

Conference Paper

Strategic Marketing Framework of Community Based Ecotourism: A Case of Panguil, Laguna Philippines towards Sustainable Perspective

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Abstract: This paper aimed to develop a strategic tourism marketing framework to save Panguil River Ecopark (PREP) from environmental degradation whilst promoting Panguil as model for Community Based Ecotourism in the province of Laguna. Panguil falls under the fourth class municipality of Laguna and endowed with cultural products and numerous natural attributes, such as falls, rivers, and nature trails. In turn, the local government developed one tourist destination named Panguil River Ecopark (PREP). The study was a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approach in nature. It involves descriptive method to address the objectives of this investigation. The primary collection of data involved different tools such as survey questionnaire, observation of the area, focus group discussion and together with Participatory Action Research (PAR). A preliminary meetings and workshop, and an in depth interviews with the Local Government Unit (LGU), visitors and locals of Panguil, Laguna, Philippines was also utilized in the study. Judgmental sampling was applied in gathering pertinent data while expert sampling was also incorporated. Through the integration of ethical standards, the gathered data were treated with utmost confidentiality. Cronbach Alpha was utilized in validating tool and framework narrative analysis was used in analyzing and interpreting the data. Based on Environmental Impact Assessment it was perceived by the respondents that PREP failed to implement carrying capacity likewise, the community was heavily reliant on said destination amidst numerous cultural resources present. Failure to resolve the problem may lead to environmental damage of PREP. To build sustainable CBET destination the study recommends the following: to offer alternative activities that will control the movement of visitors within the PREP particularly along Ambon-Ambon falls; introduce variety of cultural tourism products as part of the attractions; and implement reservation.

Keywords: Community based ecotourism, Panguil, sustainable tourism, marketing strategic framework, tourism marketing

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Introduction

Tourism is increasingly seen by all nations as a significant tool for achieving economic and spreading socio-economic growth benefits. Likewise, the industry has the highest and deepest aspirations of all people and is sensitive to its natural, cultural and environmental factors. Apparently, in the light of the increasing pace and scale of tourism activity in the Philippines, the turn of the new millennium marks a shift in the appreciation of relationships between sustainable development and tourism. In the same manner, the increasing stride of change and intensifying competition resulting from the globalization of trade, business and travel, the need to find new ways for destination communities to be competitive and yet retain a sense of place is critical.

One of the forms of sustainable tourism being promoted is ecotourism. Such concept is perceived as a significant tool for sustainable development wherein a number of developing countries are now adopting for socio-economic development. In the same notion, the term Community Based Tourism (CBT) or Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) is the best form of sustainable tourism that is managed and controlled by the community. Such type of tourism is being adopted by number of developing countries since it is anchored on the three main elements of sustainable development namely: economic efficiency, social equity and ecological sustainability. Thereby, the goal of CBET is to ensure natural resource conservation while conserving and protecting the environment and its cultural heritage is centered on the host community.

Consequently, many Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) destinations in the Philippines, despite having the products and services that are of interest to visitors, have difficulty in sustaining themselves both ecologically and economically. On the ecological aspect, one of the contributing factors that can be attributed to environmental degradation in some tourist destinations is when the community is heavily reliant on particular destination whereby the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope within acceptable limits of change. On economic aspect, the poor or lack of marketing capacity by some local communities that despite the community has the potential to attract visitors to gain more tourism revenues failed to offer other alternatives activities and just focusing on promoting the destination itself.

Pangil is one of the municipalities of Laguna experiencing such kind of dilemma. Amidst several cultural resources the Local Government Unit (LGU) just focused on developing likewise promoting Pangil River Ecopark (PREP) as major destination. Nevertheless, several studies revealed that destinations can overcome this dilemma through collaboration and support with other stakeholders in diversifying their products and services.

