need for more control over development and limits to growth Table 1. The tourists are willing to pay. Market mechanisms that would help pay for better management as well as reduce crowding, such as an entry fee, have been proposed. Over 40% of the 172 tourists surveyed said that they are willing to pay a \$5-\$10 entry fee, 15% \$10-\$14, and 11% \$15-\$20 (Trousdale 1997b). The actions of the task force are imperative to slowing the immediate decline of environmental and human health on Boracay, but implementing user fees or bed taxes required to promote sustainability requires continuous administration and effective management at all levels of government. The clear challenge to good administration on Boracay includes a legacy of distrust between residents and government, emanating from a history of DOT's sporadic mismanagement between 1978-91. The situation has not improved since 1991 when national legislation devolved power to the local authority in the Local Government Code.

#### *The 1978-91 Department of Tourism Era*

Management of Boracay under the Department of Tourism has been characterized by three major themes: a concern for the long-term sustainability of the island, a top-down approach, and many unsuccessful attempts to effectively implement plans. As Table 2 highlights, the national government became interested in the development of Boracay 20 years ago. In 1978 the Philippines Tourism Agency was given management control of Boracay when President

Marcos declared the island a tourism zone and a marine preserve through a presidential proclamation. At that time the agency was under the Ministry of Tourism (Marcos used a parliamentary system). When the new constitution was ratified in 1986 after the "people power revolution," the agency was again part of the department and management control of Boracay was subsequently given to the DOT. (For simplicity, the latter, rather than the agency, will be referenced throughout this article.)

The DOT's efforts to manage Boracay revolved around the need to establish development controls and generate a clear vision for the island. As officials with the Department of Tourism conceded, that vision for Boracay generally reflected a tourism ideal that came almost entirely from experts in Manila. When the plans (such as, the Helberg Plan—see Table 2) and implementation strategies were announced to the locals through public hearings, angry debate followed. For example, one round of development plans identified "no build zones" to preserve open space and the natural ambience. While on the surface it seemed like an instance of good planning and met most of the criteria of proper zoning (Forrest 1996), the plan failed to be "reasonable and logical" by ignoring trends and existing uses. The top-down process overlooked important stakeholder groups including people living on the land and investors in the island. Still, the DOT felt justified in implementing these plans based on President Marcos' proclamation that abolished individual titling of the land and declared the government to be the owner Table 2. From this perspective they had plans to relocate residents and those who invested had done so at their own risk, knowing that title was not available and that development would be subject to the decisions of the DOT. However, lack of early inclusion of the residents in the planning greatly concerned original Boracaynons who found themselves squatting on land that had been in their families for generations, and many did not trust the government to find them a new place.

After this top-down approach ran into defiant stakeholders, the department began to listen to local concerns and adjustments were made. An example was the 1984 reduction of the 50 meter setback to 30 meters, including exemptions for existing buildings. While satisfying some concerns, DOT's attempt at reconciliation was viewed as timid and wavering by others who felt there was a need for strict development controls. Especially troubled were those who had respected the 50 meter setback for the previous two years. Confidence in the department was further eroded by a four-year lapse before implementation of their plans was attempted. During this time more developers took advantage of the growing tourism opportunities and an absence of enforcement by violating the setback rule.

The DOT was concerned over adverse impacts of unplanned tourism development and decided to take decisive action in 1988. Demolition crews were sent to Boracay to remove buildings in violation of the established guidelines. Fearing the loss of their question-



