

## **Pagbalangkas: Issues and opportunities on natural heritage sustainability of Samar Island Natural Park (SINP), Philippines - Basis for inclusive organizational management framework**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Pagbalangkas* is a Filipino term, which means formulation or conceptualization. And in the conceptualization of a place branding strategy, such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS), stakeholders, specifically the government sector, must understand different factors and aspects of sustainable development. This study explicated the different issues and opportunities for conservation, and sustainable development, specifically for Samar Island Natural Park (SINP), Philippines. Specifically, the study also determines the associations of different efforts mandated and implemented by different government agencies both from the national and local, assessing the impacts and effects of current and potential plans and programs for conserving and sustaining SINP as a future UNESCO WHS and to conceptualized a framework that would highlight the basic factors on place branding development based on the case of SINP. The research used a qualitative-case study design, specifically by measuring information through focus group discussion (FGD) and content analysis on available government-issued documents. Participants from the FGD were representatives from different government agencies from the national, regional, local, and people's organizations. The gathered information was analyzed through a repertory grid. Based on the research, conceptualizing a place branding development, such as UNESCO WHS, must determine the government organizations, institutions, and systems framework, situation analysis of the place and its community, issues, and opportunities manifested.

### **1. Introduction**

As people hear the word heritage, they tend to think of different definitions like cultural, antiques old, and something passed down from different generations. In general,

heritage is material or built, which is mostly human-made. Heritage is a "legacy from the past, what people live today, and what people pass on to future generations" (Zerrudo, 2008). In the context of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, natural features, geological and physiographical formations, and natural sites are considered heritage (UNESCO, 2020a). Some of the inscribed natural sites are Mount Hamiguitan Range Wildlife Sanctuary (UNESCO, 2020b), Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (UNESCO, 2020c), Rwenzori Mountains National Park (UNESCO, 2020d), and Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai Forest (DPKY) Complex (UNESCO, 2020e). International recognition, such as UNESCO, shows the people's utmost concern about development and sustainability given to natural resources. When UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS or WH) designation is given, different impacts can be recognized, both positive and negative. Some of the effects are the development of tourism, encouragement/curiosity from domestic tourists to visit the inscribed site, and people's views on conservation of the cultural environment (Jimura, 2011).

In the UNESCO WHS designation, place branding through tourism are inextricably linked to each other. In the research conducted by Ryan, Chaozhi & Zeng (2010), they highlighted the significance of UNESCO WHS designation in a locality, especially on economic development through tourism. It could underline better opportunities for local communities to experience urban and rural development, tourist arrival and expenditure, job and investment opportunities. Because of the positive impacts of the UNESCO WHS designation, different stakeholders are motivated to invest in potential development and sustainably use it for promoting conservation (Lochrie, 2016). The title could provide beneficial effects and branding opportunities that could affect different stakeholders' lives and lifestyles. Through the UNESCO WHS status, potential tourists are motivated to travel, visit the sites, and strengthen their identity and community (Hassan & Rahman, 2015). But the success of a UNESCO WHS for tourism varied based on the "research period when the measurement took place, level of development in the destination country, heritage type,

dyadic data type, WHS endowment measure, and use of robust standard error" (Yang, Xue & Jones, 2019). Having also the UNESCO WHS recognition could deliver better opportunities and sustainable concepts, such as urban and cultural regeneration (Ertan & Egerciooglu, 2016), marketing and promotion (Caust & Vecco, 2017), the development of entrepreneurship in micro cultural destinations (Mudarra Fernandez & Vena Oya, 2020), economic valuation and its related impacts (Cellini & Cuccia, 2016) and highlighting local culture and tradition (Patuelli, Mussoni & Candela, 2013).

But there are also negative impacts associated with the development of UNESCO WHS, especially on tourism. As highlighted by Athula Gnanapala & Sandaruwani (2016), in Sri Lanka UNESCO WHS, several adverse implications/problems have experienced. It can be over prioritizing tourism, conflict of interests, unsustainable contraction and infrastructure development, poor heritage and cultural interpretations specifically on guiding, and poor site management. Because of it, an appropriate and intensified multi-governmental cooperation and coordination must be implied (Ripp & Rodwell, 2017). It is also highlighted by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2015) that governmental and stakeholder approaches on conservation and sustainable development must be attained, especially on conceptualizing programs, projects, and plans, such as nominating sites for UNESCO WH. To ensure that in the conceptualization of different plans and programs for a potential UNESCO WHS, appropriate actions must be provided. Normally, it is mandated and promoted by UNESCO that in a multi-governmental approach for creating a nomination for a WHS, the team must include the national government of the state party, national heritage and cultural agencies, local authorities (local government unit from the provincial, municipality/city), and other national and local government agencies (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS & IUCN, 2011). In a progressive and appropriate action, it can mitigate problems, such as over-tourism (De Luca, Dastgerdi, Francini & Liberatore, 2020), congestion and overcrowding of tourists (Du Cros & Kong, 2020), climate change, and natural-related hazards (Ravankhah, de Wit, Argyriou, Chliaoutakis, Revez, Birkmann, Zuvela-Aloise, Sarris, et al., 2019; UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS & IUCN, 2010), inappropriate plans and

