

In the Mid of Closure Lies Opportunity: Lived Experiences of the Tourism Displaced Workers

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Abstract

Boracay Island, Philippines is known for being a world's beach destination. However, rapid infrastructures development and wanton disregard to the physical environment eventually lead to a six-month temporary closure of the Island for rehabilitation purposes based on Presidential Proclamation No. 475. As a consequence, emergence of displaced workers in the Island occurred. In this paper, the researchers aimed to know the perceptions of the displaced workers in terms of their stances, feelings and opportunities relative to the issue. The researchers used Phenomenological study, a qualitative research, to deeply know the lived experiences of the displaced tourism workers in Boracay. Key informants were selected through purposive sampling. This study evinced that the displaced workers carry on their indomitable spirits of survival. Hence, the displaced workers were amenable of the closure of the Island for the preservation for the next generation. Moreover, they established business in their respective places, while others are looking for new opportunities. Nevertheless, they still have plans to go back to the Island because of innermost and better opportunities that await them. It is strongly recommended that all stakeholders must strictly enforce environmental laws owing to the fact that the main attraction of Boracay is their pristine nature; without it, everything about Boracay goes nil.

Keywords: Perception, displaced workers, Tourism, rehabilitation, opportunity

I. Introduction

Boracay Island is blessed with scenic views and pristine nature and because of these, a lot of local and international people wish to "see and feel" the Island. Having many tourists means more employment. To illustrate, this world-famed Resort Island has received a total of 2,001,974 tourists in 2017 hitting its all-time high record of the 56 Billion peso income (www.philstar.com/headlines, retrieved may 24, 2018). In contrast, many businessmen are aiming to have their own commerce in the Island which resulted to more construction of buildings to accommodate further increased of tourist arrivals, and even the workers. With these, the Island has become so contaminated and the Island was distraught environmentally and naturally because of some buildings that are not following laws that are intended for a small Islands like Boracay. For this reason, the three Government agencies namely Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) proposed a memo to Malacanang for temporary closure of Boracay for rehabilitation for six (6) months to eventually restore and sustain the beauty of the Island for the benefit of the next generation, and to give ample time for the undisrupted implementation of the following measures to restore. With this, Malacanang issued Proclamation 475 "Declaring a state of calamity on the Barangays of Balabag, Manoc-Manoc and Yapak in the Municipality of Malay, Aklan and temporary closure of the island as tourist destination".

On added note, the significance of the success of any destination is contingent on the support and involvement of the community. This study states that support and involvement of local communities is a tool for a success of any destination (Lewis 2001 and Fragrance 2003). If only the community, specially the Local Government Unit and private stakeholders discern the importance of sustainable tourism then this closure situation in the Island would not have happened. According to Winter (2008), one of the greatest negative influences on the lifestyle on the host community is the demonstration effect occurrence of indigenous and

rural communities and cultures adopting western behavior that they determined in travelling tourists through demonstration and interaction. This means that because of the different tourists arriving to the Island, locals learned so many cultures and somewhat like adapted some of both positive and negative culture. In addition, Doane (as cited by Catibog-Sinha, 2012) resounded that to be economically sustainable, there would be full employment, less poverty and no bankruptcy, and the resource provision necessary for specific projects is also guaranteed for the future.

Boracay is not a *hidden paradise* anymore, but it is more of an *island city* now. Heavy traffic on the roads is present and several kinds of pollution are existent. With this kind of situation, some tourists can have bad and disreputable image of Boracay, and the Philippines as a whole. Moreover, the government is concerned about sustainable tourism. The situation inddd calls for a drastic action to rehabilitate the Island which lead to the displacement of about 17,000 workers. Note that most of these workers are the bread winners of their respective families and mostly relying on their jobs in Boracay. In addition, the government and management discontinued the employees to work on their respective establishments because of temporary disrupted operations. With this fact, they are involuntary leaving the island and gaze for another livelihood for them to subsist.

In this paper, the researchers aimed to understand the perceptions of the displaced workers in terms of their stances, feelings and opportunities. Thus, this study will also help the researcher to know the perceived impacts of the closure of the Island to the displaced workers. Lastly, this will further help the displaced workers to find good solutions to their current problem.

I. Research Methodology

A. Research Design

The researchers used qualitative research. Phenomenological study was used to deeply know the lived experiences of the workers in Boracay. Similarly, in analyzing, the researchers used situational analysis in this study to further understand the viewpoints and ways of life of the displaced workers. It endeavored to reveal some general facts from the perspectives of the displaced workers on the effects of the closure of Boracay Island on them and on their respective families. Key informants were selected through purposive sampling, a qualitative sampling which describes that the selection of the respondents is specifically displaced workers of the island. The informants are very knowledgeable and therefore these are rich cases that can provide appropriate data on the topic being explored.