ably legal investments, some of the local stakeholders organized and staged protests, culminating in a court injunction banning the demolitions. The outcome was more dialogue, and the formation of the Boracay Development Council. Realizing there was a need for planned development, and that the previous plans were obsolete after the long delay in implementation, the DOT acted in 1990 and hired consultants to produce a master development plan (PROS 1990). The plan produced important concepts regarding the future development of Boracay including the identification of broad environmental and infrastructure requirements necessary to make tourism sustainable. Like earlier plans, this one was idealistic in the sense that some of the recommended land uses ignored existing investments and human settlements. Comments from a community relations officer, assigned to the task of telling residents to move in order to develop a tourism village pilot project, highlights this point. He recited incidents of angry residents yelling at him when they heard they were to be displaced, and he himself felt the action was "inhuman" (Trousdale 1997e). Although the bold vision had potential to benefit all stakeholders, the pilot project was never realized. These actions set the stage for development and control conflicts that still exist today on Boracay and impede attempts at participatory planning. For example, early plans to solicit public involvement by the DOT-CUI partnership were not well attended by the community, and were blamed on "workshop fatigue" and lack of stakeholder confidence that there would be follow-up to the workshop activities.

While broader public participation during the planning phase might have tempered the land use zoning recommendations, the master plan did suggest pragmatic development control guidelines. These set basic standards for construction on the island. An environmental impact statement for the plan also produced excellent recommendations to protect the social and natural environment and was supported by an environmental compliance certificate. Despite developing plans and policies for Boracay, they could not escape the top-down legacy of poor implementation and in 1992 their efforts to implement the master plan were further frustrated by national legislation called the Local Government Code.

#### *The 1992-present Local Government Era*

By 1992, only one year after the master plan cleared the environmental regulations of the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources, the Local Government Code devolved a great deal of power and responsibility from the national level to the local government units. These include the province, the municipality and the Barangay or village. On Boracay this meant that much of the power to govern, including implementation of the master plan, became the main responsibility of the Municipality of Malay. The DOT was left with yearly accreditation of business establishments and implementation and monitoring of major tourism infrastructure

projects. The mayor, among other powerful interests on the island, has suggested that the master plan and guidelines are not valid, although the guidelines are part of the municipal code of general ordinances. The mayor's position dominates the actual management of the island.

The ordinance has been ignored under the rationale that the specific section adopting these regulations was approved in 1990—before the local government code devolution. Despite many complaints from residents and tourists about uncontrolled, *ad-hoc* development (Table 1), there have been few attempts to validate or legitimize (e.g., through local ordinances) the issues that the guidelines raise. Since 1992 only a few of the guidelines have been turned into specific laws, primarily regarding the management of solid waste (Table 2). More contentious guidelines, such as those limiting building height and setback, were not "validated" by ordinance until 1997. At best, the local government has been slow to review, revise, and enact the much needed development controls. The position of ignoring the Guidelines effectively makes all pre-1992 ordinances discretionary rather than regulatory. Actual development regulations being enforced are often national laws rather than controls specifically designed for Boracay.

To illustrate, the municipal planner and the municipal engineer do not consult the guidelines when reviewing site and building designs for permitting. Instead, they use the national building code, a general scheme which is inadequate and inappropriate for the unique tourism context on Boracay. To maintain the ambiance of the island, the guidelines require strict building setbacks, and only a few of the larger businesses have followed them. On the other hand, the building code allows maximum use of lot that most, especially the small business operators, follow to their advantage. The municipality adopted a policy they termed "harmonization" that in effect invalidates the guidelines by making them optional, explaining the high-density corner-to-corner developments now being constructed on Boracay.

The impact on property rights has been significant. The lack of clear zoning or guidelines has meant that it is possible to put a loud disco next door to a residential area or to a resort. Ironically, if the neighboring resort actually follow the DOT guidelines (using native materials, spacing between cottages rather than sound resistant cement and air conditioning), they are penalized for following the written law by not maximizing the site area (as allowed in the national building code), and also are penalized by losing customers to resorts where it is much more quiet. Without enforceable development controls, the continued incremental erosion of property rights is inevitable. Noise is only one example. Other impacts must be considered such as aesthetic degradation, crime, environmental deterioration, and other non-compatible land uses. In 1997 the Sangguniang Bayan (the municipal council) finally offered policy support after five years of confusion and Guideline violations. They amended an ordinance regulating building construction in Boracay.

This new ordinance is more lenient than the guidelines, with all buildings constructed before the 1997 ordinance exempted from the law. Of course, policy support does not mean enforcement will follow, but it is an important start.