programs for development (e.g., promotions) (Marcotte & Bourdeau, 2012), affecting the local culture and integrity of the community, specifically for developing countries (Caust & Vecco, 2017), the balance between tourism development and conservation (Mariani & Guizzardi, 2019), and politicizing the benefits of the recognition (Meskell. 2014). Some of the mitigation plans and programs that can be achieved through multi-governmental cooperation and coordination are reviewing management and operational plans of the site, laws and other appropriate policies, budget allocation and review, impact assessment, education and interpretation, communication campaigns on the outstanding universal value (OUV), and other related entities (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS & IUCN, 2012). Governmental coordination and cooperation must be implemented throughout the nomination, declaration, monitoring, and evaluation (Duarte, Garcia, Lejano, Magpantay, Saavedra, Virtucio & Mercado, 2020). It is to assure that programs and projects are aligned to use UNESCO WHS as a sustainable place branding mechanism and not to be the reason for the site's degradation and its community's culture and heritage.

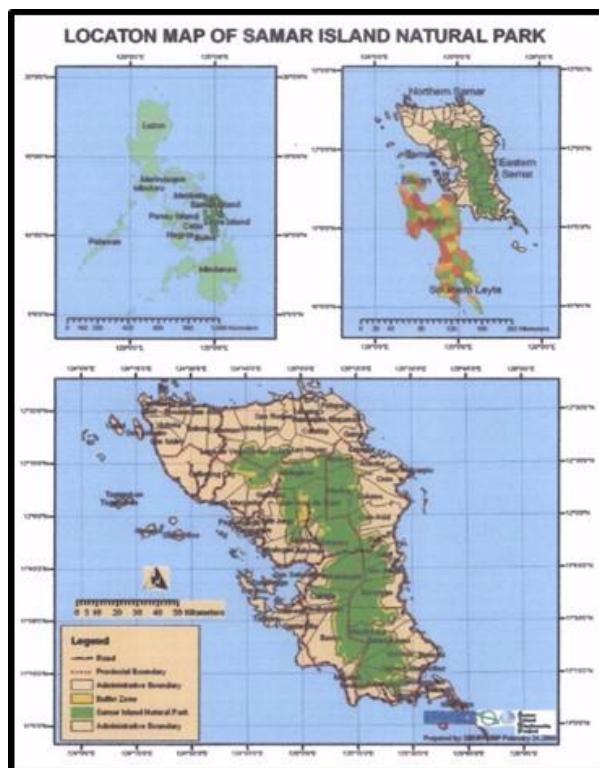
In the Philippines' central-eastern region, specifically in Region VII or Eastern Visayas, Samar Island Natural Park or SINP is located on the island of Samar in Eastern Visayas, Philippines (Barcelo, 2019). It is within the Eastern Visayas Bio-Geographic Zone and the Greater Mindanao Faunal Region. Samar is the third largest island in the Philippines, with a total of 1.34 million hectares (Holden, 2012). The island is divided into three provinces: Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, and Western Samar or Samar. Figure 1 shows a figural representation of Samar Island's location in the Philippines' geographical entity.



**Figure 1. Figural Representation of the Location of Samar Island in the Philippine Territory**  
 Source: Google (2020)

SINP is also home to the largest tract of relatively intact lowland forest in the country (Barcelo, 2019; Holden, 2012). It is because of its mountains' mineral-rich soils that support its forest and agro-forest ecosystem. As a result, it is also the home of the site- and country-endemic floral and faunal species, which are significant from the context of conservation sciences. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified at least sixteen Dipterocarp species in SINP as critically endangered, endangered, and vulnerable. Of significant note are the species from the genus of *Hopea*, *Hopea acuminate*, *H. malabato*, *H. philippinensis*, *H. samarensis*, all of which are endemic to the Philippines and have been classified by IUCN as critically endangered. The same applies to species from the *Shorea* genus, *Shorea almon*, *S. assamica* ssp. *Philippinensis*, *S. astylosa*, *S. contorta*, *S. negrosensis*, *S. palosapis*, *S. polysperma*, *S. squamata*. The park is also home to critically endangered *Dipterocarpus validus* and endangered *Dipterocarpus grandifloras* (Barcelo, 2019). On the faunal resources, SINP is known for some of the iconic species such as the Philippine Sailfin Lizard (*Hydrosaurus pustulatus*), Mindanao Flying lizard (*Draco mindanensis*), Philippine Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus philippensis*), Golden-Crowned Flying-fox

