

## TOPICAL REPORT

### TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CONTROL: A CASE STUDY OF BORACAY ISLAND, PHILIPPINES

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There is a major gap between tourism planning and implementation. Research concerning development control on the island of Boracay in the Philippines suggests that politics and governance in this democratic nation play a larger role in explaining this gap than a lack of information, knowledge, or concern among residents or tourists. A survey of residents and tourists revealed that they are very concerned with the unregulated degradation of the island due to a lack of implementation and enforcement of existing development control guidelines. The residents surveyed identified a lack of monitoring, a lack of political will, poor public awareness, and lack of administrative skills as the primary reasons for implementation failures. This case study suggests that tourism research should focus on ways to improve governance in tourism destinations rather than on the widely appreciated negative impacts of tourism development.

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Tourism planning      Tourism development control      Resident and tourist perceptions

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Adverse impacts from tourism development have long been chronicled by tourism researchers (e.g., Cohen, 1978; Ioannides, 1995; Mieczkowski, 1995). There is now general agreement that these impacts can be minimized through better planning of tourism development (e.g., Gunn, 1994; Inskip, 1991; Lea, 1988). However, overcoming the gap between planning and implementation faces many challenges.

This article will discuss research conducted on the island of Boracay, one of the Philippines' most popular tourism destinations. Here, attempts to im-

plement development control guidelines have been challenged by dramatic changes in national legislation, local politics, and local administrative capabilities. The case study is informative because it illuminates common challenges in tourism planning in the developing world. At the same time it sheds light on a common fallacy among tourism impact research in developing countries while supporting the findings of political science scholars (e.g., Richter, 1989): the failures in tourism development are often not due to a lack of information, knowledge, or concern by the residents and tour-

ists of tourism's adverse effects—rather the fundamental cause of tourism's excesses can be attributed to poor governance.

### Overview

Boracay Island is the jewel of the Philippines and the pride of the country's booming tourism sector. Boracay boasts one of the finest beaches in the world. The famed Long Beach is 4 km of white powder sand and the entire island is only slightly larger than 1,000 hectares. Boracay naturally evolved as a tourist destination. It was not the result of a highly planned central government effort or a wealthy corporation. Like so many other destinations in the Pacific, Boracay was "discovered" by a small group of both domestic and international travelers and has since been discovered by well-capitalized investors who are rapidly altering the island's landscape.

Today, the result is a unique international tourism destination. Many of the original Boracay families, or those who bought land before tourism became popular, still own small resorts on the island. These resorts are a combination of restaurants and hotel facilities. There is also a strong European influence as many foreigners who had visited the island 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.

Early prodding by the Philippines Department of Tourism (DOT) also helped to instill a unique ambiance highlighted by native-style cottages, a healthy building setback from the beach, and a pedestrian-only beach front promenade. In 1990 only 14,000 arrivals were registered with the DOT (DOT-Boracay, 1997). By 1995 that number grew to more than 80,000 and by 1996 reached 172,000. Development continues to boom with a mega-resort, a golf course, and many small resorts under construction.

In the face of increasing growth and economic success, many in the Philippines are concerned that environmental and development trends on the island are harbingers of a potential tourism disaster. Their fears were partially realized in the summer of 1997 when the Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources inadvertently

commented that the swimming water on Boracay was unsafe due to fecal coliform contamination. The result was a dramatic 70% decline in tourism arrivals from the previous year (DOT-Boracay, 1997). The DOT was not ignorant to the trends on Boracay. Before the water quality crisis they had initiated major infrastructure projects and had established a sustainable development partnership program with the Canadian Urban Institute to promote participatory, community-based planning.

Part of this research was to investigate why development guidelines and controls developed by the DOT (hereafter "the Guidelines") were not being implemented, resulting in adverse impacts from unplanned and unregulated development. The next section reviews the history of guideline development, examines the differing perceptions between residents and tourists over the impacts from development, and explores issues of implementation and enforcement.