Nowhere are clearer laws and better enforcement more needed than with land title. As previously mentioned, the entire island was declared a tourism zone and subsequent title to the land was forbidden. Consequently, claims to use the land are established through payment of property taxes. This has resulted in increased conflict within the community as land has become more valuable. Neighbors routinely argue over property boundaries and court cases are commonplace. While "squatters" are a legitimate issue for property owners, poorer local residents are at risk from the ambiguity over land tenure. The action of major developer Fil-Estate provides a good example. Unlike the other major developers with projects in Boracay (Ayala and Primetown), Fil-Estate has been accused of clearing land and establishing concrete-walls on property they did not purchase. The victim is always a local landowner too poor to pay for a land survey. To the victims, the courts do not seem like a viable option because it may take years to resolve the case. By that time the locals feel that Fil-Estate will not return the land. If a local landowner complains, Fil-Estate may try and work it out amicably by purchasing the land it took, or by reducing the total area of land in question. These types of friendly solutions do not always occur as a recent shoot-out between local residents and the Fil-Estates security force highlights (Boracay Dateline 1997). A local lot owner who complained of having 13 meters of her lot bulldozed noted: "Money wins, not reason." In the end, through persistence, she was pleased to get Fil-Estate to take "only a few meters" (personal communication 1997).

Even after the devolution of power, the local government unit seems to be more comfortable in its previous political role as critic. There still appears to be a great deal of local political currency to be earned through criticism of the once dominant DOT as the local sociopolitical system has not caught up with the legislative reality of the local government code. This was clear at a multi-sector workshop held on Boracay in 1997. Here, action was being demanded from the DOT to enforce *their* development control guidelines. The department representative, five years after the local government code devolved power to the municipality, needed to explain that since 1992 the municipality was the responsible party Table 2 and the department could only provide support. Where the DOF once provided a safe avenue for open political discussion, they are now used as a scapegoat for current management shortcomings.

#### *Local Politics and Kinship as Governance Factors*

This confusion in Boracay may signal a temporary settling period while the implications of the local government code are worked out. Or it may suggest that the political health of Boracay is in jeo-

pardy—a critical issue considering that the challenges to Boracay's future require political solutions. It is true that even where strong and clear legal frameworks are in place, they are supplemented, altered, and even undermined by informal codes of conduct that guide political behavior (Braybrooke 1968; Dahl and Tufte 1973). On Boracay, these informal codes of conduct need to be rigorously examined and the political health reviewed in order to promote a governance environment where viable solutions can be achieved. To determine political health it is important to look for two basic indicators: the presence and open expression of political conflict, and an underlying consensus inclusive enough that conflicts are manageable in ways compatible with democratic norms. Political health in a democracy needs community members who are well informed about matters pertaining to political life, who have considered these matters, and who participate in the political activities of the community. There must also be leaders with the political, administrative, and management skills to effectively coordinate internal powers and secure resources and assistance from external powers. Historically, it seems there has been healthy political conflict that resulted in agreement. When the DOT managed the island, it used an approach that would develop rules in Manila and then try to implement them. This inspired political activism and dialogue in Boracay. While the process might have been backwards and fomented polarization of positions, there was open expression of political conflict where dialogue took place and adjustments were made (see 1988 in Table 2).

After 1991 and the devolution of power to the local government there has been little open political conflict. Silence does not always mean agreement and usually it suggests just the opposite. Therefore, the complexity of gauging the political health in Boracay must include an understanding of local social interaction and relationships. Boracay can be described as a verbal, face-to-face society where family and clan loyalties are very important. Airing of certain facts and opinions could subvert the social balance and have disadvantageous, and often dangerous, consequences for the unvigilant speaker. Therefore, discussion on many topics does not openly occur while "off the record" criticism abounds. It is especially important not to explicitly criticize local politicians. This author was often warned by nervous locals not to openly discuss politics, "Be careful, the walls have ears." The current situation is in sharp contrast to when the DOT managed the island and it was possible, and even popular, to criticize policies locals felt came from people and places removed from their sociopolitically constrained locale.