(*Acerodon jubatus*), Philippine Cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*), and Philippine Crocodile (*Crocodylus mindorensis*) (Barcelo, 2019). The IUCN also classifies all of these as critically endangered, endangered, and vulnerable. Within the context of the SINP, there are four identified areas with rich biodiversity and significance on its endemism coverage (Barcelo, 2019). These are *Sohoton* Natural Bridge National Park, *Calbiga* Caves Protected Landscape, *Jicotol* Natural Park, and Taft Forest Philippine Eagle Wildlife Sanctuary. Figure 2 shows a figural representation of the exact location map and boundaries of SINP. Due to its significance, Samar, Northern Samar, and Eastern Samar's provincial governments decided to nominate SINP for UNESCO WHS under natural sites (DENR Region VIII, 2019).



**Figure 2. Figural Representation of the Location Map of Samar Island Natural Park**  
Source: DENR (2012)

This study explicated the different issues and opportunities on conservation, and sustainable development, specifically in the UNESCO WH nomination phase for SINP. Specifically, the study also determines the associations of different efforts mandated and implemented by different government agencies both from the national and local, assessing the impacts and effects of current and potential plans and programs for conserving and

sustaining SINP as a future UNESCO WHS, and to conceptualize a framework that would highlight the basic factors on place branding development based on the case of SINP. The study highlights the absence of institutionalized central entity for SINP specifically the need for an Administrative Framework focusing on Organizational Management which specifies the arrangements for ownership, authority, legitimacy, and accountability. From the research, its significance would provide a direction for regional offices of the different national government agencies on how to directly aligned their plans and programs with the provision of their policies and guidelines. It will also serve as a basic guideline on the conceptualization and implementation of policies, programs, and projects on place branding based on multi-governmental contribution and approach. Lastly, it will also determine the participation and responsibilities of different stakeholders in implementing current and plans.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Design

The research used a qualitative-case study design. It is to comprehensively understand and analyze the views and opinions of different stakeholders and the current situation on SINP's management, governance, plans, and programs. Under the qualitative design, the researchers utilized the case study approach. Table 1 provides a tabular representation of the materials and methods used for the study.

**Table 1. Tabular Representation of the Materials and Methods Used for the Study (Conceptualized by the Researchers)**

Design	Approach	Measurement		Instruments	Ethical Consideration	Analysis
		Heritage Evidence	Research Measure			
Qualitative	Case Study	Oral	Focus Group Discussion	Semi-structured Aide Memoire or Guide Questions with <i>Robofoto</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters of Intent;</li> <li>• Endorsement Letter from the Provincial Governments;</li> <li>• Approval from the Stakeholders;</li> <li>• Consent Forms;</li> <li>• Ethical Citations and Referencing; and</li> <li>• Academic Purposes Only</li> </ul>	Repertory Grid
		Documentary	Content Analysis	Literature Review and Synthesis Matrix or Tabular Reconnaissance		

## Data Measure

To comprehensively determine the primary and secondary stakeholders' views and opinions, gathering appropriate oral evidence was implemented through focus group discussion (FGD) for the government and content analysis from available literature and documents.

For the FGD, an online forum was between the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School – Center for Conservation of Cultural Property and Environment in the Tropics (UST GS-CCCPET) and the Provincial Governments of Samar, Northern Samar, and Eastern Samar. The significance of the forum was to gather information from key informants coming from primary-management-related stakeholders. Table 2 shows the list of attendees during the FGD. The FGD was guided with the conceptualized semi-structured aide-memoire, which was evaluated by a panel of evaluators. The aide-memoire is divided into three (3) major topics: awareness on sustainable tourism development, conservation, and safeguarding, the current situation on sustainable tourism development, protection and safeguarding, and sustainable development in tourism of SINP. The online FGD was recorded. A written transcript was also produced. Participants for the FGDs must be an official representative and/or officials of the organizations, which could provide sufficient and related information and data.

**Table 2. Tabular Representation of the List of Attendees during the Focus Group Discussion (Conceptualized by the researchers)**

Focus Group Discussion Participants' Position and Affiliation	Responsibilities in the SINP-UNESCO World Heritage Nomination
Regional Director, Department of Tourism (DOT) Region VIII	Key initiator in the development and submission of the nomination dossier and the key governmental stakeholder in the conceptualization of sustainable tourism and strategic development plan for SINP
Tourism Operations Officer, Department of Tourism (DOT) Region VIII	Key initiator in the development and submission of the nomination dossier and the key governmental stakeholder responsible for the conservation, protection, and sustainable development of SINP
Protected Area Superintendent (PASu), Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Protected Areas Management Bureau (DENR-PAMB) Region VIII	Key initiator in the development and submission of the nomination dossier and the key governmental stakeholder responsible for the conservation, protection, and sustainable development of SINP
Provincial Tourism Officer, Provincial Government of Samar	Key governmental organization in the development of different tourism and hospitality-related programs and projects within the province of Samar, including significant areas in SINP
Supervising Tourism Operations Officer, Provincial Government of Samar	Key governmental organization in the development
Municipal Tourism Operations Officer,	

