

Homestay and Tourism in a Philippine Municipality: A Conceptual Framework for Sustainability

Shirley V. Guevarra

University of the Philippines Diliman

Ma. Corazon P. Rodriguez

University of the Philippines Diliman

ABSTRACT

The alternative definition of tourism as an act of “gathering, building, dwelling, and learning” (Phipps, 2007) was enacted in a homestay program of Sariaya, a municipality in southern Luzon in the Philippines. The hosts, the student butlers or guides, and the tourism council contributed to the visitors’ being able to “gather” sensory perceptions of Sariaya; “build,” make sense, and understand these sensory perceptions enough to “dwell” and be part of the “visited” community from where “learning” and sweet memories of the municipality have become part of their personhood. More than photographs, these shared memories will probably be part of the discourse of tourism students. For a homestay program to be sustainable, however, the following must be done: change the paradigm among homestay participants by arriving at competitive pricing strategies, establish standardized pricing and more efficient homestay services, discover the potential of storytelling as a feature of homestay, address the issue of privacy among homeowners, and establish an acceptable return for participating in the homestay program. The last point is important because sustainability of the project is dependent not only on the fulfillment of sociocultural objectives but also on economic and financial objectives. Likewise, sustainability can be realized if there is a close coordination among the stakeholders, namely, the Sariaya Tourism Council, the local government, the academe, local businessmen, nongovernmental organizations, and national tourism offices.

Keywords: Homestay, sustainability, stakeholders, tourismic experience, community empowerment

The contribution of tourism to development is almost uncontested. There are many examples of countries in North America, Europe, and Asia that attest to the potency of tourism in spurring growth and development. As stated by Williams and Shaw:

Tourists also spend money directly on recreational facilities, tourist attractions, shops and local services. In turn, these have indirect effects on agriculture, wholesaling and manufacturing, while secondary rounds of spending of tourism create induced linkages in the economy (cited in Beeton, 2006, p.14).

Like other strategies, however, tourism has unintended results (Stem, Lassoie, Lee, & Deshier, 2003). Many issues have been raised about the effects of tourism on communities: commodification and authenticity (Scarpato & Daniele, 2003), romanticizing poverty, and referring to local groups without conflict (Liu, 2003), not to mention the negative effects on families brought about by serendipitous opportunities for wealth creation among women who in the past were consigned to do unpaid household work. There are a number of communities in the Philippines where organized groups of women have been able to manage businesses as ongoing concerns. Ashley's program (2006) on pro-poor tourism also highlights another unintended result of tourism development. Neo-liberal development models, it is said, contribute to a skewed distribution of economic benefits in favor of those who have control over capital.

As tourism develops, significant profits accrue to airlines, owners of land transport, travel agencies, hotels, shops, and related businesses. There are stories about destinations that have reached a stage of maturity where, because of dwindling demand, hotels were abandoned and communities left to deal with reduced opportunities to earn a living. These issues comprise the core of Ashley's program on pro-poor tourism—how tourism can be managed so that a wider base of beneficiaries, especially the marginalized sector, can be considered. Moscardo's (2003) community involvement and Beeton's (2006) community empowerment are tagged as ingredients to sustainable tourism. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development or OECD:

Local communities are not just the hosts for tourism, but also a cultural attraction in themselves, helping to define the sense of place, atmosphere and regions.... The support of the local community has proven essential to developing cultural experiences of tourists (OECD, 2009, p. 54).

As more and more communities have expressed their interest in tourism as an alternative source of livelihood, issues of equity, sustainability, empowerment, and an inclusive approach to development cannot be ignored.

It is noteworthy to mention that discourses in tourism have also moved from it being a purely business concern to an experience of gathering, building, dwelling, and learning (Phipps, 2007) and tourism as “being and becoming,” alluding to the difference between “flaneurs” and “chorasters” (Weaver, Stevenson, & Young, 2010). As a business concern, market segments, accessibility, affordability, and eventually profitability are goals that must be met to assure sustainability. The contribution of authors like Phipps and Weaver, et al., and others whose names could not all possibly be included in this article have diverted tourism’s importance from pecuniary measures of success to metrics that attempt to describe tourism as an experience. For example, Phipps (2007) likens tourists’ encounters in a destination as an experience of “gathering” sensory perceptions about the place; “building” impressions about people, places, events, objects, and relationships in the visited place; “dwelling” as a unique experience of ‘encountering’; and “learning” as memories that are revisited, replaced, and created as a result of the tourismic experience. Weaver, et al. refer to Plato’s concept of “being” and “becoming” which is likened to the difference between “flaneurs” and “chorasters.” The difference being that, as a tourist immerses himself or herself in the destination, the transformation from being a mere spectator to that of a visitor that is capable of emoting and empathizing with the locals is made possible. These kinds of discourses shift the value of quantity and quality of tourismic offerings away from concerns that have to do with money to “meta” values that are related to the quality and meaning of encounters in the visited place.

In this paper, the researchers chose homestay programs as initiatives that address these concerns. Homestays provide opportunities for diverse participation of different stakeholders by relying on existing infrastructures such as heritage houses, indigenous knowledge, expertise in managing visits of outsiders, and food culture, among others. Moreover, the experience of meaningful encounters in a visited place is expected to come naturally compared to what could possibly happen if visitors are billeted in hotels and inns. The emergence of a market niche composed of tourists who are depicted as hungry to experience local cultures (Mowforth & Munt, 2003) has encouraged many entrepreneurs in the tourism sector to consider homestays as a potential money-earning project. To date, studies about the profitability of homestays are “thin” if not inaccessible. One possible explanation could be that offerings are so heterogenic: sizes of available rooms differ from one homestay to another and amenities are far from being standardized. There are also

homeowners who are not inclined to do business on a sustained basis as evidenced by the fact that notions about costing of services are almost non-existent. In Sariaya, homeowners accommodate visitors as a gesture of generosity thus, translating this expression of goodwill into pesos and cents, defeats the purpose of welcoming visitors to their abode.