These social constraints and political systems have deep traditional roots in Boracay. Take the *barangay* for instance, the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines. The name is derived from traditional boats used by the early settlers. It is said that families and sometime entire villages traveled in these boats. Besides explaining why the leaders of these political units are called "captains," it provides insight into the importance of family, com-

munity dynamics, and barangay politics. In Boracay these are closely inter-linked with the powerful municipality. For the time being, the relationship is even stronger because the mayor is a Boracaynon.

A major "off the records" issue on Boracay is favoritism, the doling out of special political treatment to family, friends, or powerful economic interests. Ascertaining the true extent that favoritism impedes effective governance on Boracay is difficult. However, it is clear that many of the residents believe it is a significant issue in the community. Favoritism, in this case, does not refer to political appointments in government, a somewhat standard practice in both public and private business. The charge of favoritism is generally directed at unfair enforcement of laws and regulations. Likewise, lack of political will is often identified as a deficiency of governance. While related, the major difference between favoritism and lack of political will seems to be that lack of political will is simply not enforcing the law rather than giving special treatment to a violator. However, these two factors build on each other. Once a law or guideline violation has been ignored (perhaps due to favoritism), it becomes increasingly difficult to punish the next violation. Fairness becomes an issue as violations go unchallenged. Whether the issue is improper septic tanks, building setbacks, or building aesthetics, the laws become more and more politically difficult to enforce. The lack of this will reflects the hypocrisy the politicians face in attempting to enforce law after they let some violations go un-penalized. These factors help explain why 62% of the residents surveyed agreed that development controls are not being implemented or enforced (Trousdale 1999).

Despite the fact that Boracay has a strong democratic tradition with 77.7% (4,200) of the registered voters participating, voting behavior reinforces negative trends (COMLEC 1997). Convinced that the issues will not change, voters tend to consider how elections will improve their immediate situation. Interviews suggest that the major motivating factors when voting are family, friends, and money. Although the elections are competitive, the system as realized in local politics does not promote open dialogue, ideas, or accountability, but rather perpetuates unfair and unwise governance practices. When the local "crony capitalism" or *status quo* is challenged, reprisals can be severe. A poignant example occurred recently when a government officer, whose job requires monitoring and reporting development violations to the office of the mayor, identified and reported a flagrant violation. Slow reaction from the local government required some persistence in reporting. Soon this officer was receiving violent threats to "back off." These threats were reported to the office of the mayor, again with no reaction. The officer, out of fear for herself and her family, dropped the issue. Threats in Boracay are not idle and violence is not foreign to local politics. In 1990, the mayor was assassinated (Malay Municipal Office 1996). Violent reprisals are clearly understood in the community, helping to limit criticism and obscure governance transparency.

The lack of political scrutiny and leadership accountability in Boracay extends to the local media. Although the media, in general, are often accused of bias, most agree that the role of watchdog over the activities of government is critical. Responsible reporting helps keep the public informed, and this is essential to a healthy political system. The two irregularly published local newspapers in Boracay have chosen to take a hands-off approach to politics. While covering a wide range of important topics and providing an opportunity for insight into a number of community problems, many of the important decisions of government go unanalyzed by the press. This is a rational economic action in the clannish Boracay community. The papers are not targeted to the general public but rather to the tourists and resort owners. Therefore, it makes little sense for them to inflame the local politicians or expose the inadequacies of Boracay, lest it hurt tourism trade or invite unwanted political reprisals. In this environment, influences from off the island are safer for criticism, such as Fil-Estate for flagrant violations and the DOT for failing to implement regulations (Boracay Dateline 1997). The commonality is that, due to local politics, structures of power and inherent social relationships, they are both outside influences and obvious targets for pent-up frustration and criticism that should also be leveled at local politicians.