Focus Group Discussion Participants' Position and Affiliation	Responsibilities in the SINP-UNESCO World Heritage Nomination
Municipal Government of Basey, Samar	of different tourism and hospitality-related programs and projects within the municipality of Basey in the province of Samar, which Sohoton Cave Natural Bridge National Park is politically managed.
Municipal Tourism Operations Officer, Municipal Government of Calbiga, Samar	Key governmental organization in the development of different tourism and hospitality-related programs and projects within the municipality of Calbiga in the province of Samar, which Calbiga Cave Protected Landscape is politically managed.
Provincial Planning and Development Coordinator, Provincial Government of Samar	Key governmental organization in the development of different planning and developmental strategic programs and projects within the province of Samar
Chief Tourism Operations Officer, Provincial Government of Northern Samar	Key governmental organization in the development of different tourism and hospitality-related programs and projects within the province of Northern Samar, including significant areas in SINP
Education Program Supervisor, Technology and Livelihood Education, Department of Education (DepEd) Samar Division	A key governmental stakeholder on the supervision and development of academic and co-curricular in the basic and vocational education, especially the tourism and hospitality track in the province of Samar
Representative, Samar Island Heritage Center (SIHC)	A provincial people's organization in Samar that is responsible for the academic and research development of Samar Island's cultural and natural heritage

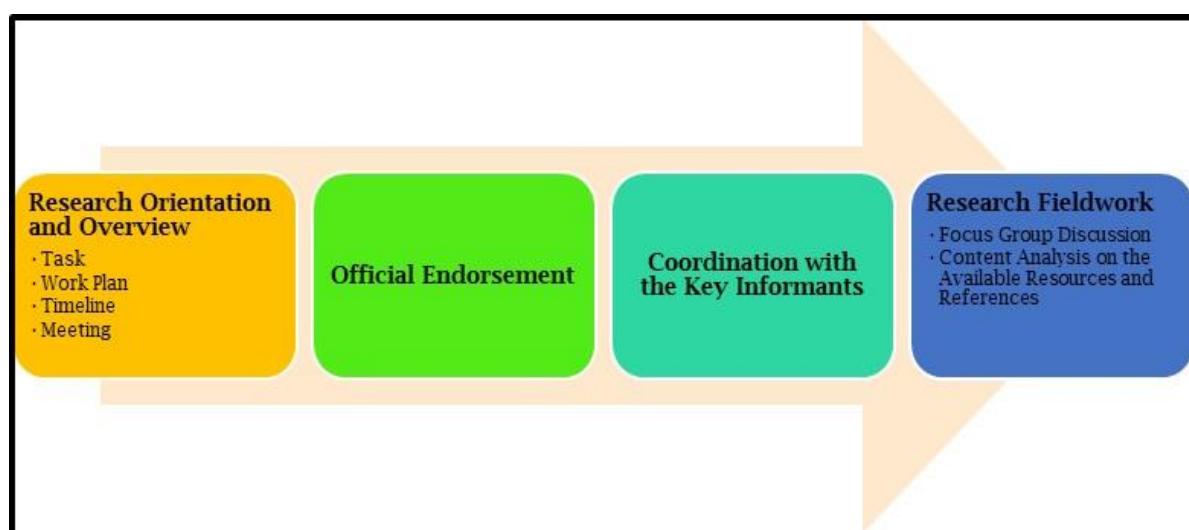
Lastly, for the documentary evidence, the researchers used content analysis for all existing documents, plans, programs, policies, guidelines, and standards. The DOT Region VIII conceptualized it, DENR-Protected Areas Management Bureau (PAMB) Region VIII, Provincial Governments of Samar, Northern Samar, and Eastern Samar and cities. It will effectively determine essential points and considerations on how the primary stakeholders prioritize the management and development of SINP. A literature review and synthesis matrix or tabular reconnaissance were used to document the identified statements systematically. Aside from government documents, the researchers reviewed published academic articles, government websites, books, reports, and other related materials.

## Data Collection Procedure and Ethical Consideration

In the preliminary part of the process, the research coordinating and tourism team initially discussed the project's overview and its associated output. Initial meetings were also implemented to discuss specific assignments and tasks to be done by the researchers. A

draft work plan was also submitted to provide a skeletal overview of the project formally. After submitting the draft work plan, an official endorsement was released from the Provincial Governments of Samar, Northern Samar, Eastern Samar, DOT, and DENR-PAMB Region VIII. The endorsement was used during the conduct of the FGD and coordination with key informants and respondents. The stakeholders also submitted different government documents that could be used to gather information on management, marketing, operations, human resource, and financial capabilities for SINP tourism development. Proper in-text citations and referencing using the American Psychological Association (APA) Style 7<sup>th</sup> Edition were implemented for ethical consideration. In the implementation of the FGD, adequate and appropriate communication was achieved through the Provincial Governments. Letters of intent and copies of the aide-memoire, and consent forms were sent to key informants. An online platform was used to conduct the FGD, a better alternative during the implementation of community quarantine and physical distancing. An orientation to the participants was held to explain the significance of the FGD formally and to discuss that the online activity will be recorded for documentation purposes. A consent form was also issued to properly document the agreement between the researchers and the key informants. After the FGD, transcriptions were created through a pen-and-paper approach.

