

# The Awareness and Perception of Community Towards Tourism Sustainability in Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark

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## Abstract

This study evaluated the level of community awareness and perception of tourism sustainability among residents living near selected sites of the Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark and examined how demographic factors influence awareness and perception, as well as the relationship between awareness and perception across sustainability dimensions. Anchored on the Triple Bottom Line Theory, Community Empowerment Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory, the study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. Data were gathered through a structured survey questionnaire adapted from the Green Destinations' Tourism for SDGs Self-Assessment Tool and aligned with Global Sustainable Tourism Council standards, with additional items on geopark awareness. The instrument demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of .895 for awareness and .981 for perception. Using purposive and stratified sampling, 380 residents aged 18 years and above from three selected barangays near major geopark sites participated in the study. Data were collected through face-to-face administration and analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and Pearson product-moment correlation. Results indicated that the community exhibited moderate awareness of the geopark and strong positive perceptions of tourism sustainability across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Significant relationships were found between selected demographic variables and awareness and perception, and awareness was positively correlated with sustainability perception. Identified challenges included limited understanding of the UNESCO Global Geopark concept, insufficient collaboration between local communities and government bodies, limited participation in sustainability practices, and the need for enhanced public education and awareness programs. The study recommends implementing a Community Awareness and Perception Enhancement Program focused on targeted training, strengthened stakeholder collaboration, expanded community participation, and partnerships with educational institutions. The study aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting sustainable tourism, community participation, environmental stewardship, and education within a geopark context. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening institutional collaboration, enhancing community capacity for conservation and responsible tourism, and supporting evidence-based policymaking for long-term socio-economic and environmental resilience.

**Keywords:** Awareness; Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark; Community Participation; Environmental Sustainability; Economic Sustainability; Social Sustainability; Tourism Sustainability; UNESCO Global Geoparks

## 1. Introduction

Bohol Island, designated as the Philippines' first and only UNESCO Global Geopark, represents over 150 million years of geological history and integrates conservation, sustainable development, and community engagement within a globally recognized framework. While geopark recognition offers opportunities for geotourism, education, and socio-economic development, its sustainability depends largely on local community awareness and perception. Despite its designation, limited research has examined how residents near geopark sites understand and perceive tourism sustainability. This study evaluates the level of community awareness and perception of tourism sustainability among residents near selected sites of Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark, examining demographic influences, awareness levels, perceptions across social, economic, and environmental dimensions, and their interrelationships.

### 1.1 Community Awareness and Perception of Tourism Sustainability in Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark

UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGp) are unified areas that protect geological heritage while promoting education and sustainable development (Varriale et al., 2022; Drinia, 2023). Beyond geological conservation, geoparks contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fostering community participation and sustainable tourism (Grigore, 2024; "Pathways," 2022). Bohol Island received UNESCO Global Geopark recognition on May 24, 2023 (Bohol Tourism Office, 2024). Its geological features, including the Chocolate Hills and limestone karst landscapes, hold scientific and cultural significance (Guimarães et al., 2021; Murtadha, 2024). The geopark framework promotes conservation, education, and sustainable tourism development, aligning economic growth with environmental stewardship (Murtadha,

2024; Drinia, 2023). However, geological heritage remains vulnerable to urbanization, vandalism, weak legal enforcement, and limited public awareness. Studies emphasize that community participation is essential for geopark sustainability, enhancing local ownership and responsibility (Gajek et al., 2019; Septiana et al., 2023). Educational initiatives further strengthen awareness and engagement in conservation (Álvarez, 2020; Zafeiropoulos et al., 2021). The absence of sufficient research on community awareness and perception among residents in Bohol highlights the need to assess these variables to strengthen tourism sustainability.