Finally, one must deal with governance and credibility issues and questions. From the aforementioned national agencies government at all levels suffers from a serious lack of credibility on Boracay that at times borders on sheer contempt. Erosion of government credibility began in the early days of the DOT involvement when plans were made and guidelines were established without being rigorously enforced (see 1984-88 in Table 2). This same pattern has continued after the passage of the local government code devolved much political control to the municipality of Malay. The pace and scale of recent development, and associated development violations magnify the disrespect for government and disregard for environmental regulatory procedures. The development of Fil-Estate is a case in point. Its decision to not obtain an environmental compliance certificate before beginning development of its golf course project, as is required, shows not only a contempt for the written law, but also questions the adequacy of existing regulations. Sometimes it is cheaper to pay the fine than to follow the law. One consequence of the credibility gap is a frustrated resident and tourist population uniformly demanding more control over the development of the island and convinced that there needs to be limits to growth established (Table 1). The credibility of the government must be addressed on Boracay if governance is to become effective.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research presented in this article has shown that many of the most important ideas and plans, including the promotion of sustainable tourism, have come from off-island professionals. This strongly

suggests that technical assistance and outside involvement is essential. Unfortunately, the visionary planning work of the Philippines Department of Tourism did not reflect or incorporate the values of enough local residents through proactive consultation, leading to protests when plans were to be implemented. Except for the area of solid waste management (Trousdale 1997c) and anticipatory broad-based local consultation, public participation, and debate have continued to be absent from local action since this government unit took over control of the island in 1992. Today local governance on Boracay faces many challenges: marginalized community members uncomfortable with expressing their political views; key decision makers who fail to recognize the existing and potential negative impacts of the rapid changes on Boracay; conflict between stakeholders; polarized and inefficient barangay and municipal politics that lacks accountability; poor information generation and dissemination; and the impacts from the devolution of power to the local unit in the local government code that includes confusion over governance relationships, roles and responsibilities as well as a lack of administrative skills and manpower.

Ironically, the recent stop-gap efforts by the Boracay task force to alleviate critical infrastructure carrying capacity limitations like water, sewer and solid waste disposal, as well as airport expansion and jetty-port development, will directly contribute to greater capacity and the potential for even faster growth. Because these incremental development efforts are not part of a community or regional plan, they threaten to put even greater pressure on other capacity constraints such as tourist and resident perceptions, transportation systems, and governance. A recent analysis of carrying capacity underscores the immediate need for managed change in Boracay (Trousdale 1997d). Using 16 indicators to capture a range of capacity constraints (from physical to perceptions to governance), the analysis concluded that 38% of the capacity indicators were exceeded, 44% were unsustainable, and only 19% were not exceeded. Key growth management decisions will have to be made and many will involve difficult tradeoffs, allocation of scarce resources, and distribution of benefits. However, the situation on Boracay suggests that programs regarding cleanliness, environmental protection, peace, and order could be made that will improve the quality of the host community and the tourist experience with little community conflict (Boo 1990; Hitchcock, King and Parnwell 1993; Williams and Gill 1991).

With most of the problems on Boracay identified, legitimate political responses to the clear challenges caused by growth are now required. Political and community leadership must come together to incorporate the concept of governance into systematic management of the island. Good governance is needed to identify and prioritize community values and combine them with the technical answers that are most appropriate. Strong leadership is imperative to coordinate the wide range of diverging concerns, address distorted balances of power, and implement future oriented strategies.

Political and community leadership will have to overcome many challenges in order to forge consensus out of conflict, establish local commitment to development strategies, and construct durable partnerships.

At the outset leadership must acknowledge the urgent need to manage these changes and marshal the information resources required in making wise choices. Two types of information are needed: value-based that will provide direction (what is important to the local residents and tourists) and technical support to develop realistic alternatives to protect and monitor these values. If governance is effective, the results will help keep Boracay competitive and enhance the quality of life on the island. Nevertheless, objections will likely be raised by this new approach to governance. First would be a concern over the loss of local political control. Therefore, the process for generating local governance innovations must come directly from the community, perhaps with federal support. The second objection would likely come from the many powerful interests on Boracay, who routinely ignore the law and would resent the closer monitoring that is in accordance with better governance. As the history of Boracay highlights, a plan is only as good as the structures and processes that are established to implement it. Experience since the passage of the local government code offers compelling evidence that Boracay needs new governance innovations, perhaps based on successes in other places in the Philippines (Palawan Council for Sustainable Development) or around the world (Round Tables in Canada).