B. Selection of Key informants

The seven key informants were selected using these criteria: (1) 27 to 40 years of age both male and female, (2) working in Boracay Island for more than 5 years and (3) a resident of the neighboring towns of Boracay, Malay, Aklan; Nabas, Ibajay, Numancia and Kalibo

II. Results and Discussions

A. Stances of the displaced workers on the mandate of closing the Island for Rehabilitation.

The key informants said that they were amenable of the closure of Boracay Island to really sustain the island for the next generation and for general rehabilitation, similarly Informant A said, *“nagiging abusado eon man abi ro mga tawo sa Boracay, eabi eon gd ro tricycle drivers hay pilion a nanda ro kano ay para mahae kanda bayad ag ro baligya idto hay kamahaeon para sa mga local idto”* (the people in Boracay became so abusive especially the tricycle drivers because they prefer the foreign passengers to ride in to pay more fare, and even the supplies there was so expensive for the locals. This statement was stated also by Matarrita-Cascante (2009) that tourism is a catalyst for change, which creates a series of impacts especially in the host communities. This implied that there were negative and positive impacts brought by the tourists from different countries in the island.

Informant B said, “*personally ok lang para kang kasi ikakalini it Boracay ag para ma comply tanan nga establishments sa standard sewage ag mapabahoe man ro kalsada kasi over crowded na ang aeagyan para sa publiko*”, (Personally, it’s ok for the cleanliness of Boracay and for the establishments to really comply with the standard sewage system and to widen the road since the highways are so tapered for public used. This line was strongly stated by Coccus & Mexa (2017), that uncontrolled tourism developments leads to over-urbanization, which may cause the alteration of historic settlements and landscapes. The following statements implied that the workers in Boracay Island were amenable of the closure to eventually sustain the beauty of the Island. Also, to discipline the abusive service providers that gave bad impression to the Island and the Philippines in general. As well, they wanted to rehabilitate and then preserve for the next generation and for them to have lasting jobs in the forthcoming reopening of Boracay Island.

However, according to the key informants the decision of Malacanang was so profligate and there was no proper plans and/or delegations for the workers to be ready to withstand the impact on their livelihood for the next six months. “*Bukon it ready nang ro hotel management, kami ag maskin LGU officials idto dahil maskin sanda tanan idto hay wa ga expect sa natabo.*” The hotel management, we (hotel workers) and even LGU officials were not ready of the closure because they did not expect these things to happen. This implied that the government is not well prepared on its projects to be imposed for the workers and even the residents of the Island to support them for the six months-closure.

On the other hand, Informant C was not contented of the memo regarding the rehabilitation of the Island. According to him, the government should only close the establishments and terminate their certifications that are not following the right measures. He added, “*pero wa eon kita it mahimo ay una eon ron, batonon lang gd ag mag padayon*” (but we cannot do anything anymore because it is already approved, just accept it and move forward”.

B. The Feelings of the displaced workers towards the closing of Boracay Island.

Informant A and B said, “*masakit ag malisod batonon nga wa eon kami it trabaho ag wa it kita hay tambay lang kami sa an-um nga buean ron.*” (It is heart breaking and so hard to accept that we have no job anymore and no income so we are just bystanders for the next six months). In addition, she added, nevertheless, I am so happy for the Island itself as it will be free now from the crowded people, noisy bars and abusive workers.

Moreover, they all went back to their respective towns and continue their lives with their families. Informant “A” said, “*mayad ngane ay makaiba kita sa atong pamilya it buhay ag abo mang fiesta, mabaligya baligya lang iya ron.* (it’s good because we can have more time with our families and there are so many fiestas now, we will just sell foods, etc.’

Informant E found it challenging every morning as they were used to waking up early, then, took a bath, put up make ups for females and got dressed for duty. She added, “*Kaon, tueog, warang, kaon, tueog, warang, ga tinambok lat a ako ngara hay Makara adlaw adlaw*) eat, sleep, wander, eat, sleep, wander, I’m getting fat now because of these activities every day.

Lastly, informant C said, “the feeling of acceptance is all we need to further continue with our lives. This implied that they should move on with life’s challenges and not stick to the issue but instead look for another opportunity. Hence, they accepted the reality of the closure.