### Background

The DOT hired tourism experts to develop the Guidelines to help ensure a sustainable future for Boracay (PROS, 1990). One drawback to using a strictly technical approach has been that the resulting Guidelines are criticized as being the DOT's vision for Boracay based on the values of the experts who wrote them, not necessarily the values of the community. In other words, they were never validated by the stakeholders on Boracay. Subsequently, there has been limited local commitment to their implementation. Comprehensive implementation of the Guidelines has been slow, exacerbated in part by a far-reaching piece of national legislation called the Local Government Code (1991). This law devolved a tremendous amount of regulatory power to the local municipality.

Today, the mayor, among other powerful interests on the island, has suggested that the Guidelines are not valid. The rationale for disregarding the Guidelines is based on the fact that the specific section in the Municipal Code of General Ordinances adopting these regulations was approved in 1990—before the devolution of power. Despite many complaints from residents and tourists about uncontrolled, ad hoc development, there have been few attempts to review, validate, or legitimize the

issues that the Guidelines raise (e.g., through new local ordinances).

The municipalities decision to disregard the Guidelines has two important consequences: 1) it sends a strong signal that the Guidelines are optional despite the fact that many resort owners still follow them, and 2) it puts into question the legality of all ordinances passed before 1991, or, at the very least, it makes all pre-1991 ordinances discretionary rather than regulatory. In fact, this is the case on Boracay as reflected by the activities of the municipal administration. For example, both the municipal planner and the engineer do not consult the tourism and site-specific Guidelines when reviewing plans for building permits. Instead, they use the National Building Code: a general code that it is inadequate and inappropriate for the unique tourist environment on Boracay.

The impact on property rights has been significant. The lack of clear zoning, guidelines, or laws makes it possible for a property owner to put a loud disco next door to a residential area or resort. And, if the neighboring resort followed the Guidelines as they were told by the DOT (e.g., native materials, spacing between cottages rather than sound-resistant cement and air conditioning), not only are they penalized by not maximizing the site area as allowed in the National Building Code, but they suffer from a loss of customers to quieter resorts. Without enforceable development controls, 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 noncompatible land uses. The trends of rapid growth and the nonenforcement policy of the municipality regarding the Guidelines are clear: *the quality of Boracay as a tourism destination is quickly deteriorating.*

#### Resident and Tourist Perceptions

A survey was developed to gauge the extent of public and tourist concern over the violations of the Guidelines (March 1997,  $n = 30$ ). The results revealed that residents and tourists alike are very concerned over the unregulated degradation of the island. In response to a question regarding changes ("Are you happy with the changes [trends] you see

taking place on Boracay?"), 50% of the residents responded "yes," 32% responded "no," and 18% responded "somewhat." Tourist responses were 43% "yes" and 57% "no." Of the residents that were pleased, they usually cited individual economic gains related to the increased tourism.

What is most fascinating about the survey results, and what is of critical concern to planning officials, are the clear, but explainable, distinctions between the concerns of the tourists and the concerns of the residents (see Table 1). The tourists are primarily affected by the appearance of Boracay. The top three issues for the tourist are all strongly related to aesthetic impacts. Appearance is critical during the short stay of the tourist. Conversely, residents were more concerned about things that affect day-to-day life and their business investments—such as garbage collection and fire prevention.

It is not unexpected that the siting, clearing, and grading are an especially prominent concern among the tourists. What is astonishing is that 100% of the tourists surveyed cited it as very important. Then rapid construction taking place throughout Boracay is being done without consideration of tourist-sensitive management or care. The most imposing example is the massive temporary scarring of the earth that is occurring where the golf course and mega-resort are under construction. The more adverse impacts (e.g., visual degradation, deforestation, noise, dust) should be only a temporary inconvenience until the golf course matures.

Another major change on Boracay is the use of new building materials (from native materials—or at least the appearance of native materials such as bamboo covering concrete—to exposed concrete) and architectural design (square cement block buildings). These trends help explain why building aesthetics are a major issue. New cement block buildings that maximize the building site do little to maintain the tranquil island ambiance of Boracay. The concern for proper landscaping is similar in that it helps maintain the aesthetic beauty of the island. Interestingly, the need for better landscaping controls is also high on the resident list of priorities.