Figure 3 provides a linear flowchart of the data collection procedure of the study.



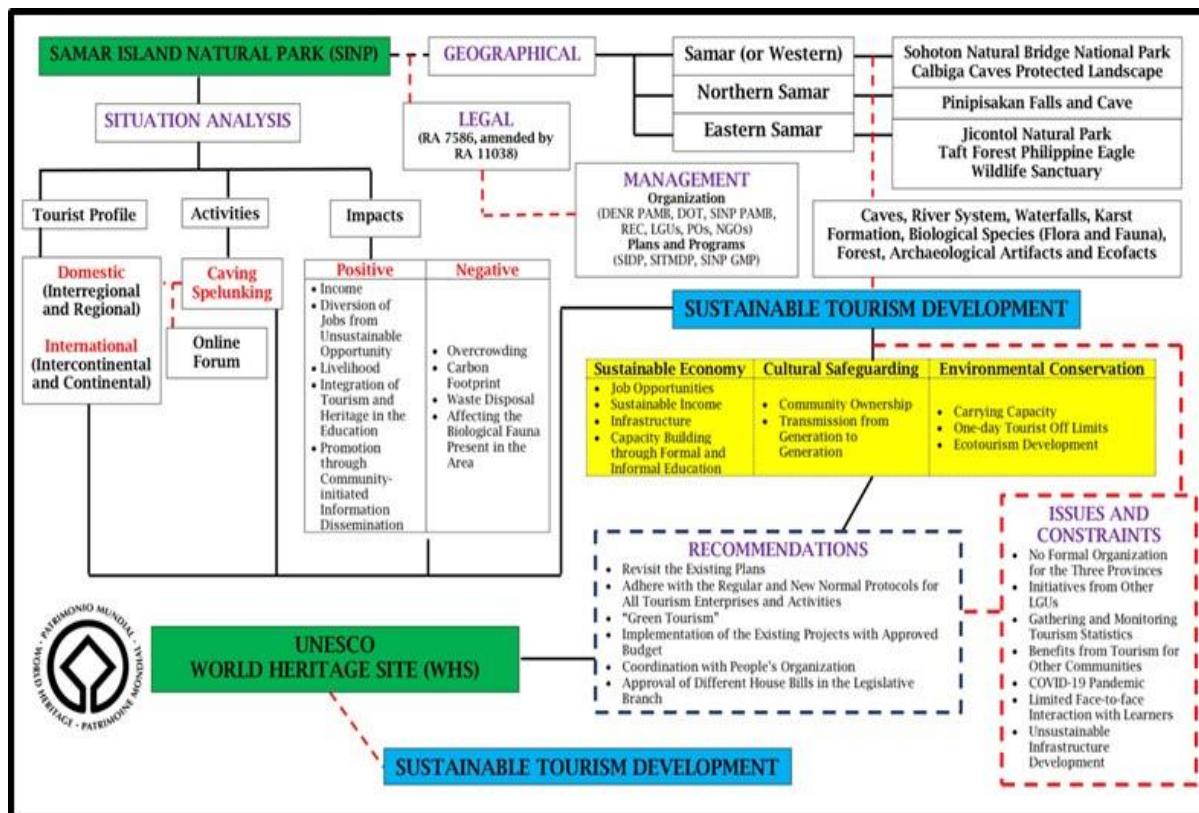
**Figure 3. Figural Representation of the Data Collection Procedure of the Study (Conceptualized by the Researchers)**

## Mode of Analysis

The repertory grid was used to analyze the findings identified from observation, in-depth interview, FGD, and content analysis. The repertory grid is the process of understanding significant statements from oral and documentary evidence by grouping them based on their similarities. Then, a priori codes must be provided to represent similar statements. If possible, general a priori codes can be delivered to group the same thoughts of a priori codes. The codes will be used to explain the findings in the research paper. Researchers used a tabular format in implementing the repertory grid.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The government, both national and local, is responsible for setting-up goals and expectations for a tourist destination as it is evident to different plans, programs, and associated strategies implemented and monitored. It is conceptualized and implemented to provide meaningful benefits and impacts to the concerned stakeholders' economy, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects. Thus, the findings revealed about the significance of evidence portrayed in frameworks to determine the government sector's perspectives and views in developing a tourism development plan. Figure 4 shows the figural representation of the focus group discussion framework from the government sector responsible for Samar Island Natural Park.