In other places, however, homestays (*nongjiale*) can be a principal means of livelihood among the local folks as what was experienced in Dahe Village, Thailand (Juan & Piboonrunroj, 2007).

OBJECTIVES

This study is exploratory in nature. It utilizes data obtained from a four-year research conducted by an interdisciplinary team of professors of the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman. This paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. describe the homestay program in Sariaya, Quezon (the research site),
2. identify stakeholders and their roles in the development of a sustained homestay program, and
3. enumerate insights and areas of further research that will contribute toward a sustainable homestay program for application in other communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Homestay

Homestay provides alternative accommodation facilities for tourists and travelers at affordable rates compared to commercial lodging facilities. In the early 1980s, the UP Asian Institute of Tourism (AIT) conceptualized a homestay program that was later adopted by the Department of Tourism (DOT) for implementation in different communities in 1986. The DOT's homestay program was initially geared toward providing alternative accommodation and home-cooked food to Filipino and foreign tourists by involving local homes in selected homestay areas in the

Philippines. It was envisioned to provide opportunities to both Filipino and foreign tourists who travel on a limited budget. Homestays are opened to tourists where there is a demand for affordable accommodation to travelers and local economy. DOT capability-building training-workshops were held, such as the two-and-a-half-day Basic Innkeeping Procedures for 108 participants on October 14 to 16, 1986 in San Jose, Antique (Ministry of Tourism Memo, November 1986). Participants came from Antique, Aklan, Marinduque, Zamboanga del Norte, Batanes, and Catanduanes. A report showed that a similar workshop for Luzon cluster followed on November 5 to 6, 1988 in Baguio City. The DOT conducted these seminars to ensure the sustainability of the program in terms of providing clean and properly managed homes. No recorded literature showed the creation of cooperatives among homeowners who operate homestay facilities or any government incentives. In terms of tax levy, only government-accredited homestay operators, like in Pagudpud in Northern Luzon, are expected to pay their taxes. It cannot be denied, however, that many operate without a government license.

At present, DOT accredits homestays based on demand for rooms, quality of facilities, presence of tourist attractions, accessibility, and the willingness and ability of homeowners to provide basic food and accommodation for travellers. This whole package was patterned after the bed-and-breakfast model.

Reflection papers written by students who participated in a homestay experience in Sariaya in 2009 stated that homestays enable tourists to experience the hospitality of host families which is absent in hotels and other commercial lodging facilities. Interviews with local families in Sariaya manifest the willingness of residents to share their homes with strangers especially during festivals.

To date, there are a number of communities that offer homestay services. A homestay program bruited about as a success story north of Manila (in Ilocos) was described in a 2009 international conference with the theme, "Partnerships at Work: Local Implementation and Good Practices" (The East Asian Seas Congress, 2009). These are success stories of local government units that have been instrumental in the sustained operation of homestay programs. Boracay and Pagudpud, two popular beach destinations in the Philippines, are also known to have homestay programs. The DOT lists the basic criteria for homestays as follows: good peace and order situation, and host families should be able to provide a separate room, clean comfort room, clean linens and beddings, and adequate and potable water. Backpackers or tourists with a limited budget usually patronize homestays. With the hotel rates ranging from Php 1,500 to 8,500 in Sariaya, homestays will provide alternative lodging for this group of tourists.

Basic Features of the Homestay Program

The homestay program requires families to host one or more tourists by providing room accommodations and allowing them to use common areas such as the comfort room, kitchen, and dining and living rooms. A room may have the most basic amenities such as a bed, side table or coffee table, chair, telephone, electric fan, and/or an air conditioning unit. The homestay program provides extra income to the host families. What usually are considered idle rooms are converted into income-generating units. In terms of design, a separate door is ideal so that the guest will be given privacy and so that he/she can go in and out of his/her room at any time of the day and night. Payment is predetermined. Guests may request extra bed sheets, pillows, and blankets. Meals— namely, breakfast, lunch, and supper where local cuisine and local ingredients are mostly showcased— are part of the homestay package. In Sariaya, there is an emerging demand among city dwellers for local viands as well as participation in rituals like drinking local coconut-based liquor, among others.

Pro-poor Tourism, Community Empowerment, and Homestay Programs

Several concepts were used as bases for this study. Concepts on the management of “income leaks” were sourced from Ashley’s (2006) material on pro-poor tourism. She posits that homestays are opportunities to keep the income from tourists confined within the community. She identifies the variables that can make tourism pro-poor: supply chains, financing for money-earning projects of disadvantaged groups, capability building, and institutional linkages. Supply chains and leaks described by Ashley refer to what usually occurs in tourism destinations that develop using capital-intensive resources as evidenced by the presence of expensive hotels, restaurants, and shops that sell imported goods. Proliferation of these kinds of establishment leads to “income leakages” that do not usually benefit the locals. Thus, homestays can be considered an approach to contain earnings in tourism activities inside destinations which are expected to lead to increased multiplier effects among stakeholders.