Creating a competitive and sustainable tourism destination is deemed necessary despite it is a long-term process which includes optimal economic development of a destination, a higher level of life standard, ecological preservation, social and cultural heritage preservation. This stands for a success given the concept's diffusion among

academics, industry, government, and policy-actors at one level, whilst it shows at the same time a continued growth in the environmental impacts of tourism in absolute terms.

In this context, the study was conducted to provide assistance among the LGU's of Panguil on how to develop the municipality as model for CBET in the province of Laguna towards sustainable perspective. As adopted community of the Malayan Colleges Laguna (MCL) through the Center for Service and Community Engagement (CSCE) and in respond to one of missions of the institution which is to contribute to the solution of industry's and society's problems by the expert application of knowledge.

Similarly, in realization of achieving this mission, the study underwent different phases of study namely: Environmental Impact Assessment, Cultural Heritage Mapping and SWOT Analysis. This paper aimed to develop a strategic marketing framework to save Panguil River Ecopark (PREP) from environmental degradation and to promote Panguil and its neighboring communities highlighting their cultural heritage resources as tool toward CBET development.

Literature Review

Study Area

Laguna is one of the provinces in the Philippines comprising 24 municipalities and three cities. Panguil is one of the municipalities strategically situated at the southern tip of Sierra Madre mountain range. It is endowed with numerous cultural assets like native products, old churches and festival. Its natural attributes include the water falls, rivers, nature trails, forest, communities and cool breeze by the lake. It has eight barangays and the major attraction is Panguil River Eco Park (PREP) which offers numerous nature activities such as trekking to Ambon-ambon falls, river tubing, and camping. It was developed by the local government of Panguil in the year 2000 upon granting loan from the World Bank.



Figure 1. Map of Panguil River Ecopark

The neighboring communities of Panguil which offer unique features for its cultural features consist of: Pakil, known as a rustic town in the province where old religious rituals are preserved such as the Turumba sa Virgen which became famous for their Turumba Festival; Paete, a crafty town declared as Wood Carving Capital of the Philippines in 2005 famous for wooden sculptures of mostly religious items -; Lumban, the home of Lake Caliraya, a man-made lake often visited by nature lovers and sports people and dubbed as ‘The Embroidery Capital of the Philippines’; Victoria- offering some of the most delicious delicacies including goats’ and ducks’ meat considered as ‘Duck-Raising Capital of the Philippines’; and Pila, where historic layout has been preserved, and declared as a “National Historical Landmark”.

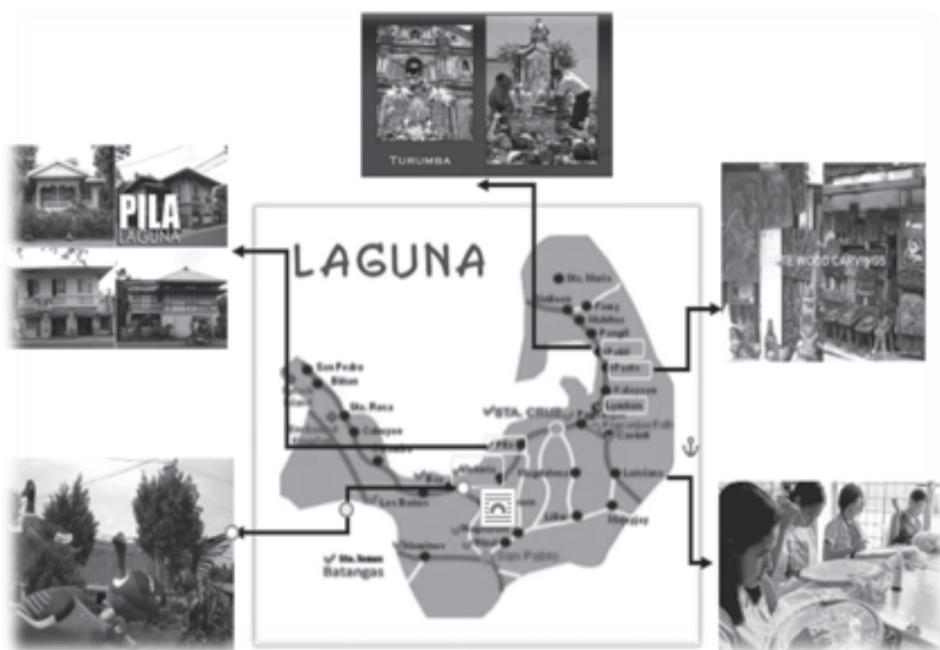


Figure 2. Map of Laguna and cultural resources of neighboring communities (Google Map)