## 1.2 Themes and Insights from Related Literature on Community Awareness and Tourism Sustainability

Literature identifies three interrelated pillars of tourism sustainability: social, economic, and environmental (UNWTO, 2021; Ernawati, 2023; GÜNDÜZ, 2023; Puciato, 2023). Social sustainability emphasizes community participation and cultural preservation (Pencarelli, 2019; Zulvianti et al., 2022; Štreimikienė et al., 2020). Economic sustainability highlights job creation and local business development while mitigating adverse impacts such as inflation and displacement (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020; “The Relationship Between Tourism, Dog Ownership, and Sustainability,” 2024; Pratama, 2024). Environmental sustainability stresses biodiversity protection and ecological conservation (Mironova, 2024; Octaviani, 2023; Santos et al., 2019; Buckley, 2012). Awareness significantly shapes perception and participation. Community-based tourism studies show that active local involvement enhances sustainability outcomes (Nguyen and Cheung, 2020; Ramachandran et al., 2021; Weaver, 2018). In geopark contexts, grassroots initiatives strengthen conservation practices (Gezahegn et al., 2024). However, while awareness may be high, implementation often remains moderate due to resource and training constraints (Alampay et al., 2023). Demographic factors such as age, sex, educational attainment, marital status, and years of residency influence awareness and perception (Ahmad, 2024; Dündar, 2023; Salvia et al., 2019; Lee & Jan, 2019). Increased awareness fosters positive perceptions, leading to stronger support for sustainable tourism (Filho, 2023; Thananusak & Suriyankietkaew, 2023).

## 1.3 Local, National, and Global Context

Globally, UNESCO Global Geoparks promote geotourism and international collaboration in geological conservation (Guimarães et al., 2021; Grigore, 2024; Gordon, 2023). The expanding geopark network underscores the importance of standardized assessment and stakeholder engagement (Wolniewicz, 2023; Bailey, 2024). Nationally, the Tourism Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 9593) mandates sustainable tourism planning with community participation and environmental protection (Department of Tourism, 2009). The National Cultural Heritage Act (Republic Act No. 10066, 2010) and the New Heritage Law (Republic Act No. 11961, 2022) strengthen heritage conservation and community involvement. Locally, Bohol’s geopark status enhances opportunities for geotourism, conservation, and education while requiring effective community integration (Jane & Pawitan, 2021). Ensuring residents’ awareness and perception align with sustainability goals is critical to realizing these benefits.

## 1.4 Theoretical or Conceptual Basis

This study is grounded in the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory, Community Empowerment Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory. The Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1994) evaluates sustainability through profit, people, and planet, aligning with economic, social, and environmental pillars. Community Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1992) emphasizes intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral dimensions of empowerment, highlighting participatory governance and local control. Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) situates individual awareness within broader social, cultural, and policy contexts. The conceptual framework integrates these theories through an Input-Process-Output model, examining demographic inputs, awareness and perception processes, and proposed sustainability programs as outputs.

## 1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale

Although global studies affirm the importance of community engagement in geopark sustainability (Gajek et al., 2019; Septiana et al., 2023), limited empirical research assesses residents’ awareness and perception in Bohol’s UNESCO Global Geopark context. Furthermore, relationships between demographic factors, awareness levels, and sustainability perceptions remain underexplored locally. This study addresses these gaps by examining demographic influences, awareness of geopark designation and geosites, perceptions across sustainability dimensions, and correlations between awareness and perception. Findings aim to inform targeted community-based programs to strengthen tourism sustainability.

## 1.6 Alignment of Community Awareness and Tourism Sustainability with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by examining how community awareness and perception influence tourism sustainability in Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark. It supports SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth by promoting sustainable tourism as a driver of local economic development and employment (Han, 2021; United Nations, 2015). It contributes to SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities through heritage preservation and inclusive community participation in tourism planning (Han, 2021). The study also reinforces SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production by encouraging responsible tourism practices that minimize negative impacts (Han, 2021).

Furthermore, it aligns with SDG 13 – Climate Action by fostering environmental awareness and conservation initiatives within geopark sites (Schlange et al., 2020), and with SDG 4 – Quality Education by emphasizing community education and awareness-building on sustainability principles (Schlange et al., 2020). Through assessing residents' awareness and perception, the research ensures that tourism development in Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark meaningfully contributes to these interconnected global sustainability objectives.