Other concepts on community participation and empowerment were sourced from Mowforth and Munt (2003), OECD (2009), Moscardo (2007), and Beeton (2006). The latter authors state the emergence of a new niche of “culture-thirsty” tourists.

METHODOLOGY

Selected data were extracted from an interdisciplinary project on culture in Sariaya and further processed for this paper. Participant observation was initially utilized to unearth culture variables with the end in view of working with a local group to help design and implement tourismic income-generating activities. Several validated culture descriptions were produced representing the different disciplines of the research team. These are Architecture, Music, Human Kinetics, Home Economics, and Tourism Management. From these descriptions, indicative tourismic packages during festivals were produced. In keeping with the suggested strategy of keeping earnings from a tourismic activity within a community (Rodriguez, 2011) the homestay program was considered. The belief being that if accommodations are provided by the locals, revenues other than sales of local delicacies will be maximized.

The researchers reviewed the definitions and standards of different homestay programs in the Philippines. After conducting a census of potential homestay participants within the town proper of Sariaya, they initially availed themselves of homestay during the 2009 Lenten season. Each team in the Sariaya project invited students and other researchers to do a “dry run” of the indicative tourism package that included participation in the *senakulo* and the *visita iglesia* in nearby Lucban and Tayabas areas and homestay. Three members of the Sariaya research team stayed in one home.

The second run for homestays was made during the *Agawan* Festival (May 14 and 15, 2009). The non-academic personnel of AIT spent their planning workshop in Sariaya and stayed in two homes where they helped in the preparation of *bagakay* (bamboo poles decked with fresh produce as well as packed processed snack food such as chips and cookies) and participated in “storytelling” with the owners of the homes. Of the 20 personnel who joined the festival, only nine were billeted in homestays. The researchers used the evaluation after the trip to identify areas of improvement for tourism packages. Likewise, they also conducted a pre-feasibility study to establish rates for food and accommodation and determine the financial return of homestay to the host families.

The third and fourth runs were held on September 13 to 14, 2009 (Sto. Cristo Festival) and March 21 to 23, 2010 (out-of-classroom activity of a Special Topics class in AIT) with 15 and 23 homestay participants, respectively.

To address potential problems deduced from the experience of two previous attempts, the Sariaya Tourism Council (STC) and the Sariaya project team collaborated more closely. A list of potential homestays was produced from personal visits that were conducted during weekends by the researchers in coordination with an STC officer/volunteer to determine the willingness, as well as the availability, of participating homes. The basic criteria for the selection of the homestay participants included the following: willingness to provide accommodation and meals to the tourists, security, and adequate water supply. Homes with water tanks were prioritized. Whereas the first and the second runs had transients who were mainly employees of UP, the third and the fourth runs were participated in by UP students.

Limited time and financial resources led to the selection of the employees and students of UP through convenience sampling. The decision to tap this group (employees and students) was based on an articulated market segment that Sariaya hopes to target in the future. Research funds were used to pay for their stay in the different houses. Prior to their visits, students were prepared via classroom discussions. A weekend session was set aside to orient participating homeowners on hygiene, cleanliness, and safety. Before the third run, the researchers scheduled one Saturday to orient the local student tour guides and participate in a “mock tour” of the *poblacion* (town center). As the homestay owners and the student guides were being prepared, the researchers made changes in the schedule of the itinerary to ensure that visitors will have ample time to go around the poblacion, taste the local offerings, and purchase souvenirs. Upon billeting the guests in their respective homestays, the participants were brought to the farm to experience local games and local food, and a reenactment of the procession for the local patron saint, St. Isidore. The researchers administered pre- and postsurveys to the hosts and a separate set of pre- and postsurvey questionnaires to the guests. Using these data, the paper deduced the relevant stakeholders in the planning and implementation of homestays in communities as well as insights derived from the experiences of the research team.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The following section presents the postevaluation results of out-of-classroom activities on September 13 and 14, 2009 and March 21 to 23, 2010. Data were sourced from 38 UP-AIT students and 23 homeowner-participants in Sariaya.

Sariaya, Quezon

Sariaya is located 126 kilometers southeast of Metro Manila. It is bounded on the north by Mount Banahaw, on the northeast by Tayabas, southeast by Lucena City, on the south by Tayabas Bay, on the southwest by San Juan, Batangas, and on the west by Candelaria, Quezon. With a total land area of 24,530 hectares, it is the only town in the provinces of Quezon and Laguna that is blessed with both mountain (i.e., Mount Banahaw) and sea coast (Dedace, 2009). With a total population of approximately 130,000 as of 2005, Sariaya is made up of 43 *barangay* (villages), six of which are in the poblacion. Fishing and farming are the major sources of livelihood of the locals. Vegetables, fruits, coffee, coconut, and root crops comprise the town's primary products. The sea coast provides a rich source of seafood products while livestock raising, cottage industries (rattan and buri crafts, delicacies, sweets), and tourism augment the locals' income. The town is home to the *Agawan* Festival (celebrated in the month of May), the *Belen* Festival (during Christmas), the *Santo Cristo* Festival (in September) and the *Senakulo* (during Lent). Sariaya prides itself with a cathedral with strong roots during the Spanish occupation, ancestral houses built at the turn of the 20th century, interesting gastronomy, hospitable people, and affordable beach resorts as well as an imposing view of Mount Banahaw. At the time of the study, the following provided accommodation for tourists: the 10 member-resorts of the Beach Resort Owners Association of Sariaya (BROAS), three swimming pool resorts, and a hotel. Rates ranged from Php 1,500 to 8,500. Out of these lodging facilities, only one resort had incorporated a modest set breakfast meal (e.g., rice, viand, and beverage) in its room rate of Php 900 a night. Unfortunately, no official data was provided by the local government unit (LGU) of Sariaya in terms of tourist arrivals.