Improper disposal of waste water is a priority to both the residents and tourists: Many resorts do

Table 1  
Resident and Tourist Priorities Related to the Development Guidelines

Rank	Resident Guideline Issue	Percentage Who Ranked it "Very Important"	Rank	Tourist Guideline Issue	Percentage Who Ranked it "Very Important"
1	Garbage	82%	1	Siting/clearing & grading	100%
2	Landscaping	77%	2	Building aesthetics	88%
2	Fire prevention	77%	2	Garbage	88%
3	Waste water	73%	3	Waste water	75%
3	Siting/clearing & grading	73%	4	Landscaping	63%
4	Boat setback	68%	5	Building setback	50%
4	Road network/number of vehicles	68%	5	Air pollution control	50%
5	Building setback	64%	5	Density	50%
5	Noise level	64%	6	Boat setback	38%
6	Air pollution control	32%	6	Noise level	38%
7	Building aesthetics	23%	7	Fire prevention	25%
8	Sign	18%	7	Road network/number of vehicles	25%
9	Density	5%	8	Sign	13%

Note. Water and sewer were not discussed in the survey due to the Boracay Task Force and OECF loan that promises to address these issues by 2000.

not bother to dispose of waste water through septic systems and simply empty it onto the ground. Visually this is disturbing, but it also shows a lack of care and concern for the island and can be a health hazard. This is recognized by both the tourists and the residents. Since the 1997 coliform scare, major steps have been taken by government officials to address this situation.

Building setbacks were also considered important by both groups, perhaps reflecting a perceived increase in crowding. Tourists were more sensitive to a lack of obvious density requirements whereas density ranked last among residents. Interestingly, air pollution ranked quite high among the tourists but was not such a critical issue for the residents who are perhaps used to the polluting motor-tricycles and open burning of garbage. The inconveniences from an inadequate road network and high noise levels were a great concern for residents.

#### Issues of Implementation and Enforcement

The need for active control over development, such as enforcement of the Guidelines, is a powerful and urgent issue, and one that easily forges almost complete consensus as it overwhelmingly reflects the concerns of the residents and the tourists. The survey showed that 95% of all residents and 85% of all tourists want more control over development. The survey also revealed that a total

of 76% surveyed felt that the reason was a lack of implementation and enforcement.

Although all the reasons cited in Table 2 were determined to be important factors behind the poor implementation and enforcement, some play a larger role than others. The most common reason was a lack of monitoring followed by a lack of political will. Poor public awareness ranked third. The fourth reason cited was lack of administrative skills. This is common experience throughout the Philippines due to the increased skills, education, and experience requirements demanded by the devolution of power from the 1991 Local Government Code.

A critical issue that ranked almost on par with administrative skills is the political feasibility of enforcing laws. This is closely related to favoritism and clan loyalties that play a major role in the local politics on Boracay. The influence of well-capitalized investors and occasional charges of corruption that dominate local politics are also a major consideration, especially since the transfer of power to the local government from the 1991 Local Government Code. Another legitimate reason for poor implementation was the lack of resources directly attributed to the 1991 devolution of power that downloaded many responsibilities to the local level, often without corresponding resources.

Table 2  
Guideline Implementation and Enforcement—Resident Perception: Reasons for Poor Implementation and Enforcement

Rank	Enforcement Issue	Percentage Who Ranked it			
		Very Important	Important	Less Important	Not Important
1	Lack of monitoring	67%	33%	0%	0%
2	Lack of political will	63%	38%	0%	0%
3	Poor public awareness	60%	33%	7%	0%
4	Poor administrative skills	53%	40%	7%	0%
5	Not politically feasible	53%	33%	0%	13%
6	Lack of resources	47%	53%	0%	0%
7	Weak penalties	40%	47%	7%	7%
8	Poor design of laws	36%	43%	14%	7%
9	Outdated laws	27%	55%	18%	0%

### Conclusions

Although the Philippines is a democracy, and progressive legislation has sought to concentrate power locally where those that are affected can have a stronger voice, there remains a tremendous gap between desires of the constituency and the actions of the government on the tourist island of Boracay. Similar to previous research (see Williams & Gill, 1994), the research presented here indicates that the desires of the tourists are similar to those of the residents. So, it is equally disturbing that the local government is indifferent or unresponsive to the tourists that fuel the local economy.