C. Things that they have done to answer the problem

Informants F and G who were working in a resort said that their hotel had a proposal to let them report for duty for fifteen (15) days a month so that they can have half of their salary monthly. However, this plan did not push through because their establishment needs rehabilitation too and no tourists’ arrivals. Thus, the management will lose turnover and cannot even pay their workers. So now, she is applying to some hospitality establishments in Capiz, the neighboring Province of Aklan to further put up with her everyday needs, but according to her, she is still planning to go back to

Boracay after six months especially if she is not blissful with her new job in Capiz. In addition, informant C, a chef was planning to apply to Kalibo or Manila because according to him, there is high possibility of the extension of the rehabilitation because of the big damage in the island and wrong implementations of the LGU and private stakeholders, so better apply to other place and not depend on Boracay. Likewise, he added, *“wa man gataas among ranko una karon, kaya mayad lang mag apply sa eayo”* (we were not promoted there, so better apply to far places).

Moreover, informants D and E became freelancers in Manila and/or Kalibo and other neighboring towns. They need to work hard because they have families who merely rely on them. Informant D said, *“kinahang ean mag hugod it mayad para di magutom ro pamilya, pasalamat ako ay may talent nga gintao kakon ro Ginoo nga maskin siin hay pwede.”* (It’s really a must to work hard so that our families will not suffer food shortage, I am still thankful because God gave me a talent that is so useful anywhere). However, after six months they still plan to go back to the island for better income.

Informant A opened a small sarisari store in their barangay. According to her, *“ok eon kung may kita ako nga tatlong gatos kada adlaw, mabuhi eon ako karon ay barato malang man iya ro baligya kaysa sa isla”* (It’s okay if I can have 300.00 as my profit every day, I can survive with that amount knowing that the lifestyle here in our barangay is economical unlike in the Island.) Also, they opened their burger station near barangay plaza because there are so many activities in preparation for the upcoming fiesta in the barangay. Nevertheless, according to her, this is just temporary because she still has a plan to go back to Boracay for work because of the service charge, salary, meeting new people and all. In addition, Informant C said *“hay sarado eon gid man Boracay, mabaligya lang kita kara it ihawihaw kaysa mag duhong”*. (Since Boracay is now closed, let’s just sell roasted meats instead of being a bystander), but according to her, she still has a plan to go back to Boracay because she received lots of benefits and assistance from the owner.

Generally, most the key informants were cooperative with the closure of the Island. For now, they will look for jobs within six months for survival purposes but still they will go back to the Island because of so many opportunities and benefits too. This implied that they have move on and are now looking for jobs to help them sustain for the next six months while waiting for the reopening of the Island.

III. Conclusion

Boracay Island is truly a pride of every Filipino specifically the Aklanons. This evidences that tourism is worthy if it is handled well by the people. In contrast, it is unfavorable if not taken care of properly, that is why the individuals are the stewards of this reward which means that they have the responsibility to take good care of the Island. Because of the existence of the Island, it gives people opportunity to meet other individuals from different walks of life; hence, it gives genuine jobs to the Filipinos. Conversely, due to some occurrences, the Island was abused by people for some political, business and even personal reasons. This consequence directed the government for the closure of Boracay for six (6) months. With this, the ordinary workers were greatly affected.

With this, the study proved that the displaced workers carry their indomitable spirit of survival as evidence by their efforts to find other means of livelihood. They can still subsist without Boracay Island by finding ways to survive and to sustain the needs of their respective families. Others have opened their small businesses like sarisari store, ihawihaw and burger station, while others are looking for new livelihood and opportunities in the neighboring towns and provinces of Aklan. Besides, this study showed the resiliency of the Filipinos. They unconsciously established their own businesses in their respective places.

Moreover, they heartedly accepted the fact of the present situation, and consider that Boracay surely and seriously needs rehabilitation for the next generation to “see and feel” it and to restore and further sustain the natural beauty of the Island. The Aklanon people were amenable of the closure for the furtherance of the Island, for as workers, they realized that they can benefit much from the Island in the next future generations only if it is taken care of properly. Equally, the next generation can appreciate the beauty of the same.

Lastly, the key informants still have plans to go back to Boracay after six months because according to them they have so many and better opportunities in the Island. But then again, if there are greener pastures in their new found jobs and businesses that they had opened, then they will stick to it.

IV. Recommendation

In line with the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Strengthen activities that promote the preservation and conservation of Boracay Island. The Local Government Unit (LGU) should have the control of all the activities on the Island. They must possess sense of pride and love for the Island for them to intensely take good care of it.
2. The government, all establishment owners, businessmen, private stakeholders and workers should strictly implement the laws and regulations of the Island. They must be strict in implementing laws and policies in the island specifically building infrastructures, Human Resource Matters, Environmental Sanitation, proper waste disposal and embrace the concept and principles of Sustainable Tourism.
3. All stakeholders should focus on sustainable tourism, and enterprises should carry on their corporate social responsibility that of taking good care of the environment. .

V. References

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