The Homeowner-Participants

Prior to the September 13 and 14, 2009 visit of students from the UP-AIT, the Sariaya Tourism Council (STC), represented by a volunteer, consulted with potential homeowner-participants to the homestay program. This consultation was done based on learning derived from the two previous attempts (the *Senakulo* during Holy Week and the *Agawan* Festival) to formally start a homestay program under the auspices of the STC. The majority of those who agreed to participate owned houses that are typical of middle- and lower-income groups (including teachers, retired teachers, a general merchandise store owner, a housewife, and a government employee) in the poblacion. The researchers considered the houses because the

visitors will be students who cannot afford to stay in big ancestral houses that are also located within the area. Table 1 shows that the majority of those who agreed to participate said they have four to six rooms (76.9 percent in September 2009 and 60 percent in March 2010) that they can spare for guests. In the dry run on May 14 and 15, 2009, a problem was encountered regarding “spaces” that are available for use by guests. Some homeowners wanted to billet more guests in their rooms to maximize occupancy.

However, the visitors received this arrangement positively. When this problem was analyzed after the dry run, it became evident that local homeowners had a different definition of “comfortable space” compared with that of visitors. To address this, the STC, together with the interdisciplinary research team, visited all potential home participants and decided to assign a maximum of two rooms per participating home.

**Table 1. Rooms Available in Homes
that Agreed to Participate in the Homestay Program**

No. of Rooms	September 13 to 14, 2009	March 21 to 22, 2010
	Frequency (n=13)	Frequency (n=10)
1 to 3	2	3
4 to 6	10	6
7 to 10	1	1

Homeowners' Awareness of Homestay

Table 2 shows that for both periods, September 13 to 14, 2009 and March 21 to 22, 2010, the majority or 61.53 percent and 70 percent of the homeowners, respectively, are knowledgeable about homestay programs. They obtained significant information on homestays from sources identified with the STC. Thus, the homeowners were more than willing to participate but also required more effort on the part of the organizers to provide information on how a homestay operates. Prior to the September and March visits of students, the interdisciplinary research team together with the STC set aside a day to meet with homeowners to discuss concerns related to hygiene and food preparation since these are two basic functions that will ensure the safety of the participants.

Table 2. Prior Knowledge on Homestay

Prior Knowledge	September 13 to 14, 2009	March 21 to 22, 2010
	Frequency (n=13)	Frequency (n=10)
Yes	8	7
No	3	3
No answer	2	0

Reasons for Joining the Homestay Program

When the homeowner-participants were asked why they agreed to join the homestay program, the following common responses were obtained through the use of open-ended questionnaires:

- *Layuning tumulong sa pagpapaunlad ng turismo sa munisipalidad* (To help in the progress of tourism of the municipality);
- *Mapakita ang magandang ugaling taga-lugar* (To show the good character of the local folks);
- *Magkaroon ng bagong kakilala* (To gain new friends);
- *Sapat nang mag-entertain ng mga taga-U.P. students* (I am satisfied that I have entertained U.P. students); and
- To impart to them the culture and tradition of Sariaya.

The above articulations show that the primary reason for the homeowners was to show the visitors the innate good character of the locals. They also expected to gain new friends. Despite Sariaya's grand houses and its quaint rural character, it is not surprising that the homeowners value more the unique and rare opportunity to showcase what their community has to offer.

Room Allocation

After the dry run, the majority of homestay participants were more than willing to provide one or two rooms (Table 3) which had been unoccupied anyway. It is the nature of the Sariayahins to welcome guests into their homes without expecting anything in return, which is a typical Filipino trait. This indicates that the homestay participants still do not consider homestay as a business venture even after one year of participating in the program.

Table 3. Rooms Allocated for Homestay

No. of Rooms	September 13 to 14, 2009 Sto. Cristo Festival	March 21 to 22, 2010
	No. of Homeowner- Participants (n=13)	No. of Homeowner- Participants (n=10)
1	8	8
2	4	2
3	1	0

Incurred Expenses

Table 4 shows that homeowner-participants experienced difficulty in quantifying their services and expenses in preparation for the homestay. The participants were not mindful of the proper accounting of their actual expenses as can be gleaned from Table 4. There was difficulty in assigning monetary values to services and food served especially during special days like a *fiesta* (feast day) because amounts cannot be disaggregated between personal and “business use.” There was a wide range of expenses ranging from Php 5,299.68 to as low as Php 143.53 in 2009 and Php 400.20 to Php1,500 in 2010. This might have been the result of “forcing” the respondents to give answers that they were not comfortable about during discussions with the Sariaya project team. During the March 2010 trip, the homeowner-participants also failed to accurately quantify their expenses. Thus, in both instances, it was also difficult to determine the average expense per guest incurred by the homeowner.