**Figure 4. Figural Representation of the Focus Group Discussion from the Government Sector (Conceptualized by the Researchers)**

SINP is politically governed in its geographical context and comprises three (3) provinces: Samar (or Western Samar), Northern Samar, and Eastern Samar. It is legally considered as a protected area under the Republic Act No. 7586 or the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992 (Congress of the Philippines, 1992) and amended by the Republic Act No. 11038 or the Expanded NIPAS Act of 2018 (Congress of the Philippines 2017). Due to its legal implications, SINP is managed by different stakeholders, such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Protected Areas Management Bureau (DENR PAMB) Region VIII, Department of Tourism (DOT) Region VIII, SINP Protected Areas Management Board (PAMB), Regional Ecotourism Committee (REC), different local government units (LGUs) in the provincial, city, and municipal levels, People's Organization (POs), and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) (DOT & Certeza Infosys Corporation, 2019). Different organizations and institutions managing SINP are mandated under guidelines, plans, and standards. It provides a

systematic process on how to conceptualize and implement programs and projects for the conservation and development of SINP. The current plans are the Samar Island Development Plan (SIDP), Samar Island Tourism Master Development Plan (SITMDP), and the SINP General Management Plan (GMP). The organizations and institutions are also currently conceptualizing the Samar Island Natural Park Sustainable Tourism and Strategic Development Plan (SINP STSDP) for 2022-2031. The figural representation of the FGD portrays the bird's eye view of the entire complexity of the protected area entity. This includes the primary stakeholders describing their roles and responsibilities in organizational management functions and accountability for the attainment of future prospects focusing on sustainability and UNESCO WHS nomination. Figure 5 provides a figural representation of the SINP organizational management framework on promoting conservation and sustainable development. It shows the significant relationship and coordination between different organizations and institutions on implementing programs and projects based on relative policies and laws mandated in the area of concern (Ripp & Rodwell, 2017).



**Figure 5. Figural Representation on Samar Island Natural Park (SINP) Organizational Management (Conceptualized by the Researchers)**

Currently, significant areas in SINP are open for tourists and excursionists to visit, explore, and learn the significance of the protected area. Based on the records and statistical reports of the LGUs on tourism arrival and profile, domestic and international tourists are normally visiting their areas. Domestic tourists are visitors categorized as regional (different provinces within Region VIII) and interregional (coming from the Philippines). In regional records, almost ninety-percent (90%) of SINP tourists are domestic travelers. From the international perspective, they have recorded travelers under the continental (tourists living within the Asian continent) and intercontinental (tourists who live from other continents, for example, Europe, North America, and Australia). Normally, the recorded international tourist nationalities are Americans, Koreans, British, German, Chinese, French, and Swiss. In terms of tourism activities, most tourists are doing adventure and outdoor-related recreation like cave spelunking. Usually, foreign cavers and spelunkers visiting SINP are members of different online fora available on social media websites like Facebook. It became one of the effective channels of communication and promotion for SINP. With the records on tourist arrivals and its related activities, it could highlight an emerging tourism system that is being implemented in the area, which is significant in the nomination of a site for UNESCO WHS (Mudarra Fernandez & Vena Oya, 2020; Caust & Vecco, 2017; Cellini & Cuccia, 2016; Ertan & Egercioglu, 2016; Ryan, Chaozhi & Zeng, 2010).

Different stakeholders have experienced some significant benefits and costs through the current tourism programs and projects being implemented. In the context of its positive impacts, local communities, especially residing within the SINP, are generating income and profitability due to different livelihood and job opportunities. Some of them are related to *banig* weaving, food catering, assistance in different adventure-related activities, and community tour guides. It also helps the government in diverting the lifestyle of local communities and make it sustainable. Before tourism activities are implemented, the local communities were concentrating on timber poaching or *kaingin*, which contributes to the destruction of the natural resources of SINP. In the context of education, natural and cultural

heritage and tourism of SINP are integrated with the curriculum, pedagogy, instruction, and competencies of different programs at the senior high school level, specifically on the Department of Education (DepEd) *Basey* and *Calbiga* Divisions in the province of Samar. Tour guiding and tourism promotions are some of the programs that are being offered. After the program, most students were assessed and certified by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) regional office. Lastly, the government sector observed how local communities became proud of SINP's resources and their significances, which lead them to promote and disseminate information to their community peers and visitors. It relates to the development of current studies associated with the positive impacts of tourism, such as economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects (UNWTO, 2020b; Cellini & Cuccia, 2016; Patuelli, Mussoni & Candela, 2013).