In general, better governance is the key to addressing the many challenges of sustainable tourism. Specific answers must come from the stakeholders of Boracay, with much consideration given to the island's development context. Five contextual issues associated with the recommendations may be highlighted at this point. One, the local community should be more directly included in the decision-making process. Many of the actions by Boracay stakeholders focused on pinpointing blame for the poor development record. Stakeholders need to take greater responsibility for their own community affairs, become more politically active, and demand higher standards of governance from their politicians. They can have much more control under the local government code. Two, an opportunity for more critical, transparent, and accountable governance should be provided. There is a need to remove the inherent constraints imposed by clannism, favoritism, and the clouds of corruption that characterize the local political system. Better media oversight and more consistent involvement from national and regional agencies (especially the DOT and the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources to provide funding, technical expertise, and enforcement of environmental laws) is needed to balance local politics.

Three, provisions should be made for local officials to express political will, while at the same time "save face." The sociocultural constraints and kinship bonds on Boracay inhibit strong and fair

local leadership. New governance structures should allow local leaders to justify positions and actions through recommendations from an advisory group that includes off-island technical/professional experts. Four, a broader decision context should be constructed. Longer planning horizons to incorporate intergenerational equity are needed to move past short-term political agendas and business obligations that stress immediate returns on investments. Besides broader time horizons, Boracay should continue to promote more integrated regional development. Many of the improvements in regional infrastructure, such as the improvements planned by Boracay Task Force (Kalibo airport upgrades, Kalibo-Boracay corridor improvements, and sanitary landfill development), provide opportunities to intentionally address complementary regional development issues. For example, the landfill could be located on the mainland where it could service other local barangays, and tourism sensitive agriculture or manufacturing could be encouraged to maximize the efficiency of upgrades intended for Boracay, while helping to insulate the regional economy from a downturn through economic diversification. Finally, more informed dialogues and safer avenues for political expression should be promoted. This means new governance structures must ensure that open and informed debate occurs over community development issues without threats or fear of violent reprisals to outspoken individuals.

*Addendum*—The DOT has now committed to promoting a participatory approach on Boracay. After this article was written, the information was presented during a two-day seminar/workshop that was part of the Canada-Philippines Cooperative Program on Sustainable Development for Boracay Island. The workshop attracted over 50 representatives from all levels of government (politicians and bureaucrats), private business, local and national media, and local non-governmental organizations. The workshop participants outlined an environmental and sustainable development strategy for Boracay (Trousdale 1998). They then analyzed the capacities, roles, and responsibilities of organizations responsible for implementing the strategy. They concluded that the way Boracay is being governed is inadequate and the municipality would be incapable of implementing the strategy. New governance relationships would have to be developed to turn this into the sustainable tourism destination envisioned in their plan. The participation of key community leaders, and the group consensus they achieved, is a major step towards real community empowerment. The workshop concluded with the participants agreeing to begin a process for developing governance structures that tap into the strengths and capabilities of individual residents, local NGOs, businesses, and, of course, government.

A recent communication from the Boracay Foundation (November 10, 1998) indicates that many of the recommendations stemming from the work discussed in this paper are beginning to be implemented. A multi-stakeholder Special Task Force for Boracay, made up of resort and business owners, a local NGO, local baran-

gays, and national agencies has been created to "assist" the mayor with fair implementation of municipal laws. This new governance structure is promoting effective management as discussed in the paper. It is a big and encouraging step for the community as they start to get past the blame and begin working together on common problems. There are many reasons why progress is taking place. Strong local community leaders, crisis events surrounding water quality, oversight from provincial and national governments, media interest, and the research and participation from the community-based program of the Canada-Philippines program on all continue to play a role in the current achievements in Boracay. ■

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