Table 4. Amount Spent in the Preparation for Homestay

Year/ Participant	Item/Amount (Php)					Total (Php)
	Food	Fare	LPG/ Fuel	Helper	Others	
2009						
Sept. 2	99.82	3.80	29.90	-	-	143.52
Sept. 6	1,000.04	-	500.02	249.78	-	1,749.84
Sept. 10	4,999.74	-	799.94	-	-	5,299.68
Sept. 11	4,000.66	-	-	-	-	4,000.66
Sept. 13	1,500.06	68.08	299.92	-	1,386.44	3,254.50
2010						
March 1	899.76	-	-	-	-	899.76
March 2	1,000.04	-	-	-	-	1,000.04
March 3	400.20	-	-	-	-	400.20
March 5	1,500.06	-	-	-	-	1,500.06

The failure of the homeowners to log their expenses can be attributed to their inability to see the homestay program as a business venture which also validates their failure or hesitation to put a price on their efforts. It can be gleaned from this result that the Filipino hospitality is very evident among the homeowner-participants.

Food Served During Homestay

In terms of food preparation, Table 5 shows that the homeowners used mostly local products such as meat, poultry, fish, and vegetables as ingredients for preparing meals. While not all participants gave a detailed list of their purchases, it is evident that most of the items bought were sourced from Sariaya and neighboring towns. *Longganiza* (local version of chorizo), which is famous in Sariaya, is said to be produced in a nearby municipality (Lucban). Sariaya also boasts of a local noodle dish called *chammy*, which is similar to *pancit canton* but has a sweet taste. This dish resembles another indigenized food called *pancit habhab*, so called because of the way it is eaten, which is by using the mouth to slurp the mound of noodles from the small square of banana leaves which serves as the product's container.

Table 5. Foods Items Bought for Homestay

Participant	Septemer 13 TO 15, 2009	Participant	March 21 TO 22, 2010
1	chicken, pork, hotdog, egg, Lucban longganiza (sausage), dried fish, bread, rice, pancit (rice noodles), lumpia (spring rolls), buko (young coconut), banana	1	pork, fish, egg, fruits, vegetables, meat, Lucban longganiza
2	pork, banana, coffee	2	chicken, pork, fish, vegetables, fruits
6	pork, fish, hotdog, egg, Lucban longganiza, squid or fish, milk, coffee, bread, softdrinks, juice, banana, chicken, pork, egg	3	chicken, pork, fish, vegetables
9	Lucban longganiza, chicken, pork, fish, macapuno (coconut), pork, fish	4	chicken, pork, vegetable, fruits, native cakes
10	Lucban longganiza, egg	5	pork, fish, fruits, vegetables, chicken, fish, vegetables
11	vegetables, chicken, pork, fish	6	chicken, pork, beef, fish, fruits, vegetables
13	sotanghon (mung bean noodle), tamales, puto (rice cake), banana, pinagong (local bread), salad, coffee	7	chicken
		8	fruits, beef, chicken, fish, vegetables
		9	chicken

One of the hosts claimed to have served “*do-do-do*” (*menudo*, *embutido*, and *mechado*), that is, pork dishes which are staples during fiestas. Breakfast included local fare like *Lucban longganisa*, native cakes, and baked products like the turtle-shaped bread *pinagong*, *apas*, *broas* (lady fingers), and many others. Dishes served during the March 2010 homestay consisted of *tinolang manok* (chicken cooked in ginger and papaya) and fish. Aside from local baked products, *mukmok*, a popular native cake made of ground cassava or banana, was also served as snacks. From the list of food in Table 5, the homeowner-participants were able to showcase the usual fare in a Sariayan table. Except for hotdog, the rest of the ingredients are either traditional or indigenized products. Sim (2009, p. 322) acknowledges the study of Davidson, Bondi, and Smith (2005) as well as that of Boniface (2003) on the role of taste, touch, sound, and smell within the holiday. Sim also cites the studies of several authors (e.g., Boniface, 2003; Clark & Chabrel, 2007; Enteleca Research and Consultancy, 2001; Ilbery, Kneafsey, Bowler, & Clark, 2003; Torres, 2001; Woodland & Acott, 2007) stating that the kind of food and drinks offered to tourists can have a major impact on the economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability of tourism destinations (Sim, 2009, p. 322). He further explains researchers’ arguments that locally sourced products can benefit both hosts and guests. It can be gleaned from Sariaya’s food products that several iconic products can be harnessed to develop the municipality’s food tourism.

Students’ Evaluation of the Homestay Program

Table 6 presents a comparison of the students’ evaluation of the 2009 and 2010 homestay programs. Included are data on student guides who were recruited from a local college offering an undergraduate course on tourism.

These guides were trained by both the STC and the interdisciplinary research team in preparation for the September and March visits of students from the UP-AIT. The organizers assigned student guides to groups of visitors. These guides welcomed the guests, escorted them to the different homes, and helped the visitors move around the poblacion. Even if students were assigned to homes of middle- and low-middle income homes and despite the big difference between huge ancestral homes and the ones assigned to them, their ratings for the facilities of the homes where they were billeted were surprising.

In the September and March visits, the ratings were mostly “Good” and “Excellent.” Guest service was also “Good” for both visits. What could have accounted for these? One possible answer could be in the way the homeowners prepared to accommodate

visitors. The homeowners were encouraged to do storytelling. Students were also told to use their stay to validate cultural artifacts, value systems, and assumptions unearthed by the interdisciplinary research team. After the September visit, many students verbalized positive encounters during their homestay. In addition, relationships with student guides continued long after the visit with exchanges of text messages and e-mails. In September 2009, a student commented that tour guides need more training specifically in terms of the flow of managing and explaining the various sites and activities. In March 2010, the rating for tour guiding improved from an excellent rating of 40 percent in 2009 to 65 percent in 2010. The lessons learned in September 2009 were used to improve tour guiding.