Concept of Ecotourism and Community Based Ecotourism

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2012), defined ecotourism as “a type of responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. Whereas, the concept of Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) emerged in the mid1990s and generally small scale which involves interactions between visitor and host community. Such type of tourism suited to rural and regional areas. CBET is commonly understood to be managed and owned

by the community, for the community. It is a form of 'local' tourism, favoring local service providers and suppliers and focused on interpreting and communicating the local culture and environment (APEC, 2010).

Issues and Challenges on Developing Sustainable Tourism Destination

Several issues in relation to build a sustainable destinations in most developing countries. Such challenges attributed to the following factors: the lack of marketing capacity was one of the constraints identified (Boonratana, 2011); poor market access (Harrison and Schipani, 2007); dependent on a constant flow of visitors (Goodwin and Santilli 2009); marketing is a costly affair, frequently beyond the means of small to medium tourism enterprises therefore affecting the destinations' marketing capacities (Seif, 2001).

In a globalized and competitive environment, the tourism market has been recognized as a pillar for the growth and sustainability of tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2011). In the same notion, according to Pearce (2015), creating a competitive and sustainable tourism destination is deemed necessary in order to have a quality and systematic destination management. It implies a long-term process of change management, which includes optimal economic development of a destination, a higher level of life standard, ecological preservation, social and cultural heritage preservation.

Concept of Developing Sustainable Tourism Destination

The United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and United Nation Environment Program (UNEP) cited, a sustainable development should ensure a controlled development of tourism by using resources, which are the basis of tourism development, for the current development, but at the same time by preserving the resources for further generations. Furthermore, according to Agenda 21 (UNWTO, 1992) sustainable development in tourism should be based on sustainable preservation of ecological, socio-cultural and economic components, with the presence of human activities and processes as a key fact. Hall (2011), also states that sustainable tourism presents a paradox, as it stands for a success given the concept's diffusion among academics, industry.

Related Study

According to Crouch (2006), there is no simple formula that can be followed when developing a sustainable tourism destination, since there are different views, attitudes and preferences – the societal prosperity, quality of life, and the situation and resources available may dictate, constrain or shape tourism development. Chan (2010), cited that one needs to recognize that sustainable tourism development is multifaceted and there is no "one size fits all" tourist destination. The study proposed a general conceptual framework for building and developing sustainable tourism destination

which takes into consideration: a) destination key attributes and the destination competitiveness components; b) the principles of sustainable tourism codes and guidelines; c) promotion of responsible tourism grounded in environmental and social principles with ethical values and social responsibility.

Methodology

The study underwent three phases consisting of Environmental Impact Assessment, Cultural Mapping and SWOT Analysis. The study is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approach in nature. It involves descriptive method to address the objectives of this investigation. The primary and secondary data were obtained to different stakeholders in the field, people and institutions included in the promotion of ecotourism industries.

The primary collection of data involves different tools such as survey questionnaire together with Participatory Action Research (PAR), and observation of the area. A focus group discussion, preliminary meetings and workshop, and an in depth interviews made to convene the Local Government Unit (LGU), visitors and locals in Panguil, Laguna, Philippines were also utilized in the study. Judgmental sampling was applied in gathering pertinent data while expert sampling was also incorporated.