But negative implications are being experienced due to the implementation of tourism in SINP. The most common is overcrowding of natural tourist sites and attractions, which leads to an increased carbon footprint and wastes disposal. There are also possibilities for natural disruption of common biological features (flora and fauna) in SINP due to tourists' physical movement and local communities and infrastructure development. Primarily, the situation of SINP is associated with the common problems of exiting UNESCO WHS, such as overcrowding and natural disruption of biological features (Du Cros & Kong, 2020; Mariani & Guizzardi, 2019). With this, the government must provide an adequate mitigation strategy to diminish or complete the existing problem, especially that the nomination is currently creating.

The government, in general, would like to concentrate on the movement towards sustainable tourism development. It highlights the significance and balance on sustainable economy, cultural safeguarding, and environmental conservation (UNWTO, 2020b; UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS & IUCN, 2011). Primarily, the government sees the importance of a sustainable economy through job opportunities and availability of sustainable income to the communities, ethical and sustainable infrastructure development based on the significance of SINP, and capacity building to the communities and other

related stakeholders through formal and informal education. In the appreciation of SINP as a premier tourism destination, the local community must strengthen community ownership, be proud of their local resources, and continuously conserve and preserve SINP for the future generation. Sustaining local resources and the environment can be achieved by implementing carrying capacity, tourism activity limitations (e.g., one-day tourist off-limits for significant areas in SINP), and the development through the use of ecotourism principles and strategies.

Although some programs and projects are planned and implemented to promote sustainability, different issues and constraints are being experienced by different stakeholders. In the management and governance of SINP, specifically from the three (3) provinces, there is no formal organization that will be responsible for unifying plans and programs for SINP. Currently, regional offices from DOT and DENR are the collaborators and serves as initiators in the development of SINP. Another significant issue that arises is LGUs in the development and sustainability of the areas concern. It was highlighted that the main drivers of sustainability and development for SINP depend on the initiatives and directions set by local chief executives (LCEs). Because of this political and governmental culture of other LGUs, there is also a difference in the benefits or positive impacts that the community is experiencing. That is why it is highlighted that the success of SINP's sustainable tourism development lies in the perspectives and actions done by the LGU concern. In terms of documentation and inventory of tourist arrival, SINP management and its related LGUs are experiencing problems, especially on unified associated guidelines and protocols on sustainable tourism statistics and records management. There are reports that, for instance, some international tourists can directly go to the sites without proper coordination and recording from the authorities (e.g., tourism information centers from LGUs or *Barangay* representatives). Due to SINP's natural and cultural significances, projects and programs on development and commercialization must be cautiously conceptualized, implemented, and monitored based on the authorities' standards, strategies, and guidelines. But there were cases that protocols are not implemented, which led to a disruptive effect on

the protected area's natural landscape and biodiversity. An example is the controversial construction of *Basey-Magdolong* Road, which connects Samar and Eastern Samar provinces. The project was developed by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). The road provides the easiest way to traverse Tacloban to Eastern Visayas and vice-versa. Unfortunately, major portions of SINP in Samar and Eastern Samar were destroyed. Thus, to compromise the protected area's damage, the DPWH and the project contractor paid 47 million pesos. But as participants shared, the amount of money cannot replace the entirety of loss from the biodiversity and landscape of SINP. Lastly, in today's situation, the Novel Corona Virus or COVID-19 Pandemic affects the area's operation and management. Closure of tourist attractions, sites, and their related establishments is the primary effect to SINP and its stakeholders due to the implementation of health and sanitation guidelines and protocols. Also, the delivery of tourism and hospitality education is affected by means of limited face-to-face interaction between the facilitator and the learners. Due to the reflected current problems and its related situation, it is also manifested in the context of mismanagement (Somuncu & Yigit, 2010), political culture and its associated impacts (Meskell, 2014), the inappropriateness of implemented plans and programs (Marcotte & Bourdeau, 2012), and climate crisis context through natural and biological hazards (Ravankhah, de Wit, Argyriou, Chliaoutakis, Revez, Birkmann, Zuvela-Aloise, Sarris, et al., 2019; UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS & IUCN, 2010).

Because of the different issues and constraints experienced by the stakeholders in SINP, the government sector is proposing recommendations to ease the current problems. Due to the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, DOT, DENR regional offices, and LGUs must revisit and reexamine the current strategic directions and programs from the existing plans and programs for the sustainability of SINP. Another significant action that must be done during the pandemic is to adhere to the regular and new normal standards and protocols for all tourism enterprises and their related activities. The standards and protocols must be based on the DOT's existing accreditation standards and the new normal guidelines set by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-