Table 6. Evaluation of Students on Homestay

Category	Sept. 2009		March 2010		Category	Sept. 2009		March 2010	
	(n=15)	%	(n=23)	%		(n=15)	%	(n=23)	%
Facilities					Food				
Poor	0	00.00	1	4.35	Breakfast				
Fair	6	40.00	1	4.35	Poor	0	00.00	0	00.00
Good	7	46.67	10	43.48	Fair	0	00.00	0	00.00
Excellent	4	13.33	11	47.82	Good	8	53.33	5	21.74
					Excellent	7	46.67	18	78.26
Access- ibility					Lunch				
Poor	0	00.00	0	00.00	Poor	0	00.00	0	00.00
Fair	4	26.67	0	00.00	Fair	2	13.33	1	4.35
Good	7	46.67	13	56.52	Good	6	40.00	8	34.78
Excellent	4	26.67	10	43.48	Excellent	7	46.67	13	56.52
Guest service					Dinner				
Poor	0	00.00	0	00.00	Poor	0	00.00	0	00.00
Fair	4	26.67	0	00.00	Fair	1	6.66	0	00.00
Good	1	6.66	3	13.04	Good	7	46.67	6	26.09
Excellent	10	66.67	20	86.96	Excellent	7	46.67	17	73.91
Security					Snacks				
Poor					Poor	0	00.00	0	00.00
Fair	0	00.00	0	00.00	Fair	1	6.67	2	8.69
Good	3	20.00	2	8.69	Good	8	53.33	12	52.17
Excellent	6	40.00	6	26.09	Excellent	6	40.00	9	39.13
	6	40.00	15	65.22					
Tour Guide									
Poor	0	00.00	0	00.00					
Fair	5	33.33	0	00.00					
Good	4	26.67	8	34.78					
Excellent	6	40.00	15	65.22					

Students, however, noted the lack of storytelling activities as some homeowners became so busy with the preparation and cooking of food. Students loved the activity of sharing and learning from the homeowners' narratives. This result is significant because it established the potential of storytelling as a feature of a homestay program. It appeared that very little external help is needed in the preparation by homeowners to do storytelling because as participants in shared histories for a prolonged period of time, they have a wealth of memories that they can recall and share with visitors. The initial run of the homestay which the researchers participated in was replete with stories using story aids ranging from pictures culled from the family wooden chest to heirloom pieces such as the antique life-sized statues of saints and items displayed in the family cabinet. Eating time also featured stories on the preparation of local food. Sim (2009) explains that telling the stories of food products, including the people and places involved in their production, will enhance the tourist's desire for authenticity.

Assessing the Profitability of the Homestay Program

An attempt was made to compute the profitability of homestays in Sariaya. Table 7 shows a summary of computations. The organizers derived the initial rate of Php 925.00 for a "one-night, one-day stay" with a host family from a survey of rates of existing resorts and a few lodging facilities in the area. The breakdown of the rates is as follows: rooms at Php599.38, breakfast at Php74.98, lunch and dinner at Php125.12 each. The researchers also considered food cost and variable operating expenses such as cleaning supplies, LPG, payment for helpers, local transportation, utilities, repairs and maintenance, and miscellaneous items.

The researchers also allocated as depreciation cost for furniture and fixtures spread over a total of five years. They also included a fixed operating cost for the monthly wage of helpers needed for house maintenance, especially for those homes with no occupants. However, since most of the houses were occupied by the owners, this amount was considered their compensation for the effort which they expend in maintaining the homes. Table 7 indicates that a host will realize a financial return when two or more guests stay in his or her home. Having only one guest will mean that a host will incur a net loss of Php131.56, while having two guests will provide an income of Php136.62. The researchers verbalized to the participants that the homestay presents opportunities to increase earnings and the development of tourism in the municipality. Given the amount shown in Table 7, it might just be interesting to find out if actual profits were higher which could explain very positive comments from the homeowners.

Table 7. Summarized Computation of Profitability of Homestays in Sariaya

No. of visitors/night	Revenue			Expense	Profit
	Rooms	Meals	Total		
1 visitor/night	599.38	325.22	924.60	1,056.16	(131.56)
2 visitors/night	1,198.76	650.44	1,849.20	1,712.55	136.62

In evaluating the homestay rates, 80 percent and 96 percent of the students in the September 2009 and March 2010 visits, respectively, considered the rates, including fees for student guides, “Just Right”. These figures are significant since they came from student-visitors from the UP-AIT who were able to compare these rates with those of their past field trips outside of Metro Manila (Table 8).

Table 8. Evaluation of Rates

Category	September 2009		March 2010	
	Frequency (n=15)	%	Frequency (n=23)	%
Cheap	1	6.67	1	4.35
Just Right	12	80.00	22	95.65
Expensive	2	13.33	0	00.00

Homeowners' Evaluation of the Homestay Program

Postevaluation indicates that the homeowners appreciated the homestay program, with the following responses:

- “*Oo, nagkaroon kami ng friends. Ay, wala akong hindi nagustuhan.*” (Yes, because we gained friends. There was nothing that we disliked about the program.)
- “*Oo, being part of the program is a joy. We love to be among the selected few kahit antique ang house namin.*” (Yes, being a part of the program is a joy. We love to be among the selected few even if our house is antique.)
- “*Nagkaroon kami ng karagdagang kaalaman tungkol sa bagay kasi matatalino sila.*” (We gained additional knowledge on things because they are intelligent.)
- “*Oo, dumami ang mga kakilala.*” (Yes, we gained additional acquaintances.)