The initial copy of the instrument used was validated by the tourism experts for constructive criticisms, comments and suggestions. For the pragmatic approach of validation, content validity was utilized in the study to demonstrate the extent of the content of indicators in addressing different concerns faced by the destination. Through the integration of ethical standards, the gathered data were treated with utmost confidentiality by tallying the survey, transcribing and coding the result of interview and highlights of focus group discussion for easy interpretation of data. Letter of approval was designed to different concern parties to observe proper conduct.

Cronbach Alpha was utilized in validating tool and framework narrative analysis was used in analyzing and interpreting the data. Framework analysis was given consideration relative to the concepts utilized. Statistical method using weighted mean and deductive analysis were employed leading to discussion of the results.

To address the objectives of the study, the primary and secondary data had been obtained from different categories of fields, people and institutions involved in promoting cultural tourism and ecotourism. The primary data has been collected through the following: observation on the area; formal and semi-formal interviews conducted with Local Government Unit (LGU), visitors and local people.

Results & Discussions

Phase 1- Environmental Impact Assessment

In 2015, an “Environmental Impact Assessment” (EIA) was conducted to determine the perception of stakeholders on the environmental impact of tourism existing in PREP as

presented in Table 1. An EIA is a process to monitor and examine tourism impacts on the environment (Pickering & Hill, 2007). The study utilized survey questionnaires with 100 stakeholders (visitors, LGU, Personnel) of PREP as respondents.

Table 1. Assessment on environmental impacts of tourism in Panguil River Ecopark as perceived by stakeholders in Panguil, Laguna

Environmental Impact indicators	Overall Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Zoning	4.22	"Always Implemented"
Code of Conduct	3.60	"Always Implemented"
Waste Management	3.44	"Sometimes Implemented"
Carrying Capacity	2.20	"Never Implemented"

It appears in Table 1, carrying capacity obtained the lowest weighted mean of 2.20 and interpreted as "never implemented". The same result revealed on the study conducted by Layug et. al (2015) wherein uncontrolled number visitors experienced during summer. In an interview with the General Manager (GM) of PREP, he mentioned that "*we don't really control the number of visitors as we take advantage to gain more revenues so we could pay for our loans at the World Bank*". The over carrying capacity is a clear manifestation of the negative impact experienced at PREP. It is expected that failure to address the problem at the early stage may contribute toward environmental damage.

To address the problem on environmental degradation of PREP, a series of workshop among LGUs and local community of Panguil was facilitated between January to May 2016. The series of workshops were facilitated to teach the community on the importance of conserving and protecting their environment and how to develop and manage tourism sustainably.



Figure 3. Photos taken during the CBET Workshops

Phase 2- Cultural Heritage Mapping

In November 2016, a cultural heritage mapping was conducted in Panguil, Laguna having indigenous people and LGU as respondents. According to Hagen (n.d) cultural mapping is a valuable tool for identifying a community's strengths and its resources. This was directed to make an inventory of tourism assets present in Panguil and to determine the potentials of Panguil for CBET development.