MEID) and DOT (2020). Although the industry is experiencing the pandemic's wrath effect, it is vital to implement the context of "Green Tourism" or sustainable programs and projects on tourism development. In this point, coordination with different POs must be practiced, specifically on providing capacity building, training, seminar, alternative livelihood, job opportunities, and their responsibilities during and after the pandemic. Also, accounted and approved budget allocation on projects and programs for SINP, either from the national or regional, must be implemented even in the time of the pandemic. It is in line with the provision of the general and local appropriations budget allocated by the government. Lastly, to provide legal support on the succeeding programs and projects for SINP, the legislative sector concerned in the region proposed the following House Bills in the lower house of the Philippine legislature: House Bill No. 06000: An Act Declaring *Ulot* River in the Municipality of *Paranas* an Ecotourism Site and Appropriating Funds, Therefore; House Bill No. 06001: An Act Declaring *Lulugayan* Falls an Ecovillage in the Municipality of *Calbiga* an Ecotourism Site; and House Bill No. 06075: An Act Declaring *Sohoton* Caves and Natural Bridge in the Municipality of *Basey* an Ecotourism Site and Appropriating Funds, Therefore. The suggestions of the government sector also adhere to the current situation of different potential and declared UNESCO WHS, which focuses on implementing new standards and protocols due to biological hazard (UNWTO, 2020a), sustainable environment and development (Odeku, 2018), coordination and collaboration (Duarte, Garcia, Lejano, Magpantay, Saavedra, Virtucio & Mercado, 2020), training and development, financial allocation, and laws and policies (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS & IUCN, 2012)

The government sector wanted to continue the value of sustainable tourism development for SINP by nominating SINP's like the new UNESCO WHS of the Philippines. It will contribute diversified impacts to the stakeholders through international prestige and recognition and popularity by means of having an international "title." By having the recognitions, different economic benefits can be experienced by intensifying and abrupt increasing tourist arrivals and related tourism development and activities. The region can get international and national public and private agencies' attention, specifically on funding and

prioritization. It could also provide beneficial impacts to the community, especially on income generation and job opportunities. But the most important impact of the recognition is to intensify the implementation and monitoring of programs and projects on conservation and protection of SINP's natural and cultural heritage significance. It supports the essence of conceptualizing, implementing, and monitoring programs and projects for SINP's sustainable tourism development. The government sector adheres to the concept of sustainability even on its plans and programs, which will benefit the region's economy (Menor-Campos et al., 2020; Ribaudo & Figini, 2016; Meskell 2014; Oktavio & Indrianto, 2019), communities and their heritage (Khalaf, 2017), and the environment (Odeku, 2018).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the conceptualization and development of a place branding specifically in SINP and its UNESCO WH nomination, it needs evidence-based research on determining issues and opportunities arising. Figure 5 provides a figural representation of the SINP sustainable development quadrant. In the initial phase, specifically during the nomination requirements' conceptualization, stakeholders' participation through the government sector's initiative must be attained. The study highlights the absence of institutionalized central entity for SINP specifically the need for an Administrative Framework focusing on Organizational Management which specifies the arrangements for ownership, authority, legitimacy, and accountability. This being said, the government, as an organizational management initiator and implementor must provide a direction on managing and developing sustainable programs and projects for the subject site, attraction, or destination. This initial study, as basis and guidance derived from empirical primary data, the government must determine the associated organizations and institutions (national, regional, local, and people's organizations) and its management framework (laws, policies, and systems) which will determine the needed people and their responsibilities during the conceptualization, nomination, and implementation. Further, it will also highlight the legality, alignment, and ethical standards on nominating the site, attraction, and destination based on current

national, regional, and local policies and plans. The related stakeholders must then determine the current situation, specifically on visitor profile, marketing and promotions, programs and projects, such as tourism education and interpretation, and impacts and implications. In situation analysis, stakeholders must determine how factors can be associated with a possible concentration on the conceptualization of different developmental programs and projects and validate its appropriateness in the nomination. During situation analysis, stakeholders must determine different management issues, political culture, the inappropriateness of programs and projects, and climate crisis (natural and biological). The issues can affect the integrity and significance of the nominated site. From this, it is needed to provide appropriate solutions and mitigation measures. Possible solutions can be related to the opportunities recommended by the stakeholders, such as the implementation of new standards and protocols, promotion of sustainable environment and development, coordination and coordination with different stakeholders, training and development, financial allocation, and provisions for appropriate laws and ordinance. But in the end, programs and projects, such as the UNESCO WH nomination as place branding, must be utilized sustainably to promote balance between economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects of the stakeholders' concern. The study presents the initial findings of the Qualitative Approach through the findings from interviews and FGD with the stakeholders. Therefore, the source of data is limited to the initial set of informants. The succeeding phase of the project focuses on the Quantitative Approach through Surveys for both the Tourists and Local Communities of the entire Local Government Units (LGU) within Samar Island Natural Park (SINP).



**Figure 6. Figural Representation of SINP Sustainable Development Quadrant (Conceptualized by the Researchers)**

Future researches may focus on the Local Administrative issues and concerns including territorial jurisdiction and business functions of the SINP stakeholders.

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## 6. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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