From the above articulations, the major reason why they appreciated the homestay program is because of the friendships that they have forged with their guests. This result also validates the friendly and hospitable character of the homeowners.

SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR A LOCAL HOMESTAY PROGRAM

How can the above data be used to identify insights in making homestay a sustainable project? The following conceptual framework can be considered if sustainability of homestays is desired.

The role of the Sariaya Tourism Council (STC) is significant in the sense that the homestays will not have clients if tour packages are not designed and marketed. In addition, as there are different market segments (yuppies, oldies, students, for example) which are interested to visit Sariaya, these present potential problems in marketing the homestay program. As part of the initiative to make tourism a vehicle for poverty alleviation, supply chains, as suggested by Ashley (2006), have to be managed. The STC can develop a program so that, for instance, raw materials used

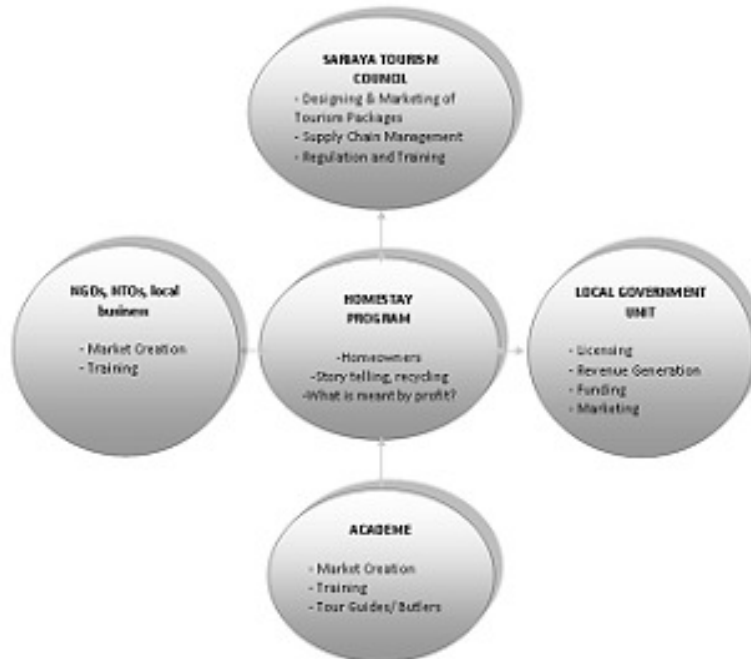


Figure 1. Sustainability of homestays in Sariaya.

in the preparation and serving of meals as well as in cleaning of homes can be internally sourced. Opportunities for local sourcing of milk and processed milk products can be developed as these have once been identified by municipal agriculturists in the Mayor's Office. For the upscale market, Sariaya's *alamid* (civet cat) coffee can be offered. Local producers of *kakanin* and *bibingka* (local rice cakes) as well as bakery products can be encouraged to produce more so that this fare can be offered for breakfast as these have been served during the dry runs. The local producers of food can be organized so that good quality at affordable prices of ingredients as well as finished products can lead toward win-win transactions for diverse stakeholders.

Regulation and training cannot be overlooked. The STC must spearhead the initiative to set up quality standards that will make the visitors want to come back. If currently there are quality and standard gaps, training programs can be designed in coordination with the Department of Tourism as well local schools offering related courses.

Initially, it might be imperative to look for sources of funds to support training activities. But if the homestay participants become convinced that a reasonable return can be earned from this project, it is expected that they themselves will be willing to invest in skills development.

Another concern has to do with safety. The visit of students during the Santo Cristo Festival (September, 2009) had parents asking for more information about the safety of their children. Understandably, a perception of greater risk is attached to homestays. Parents will not think twice about allowing their children to stay in hotels rather than homestays for lodging. The STC can therefore brainstorm with participating homestay owners so that concrete projects on security (including the police) can be designed and implemented.

Using the authors' experience of homestays in Santiago de Compostela, Spain when they participated in a conference on tourism, the LGU can collaborate with different stakeholders to design Sariaya's image as an attractive tourism destination. For example, maintenance of old houses is a very expensive endeavor. This is probably one of the reasons why some ancestral houses are in a bad state of disrepair. Personal funds are not available to rebuild and repair. The local government unit in Santiago de Compostela designed a financing project that advances money to homeowners on condition that the beneficiaries offer their homes to tourists. The money earned from these visits are to be used to amortize low interest loans. In addition, municipal codes can be enforced to make sure that precious ancestral

assets are not demolished in the name of “progress.” Like Marikina in Metro Manila, which had an active tourism program during the term of then Mayor Ma. Lourdes C. Fernando, the Sariaya LGU can use its networks in the public sector to encourage local officials to visit Sariaya. A system of give-and-take can also lead to collaborative efforts in the promotion of contiguous destinations. The Sariaya LGU will have to make a decision about the status of the STC. Should it be considered part of the local governing machinery or should it be an independent unit? There is no surefire answer to this question. The answer will have to suit the interests of the concerned stakeholders.