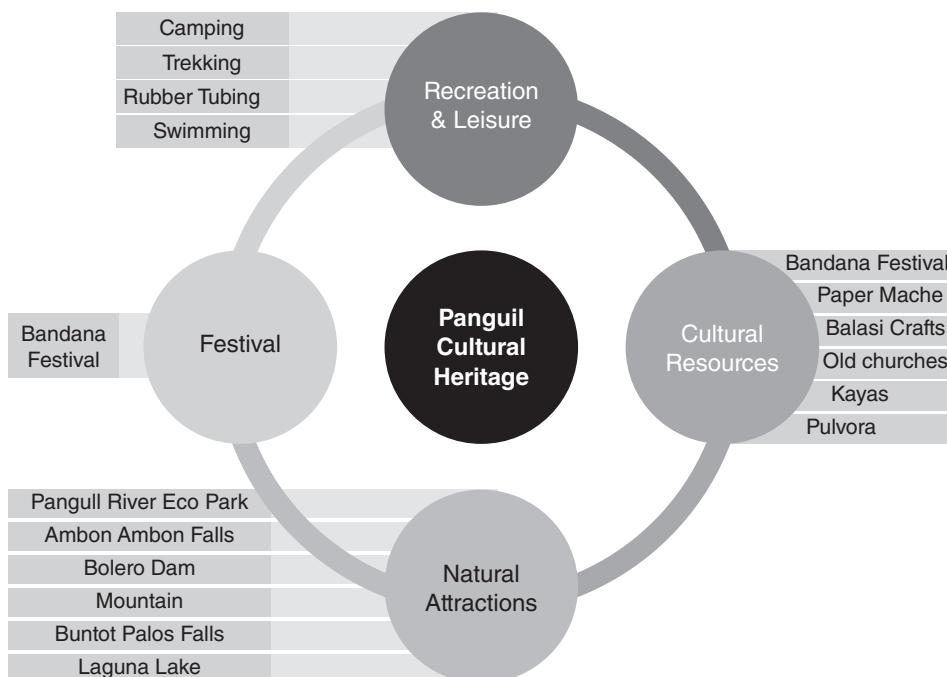


Figure 4. Cultural Heritage Mapping of Panguil, Laguna

Interestingly, Panguil is feasible for CBET in terms of base product since it has numerous natural and cultural attractions. Unfortunately, having base product for CBET development is not enough. Other factors for selecting ecotourism project sites is “Experience” wherein there should be an element for product development (Reyes and Mencias, 2012).

Phase 3- SWOT Analysis

In 2017, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis was conducted on the third phase to reveal the potential of the survey area. A SWOT analysis allows certain firm to identify their competitive advantage and to understand

the current and potential environment in which the product or services will be marketed (Lamb et.al. 2013). Through SWOT analysis research method is often used in business fields its use has now been extended to natural resources management to assess the decision and policy directive in a systematic manner (Schmoldt et al., 2001). The strengths and weaknesses (local analysis) are the internal factors while opportunities and threats (global analysis) are external factors (Harfst et al., 2010). SWOT analysis was done through empirical observation, group interview from different stakeholders namely, the Local Community, LGU's, Tourism Officers and literature review to determine whether the area has the potential to develop into CBET.

Strength	Weakness
Richness of natural and cultural attraction	Lack of ecotourism planning
Presence of ecosystems falls, river, lake, mountain, forests	Inadequate infrastructures
Having a pleasant and convenient environment	Poor market access or lack of marketing capacity
The place is accessible	Insufficient care to protect natural, historical and cultural values
Local community are friendly and hospitable	Limited activities
	The sale of local products not being planned
	The lack of marketing capacity
	Absence of tourism package
Opportunities	Threats
Existing natural and cultural attractions for responding new demands of tourists	Lack of water flowing in the river and possibility of drought
Making variety in tourism products and markets in order to attract tourists all year round	Natural disaster like floods, earthquakes
Having regular tours	Lack of attraction and activities
Increasing the quality of tours of tourism services and facilities	Absence of local policy in ecotourism management
Strategic coordination between regional tourism office and local government	Lack of skills and knowledge on operating PREP
Planning for new projects and allocated budget	Vulnerability of environment through scattering of waste
Contribution of handicrafts to tourism as entrepreneurial activities	Failure to implement carrying capacity

Figure 5. Summarizes the principal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats on the proposed CBET development.

Based on analysis, it shows that among the strengths the presence of ecosystems falls, river, lake, mountain, forests obtained the highest answer. The analysis is based on an informal interview with the respondents. Likewise, it also appeared in the cultural mapping under tangible assets conducted by Roxas & Hurano (2016). The presence of ecosystems denotes that the area has potential to be developed into CBET since falls, river, lakes, mountain and forest are based product of ecotourism development (Mencias, 2012). This is similar to the study conducted by Hong & Chan (2010) entitled: Strength-weakness-opportunities-threats Analysis of Penang National Park for Strategic Ecotourism Management wherein the presence of unique features such lakes, mountains and forests obtained the highest among the strength identified.