Recent systems of governance have proved unsuccessful at effectively addressing urgent needs associated with rapid development. The top-down approach of the DOT regarding the Guidelines, however well intended, has fallen short of achieving success. The local government has also proved to be incapable on effectively governing the rapid growth. There are major, large-scale, and irreversible changes occurring on Boracay that demand immediate implementation of development controls to protect the environmental integrity, community structure, and high touristic quality of Boracay.

Clearly, there should be a meeting point between the technical expertise orientation of the DOT approach and the bottom-up representation established by the local government. Boracay is unique and should have development controls that

protect the special qualities of the island and there should be governance mechanisms in place to effectively implement and enforce these controls. There is an immediate need for the accountable local political leadership to recognize the importance of development control and implement and enforce proper ordinances.

The excessive stress on the infrastructure, ecosystems, and the community from rapid unplanned and unregulated growth suggests that the existing carrying capacity has been exceeded. Residents of Boracay overwhelmingly agree (82%) that there should be limits to growth established.

Typical of tourism destinations that are developed without proper planning and development control, there are many incompatible development patterns being established on Boracay. Most development controls are directed at the Long Beach corridor and the tourist village. These changes are rapid and need to be addressed, but the small, self-managed resort approach on Long Beach requires different planning solutions than the corporate enclave mega-resort developments targeted for the northern part of the island. Most of the residents are aware of these differences and overwhelmingly agree (82%) that a zoning ordinance should be enforced with respect to the special needs and issues of each distinct part of the island.

These survey results highlight that the rapid change is affecting the quality of life on Boracay and many residents and tourist are aware that it is threatening the viability of Boracay as a tourism destination.

### Recommendations

Action is now needed on Boracay. First, the Guidelines should be evaluated, and adjusted if necessary, to reflect community values and changes since they were developed. They should then be established as municipal policies and ordinances. The Guidelines should be initially reviewed from the perspective of the tourists, because they are the "customer" and the guidelines are meant to improve the quality of the Boracay tourism "product." It should be noted that most of the tourist concerns are also the concerns of the residents of Boracay.

The most important action is the need for the responsible government agencies to implement and enforce the laws and ordinances that govern the island of Boracay. Specifically, there needs to be better monitoring, greater political will, improved public awareness, improved public involvement in the planning and decision-making process, and greater capability building and skills development among the administrative staff. The challenges to implementation will include generating more resources that will be required for implementation, overcoming the political challenges of enforcing guidelines after such a long period of negligence, and designing laws that are practical to implement with penalties that will deter undesirable activities.

Additional steps that may help facilitate implementation would be to institute review committees composed of members of the community in order to review development plans. For example, an architectural review committee and a landscape review committee could develop appropriate guidelines and ensure that the design and plans reflect these standards before building permits are given. These committees would provide oversight, allow key politicians to "save face" in their decisions, and allow decisions to be less controlled by favoritism and clanism that marks local politics today.

Finally, there should be more self-regulation

within the tourism industry itself. Clearly, the government is not capable of constantly monitoring all activities on the island. The private sector should play a prominent role in all aspects of development control. A positive step would be to develop a code of ethics. Our research uncovered the encouraging fact that 95% of those questioned agreed that the private tourism industry should develop a code of ethics or a code of conduct. This would help not only through self-regulation, but would also provide a bond and a common avenue for communication within the industry. This case study suggests that tourism research should focus on ways to improve governance in tourism destinations rather than on documenting the widely appreciated negative impacts of tourism development.

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