If the local government unit decides to spin off the tourism council, it must help in the eventual independence of this unit. Currently, the STC is composed of officers and members who are volunteers. The STC needs initial funding for it to be able to sustain itself. The academe is an important variable in the equation as can be gleaned from the experience of tourism development in Marikina City wherein students, as a market segment, represent a continuous demand for destinations. The city has become a favorite destination of students for their field trips. Another example is the Special Topics class at the UP-AIT which was instituted to capitalize on the research outputs of the Sariaya project. To validate lessons learned inside the classroom, the students were required to participate in the Santo Cristo Festival (September, 2009) and the out-of-classroom activity in March, 2010. The academe can also be tapped do research work on culture so that the STC will have a continuous stream of potential offerings. Interpretive materials development can be a project of tourism and hospitality students. The value of interpretive materials was mentioned in the book by Moscardo (2003). These materials help guests understand and appreciate embedded meanings in the space, movement, music, and cuisine of a destination. Thesis topics as well as practicum activities of the schools can be crafted in coordination with the STC. These will open opportunities for students to see the value of praxis in tourism development. The experience of student guides or butlers must also be mentioned. Because the visitors were students, student butlers or tour guides were a perfect match. The terrific bonding and sense of community that resulted from this experience cannot be valued using pecuniary variables. National tourism offices (NTOs), like the Department of Tourism (DOT), and nongovernment offices (NGOs), like Tuklas, whose members are owners of ancestral houses in Sariaya, have significant roles in the sustainability of homestays in Sariaya. Tuklas’s cooperation with the DOT, which currently has a training program for homestays, should lead to the identification of concrete solutions in the rehabilitation of ancestral assets. As operating guidelines for the operation of homestays are fine-tuned, opportunities for involvement of smaller homes should be forthcoming.

The homestay, which is the focal point of this framework, includes the homeowners who should undergo capacity-building activities that aim to effect a paradigm shift as far as accommodating guests for a fee is concerned. This should cover keeping track of expenses to establish a reasonable rate. They should be trained on the rigors of maintaining and preparing their homes for guests in terms of food served to guests, cleanliness, sanitation, and to administer the various activities for the guests. The latter includes storytelling and the guests' participation in household chores, among others. They should also be consulted in the formulation of guidelines, such as preferred guests' decorum in the homes, safety, use of rooms, respect of hosts' privacy, and many more.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The following reflections are enumerated to amplify points raised in the previous pages and identify areas for further studies in the sustainability of homestay programs. The case study included in this paper focuses on experiences confined to one municipality. As there are other homestay programs operating in other tourism destinations, the following insights enumerated in this study should help increase the base of research on the topic and hopefully contribute to the formulation of related theories:

1. The observed aversion for quantifying services and costs among homeowners must be stated. In Sariaya, this phenomenon has a cultural context. Informal discussions with local parishioners in the Roman Catholic Cathedral affirmed the innate generosity of an ordinary Sariyahin, which may have its roots during the prosperous years of coconut exports in the early 1940s. To be sustainable, however, there might be a need to treat homestays as a business proposition. Is the money earned from participating in the program enough to cover pecuniary and nonpecuniary costs? It might be stated that an issue related to visits of outsiders is an invasion of privacy, especially that of young members of the family who might not want to share "home space" with outsiders during visits.
2. The homestay owners in Sariaya placed a lot of premium on socialization benefits and being of help to those "in need of places to stay." They asserted willingness to accept guests for free. Can the loss of this generosity be a negative unintended result of commercialized operations as a result of tourism development?

3. Should homestays be considered an alternative source of livelihood or is there an expectation that it will provide major sources of income for participating homes? Answers to these questions will implicate issues related to standard costs and readiness of homeowners to upgrade standards of efficiency, hygiene, and safety. How prepared are local government units to provide assistance in repairs of homes and in training of homeowners? In many tourism destinations in the Philippines, adequate water supply is a current major concern. Standard costs are important variables because as tourism councils are given the responsibility to market homestay programs, customers will have to be given information related to costs of visits. The difficulty in establishing standard costs in the homestay program of Sariaya has to do with different configurations of houses and different levels of availability of amenities.
4. Postevaluation indicates that the homeowners valued the friendships that they have developed with their guests.
5. There is a need to provide spacing for the various highlights and activities of the homestay.

In general, homestays contribute in the development of a strong sense of community (Phipps, 2007). The caring and the concern showered on the student guests gave a lasting impression. Homestays, according to the students, contributed to an authentic touristic experience. "No frills, no masks, no artificial presentations." They got what Sariaya had to offer.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank the Office of the Chancellor and the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Development of the University of the Philippines Diliman for funding this research. The support of the Sariaya Tourism Council, and Mayor and Mrs. Rosauro Masilang of Sariaya is also sincerely acknowledged.

Shirley V. Guevarra, PhD <shirley_guevarra2001@yahoo.com> is a Professor and current officer-in-charge of the Office of Student Housing of the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD). She served as chair of the UPD Department of Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management from 2007 to 2013, and acting director of the Business Concessions Office from 2006 to 2007. Her articles have appeared in the *Journal of Asian Regional Association of Home Economists*, *Journal of Nutritionist-Dietitian's Association of the Philippines*, and *Journal of Philippine Association of Home Economists in State College and Universities*.

Ma. Corazon P. Rodriguez, DPA <corarod2014@yahoo.com> has a doctorate in Public Administration from the University of the Philippines Diliman. Her association with tourism stakeholders to promote community-based tourism started in 2001 when she was appointed Director for Research and Extension Services of the Asian Institute of Tourism (AIT). In 2006, she managed an interdisciplinary research team that looked at interpretations of culture and how these can be used by local stakeholders to promote tourism. She served as Dean of AIT from 2004 to 2010.