As to weaknesses, poor market access or lack of marketing capacity obtained the most number of answers. The emphasis made by the GM of PREP. When asked “why do you think, Panguil cannot attract more visitors despite it is accessible and has unique features? “we do not know how to start on how are we going to promote our place despite we have natural resources and numerous handicraft products, we only relied through word of mouth since we have no budget or enough funds to market our community”. It appears therefore that most of the results pertains to planning and marketing issue. The finding is similar to the study of Boonratana (2011) entitled: “Sustaining and Marketing Community-Based Tourism: Some Observations and Lessons Learned from Thailand”, wherein it revealed that the lack in marketing capacity same with the dilemma experienced by other community tourism destinations and less investment provided, both in terms of financial and trained human resources.

In terms of opportunities, many of the respondents claimed that making variety of tourism products and markets in order to attract tourists all year round could be the best option. The data is based from focus group discussions among LGUs of Panguil and tourism officer during the CBET workshop. This implies that Panguil has a huge potential to be developed into CBET destination and willingness of locals to be involved to market their products. This also support in support to Tourism Master Plan 2016-2022 where one of the strategic directions is to encourage local communities to expand product development. The findings also reconcile with the study of Anuar et. al. (2015), “Developing of Tourist Friendly Destination Concept: A Quantitative Study”. The study cited that all attributes are “important” in measuring tourist friendly destination in tourism namely: dimensions of activity – wherein there is a need to provide a varied activities where the value of ethnic has been embedded in art cultural and historical activities, offering diverse entertainment activities and special events need to achieve the tourist’s demands.

Pertaining to threats, failure to implement carrying capacity had the most frequent answers. The data is similar to the survey conducted among 100 tourism

stakeholders of Panguil namely: visitors and staff personnel of PREP. This implies that failure to implement carrying capacity is a clear manifestation of undermining the environmental aspect of sustainability. The threats perceived by the stakeholders is evident in several studies wherein very often negative aspects of ecotourism are associated with environmental deterioration as environmental carrying capacity thresholds have been exceeded. On the study conducted by Kantawateera et. al. (2014), "A SWOT Analysis of Tourism Development in Khon Kaen, Thailand" the study revealed that concentration is in economics, but it contributes to a loss in terms of environmental issues if carrying capacity is not implemented.

Conclusion and Recommendation

One important consideration prior to destination promotion, one has to conduct environmental impact assessment on the first stage. Whilst tourism has the potential to contribute in a positive manner to socio-economic achievements at the same time, its fast and sometimes uncontrolled growth can be the major cause of degradation of the environment and loss of local identity and traditional cultures. The next stage is to undertake cultural mapping, to explore other natural and cultural resources of a particular destination and to determine what other alternative activities to offer; and SWOT analysis should be done at the last stage to identify the competitive advantage and to understand the current and potential environment in which the product or services will be marketed.

The following are recommended to build a sustainable perspective:

- Introduce variety of tourism products to attract tourists all year round by introducing alternative activities like team building, mountain climbing that will control the flow of visitors within the Ambon-ambon Falls.
- Offer other alternative cultural products like "Kayas" where students can learn how to create artworks using a piece of stick and visit the "Balasi Crafts" and where visitors can buy souvenir and decorative items made of paper
- Develop tourism circuit by tapping the neighboring communities of Panguil like the Paete which is known for "*Wood Carving Capital of the Philippines*" and Lumban dubbed as "*Embroidery Capital of the Philippines*" as added attractions.
- Strictly adopt carrying capacity which can be done through the implementation of reservation policy.
- Create interactive website to monitor and control number of visitors.
- The marketing media and activities should be delivered through partnerships and collaboration with other stakeholders.



Figure 6: Meeting with the LGU of Panguil and Familiarization Tour with the Association of Travel and Tours Facilitator Inc. (ATTFI) and Tour Operator United Reform Advocacy Vigor Excellence League (TOURAVEL)

- The development and design of promotional materials will be done through collaboration with Multi Media Arts of the institution whilst advertising and publicity will be delivered by the Local Government Unit of Panguil and its neighboring municipalities.

The proposed marketing strategic framework can serve as a generic holistic framework to guide the tourism destination towards sustainable development and ensure that all stakeholders benefit accordingly. Further research may be undertaken to validate the proposed marketing strategic framework for sustainable tourism perspective.

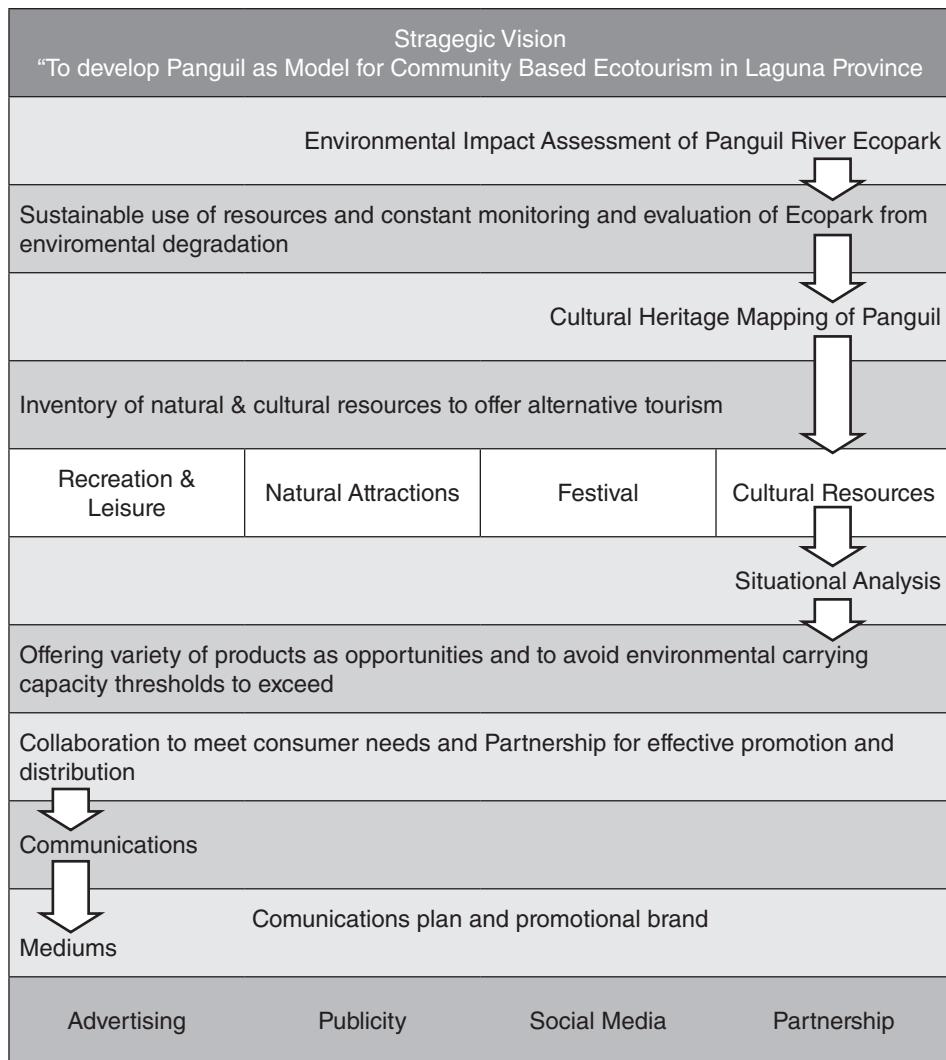


Figure 7. The proposed strategic marketing framework of Panguil River Ecopark toward Sustainable Perspective

Another research avenue may involve comparative studies for different tourism destinations worldwide, which may generate more holistic findings.

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