### 1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

This study contributes to socio-economic sustainability by examining tourism's role in local development; environmental sustainability through conservation awareness; cultural sustainability via heritage preservation; educational sustainability by assessing knowledge dissemination; and policy and governance sustainability through alignment with national heritage and tourism laws. By integrating community awareness, perception, and sustainability principles, the research supports evidence-based policymaking and participatory governance, strengthening the long-term resilience of Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark.

## 2. Material and methods

### 2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational design to determine relationships between demographic variables and respondents' awareness and perception of tourism sustainability without manipulating variables. The correlational method enabled the identification of associations and predictive relationships among variables. Multiple-response analysis was also applied to determine the percentage distribution of perceived challenges. The survey questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument and was structured into four parts: demographic profile, awareness, perception of tourism sustainability, and perceived challenges.

### 2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark Sites, specifically in Barangay Buenas Aires in Carmen (Chocolate Hills), Barangay Bingag in Dauis (Hinagdanan Cave), and Barangay Canapnapan in Corella (Tarsier Conservation Center). These locations were identified as among the top tourist destinations based on data from the Bohol Provincial Tourism Office as of July 2024. The scope map presented in the original manuscript illustrates the geographical location of Bohol Island in the Philippines and identifies the three barangays where the study was conducted. The map visually situates the Geopark sites within the provincial context, clarifying their spatial distribution and accessibility.

### 2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were residents aged 18 years and above living within the selected barangays near the Geopark sites. A total of 380 residents participated in the study. These respondents represented communities directly influenced by tourism activities associated with the UNESCO Global Geopark.

### 2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select barangays where the Geopark sites are located. Slovin's formula was used to determine the sample size at a 90% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Based on the 2020 Philippine Statistics Authority census, the total population of the three barangays was 7,705. Stratified sampling was then applied to proportionally allocate the 380 respondents across the three barangays.

### 2.5 Research Instrument

The study used an adapted questionnaire derived from Green Destinations' Tourism for SDGs Self-Assessment Tool and aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council standards. Additional items related to Geopark awareness were constructed from related literature. The questionnaire was translated into the Boholano dialect (Bisaya) to ensure comprehension. It was reviewed by the Bohol Provincial Tourism Office and pilot-tested for reliability and validity. The instrument contained four sections: demographic profile (age, sex, educational attainment, marital status, years of residency); awareness (general awareness, awareness of geosites, sources of awareness, perceived importance of the Geopark); perception (economic, environmental, and social sustainability); and perceived challenges. Reliability testing through Cronbach's alpha showed strong internal consistency. The overall awareness scale obtained a reliability coefficient of .895 (interpreted as good), while the overall perception scale obtained .981 (interpreted as excellent).

### 2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, approval was secured from the Dean of the Graduate School and authorization was obtained from the Bohol Provincial Tourism Office. Pilot testing was conducted among 40 residents near the Blood Compact site in Tagbilaran City to establish reliability and clarity of the instrument. Primary data were gathered through face-to-face distribution of questionnaires from January to February 2025. The researcher personally administered and retrieved the questionnaires to ensure clarity and maximize response rate. Follow-up interviews were conducted to validate responses.

Secondary data were obtained from academic literature, official documents, and online sources. All collected data were encoded in Microsoft Excel and organized into a database for statistical analysis. Strict confidentiality was observed throughout the research process.

### 2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study employed descriptive and inferential statistical tools using SPSS version 26. Simple percentage distributions described demographic characteristics and perceived challenges. Weighted mean was used to determine levels of awareness and perception using a 4-point Likert scale. For awareness, the scale ranged from “Fully aware” (4) to “Fully not aware” (1). For perception, the scale ranged from “Strongly agree” (4) to “Strongly disagree” (1). Chi-square tests were used to determine the significant relationship between demographic profile and awareness and perception levels. Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to examine the relationship between awareness and perception of tourism sustainability.

### 2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study strictly complied with Republic Act 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and voluntarily participated. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and all responses were treated with discretion. The researcher committed to securely storing questionnaires and properly disposing of them after five years in compliance with data privacy regulations.

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## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Community Awareness and Perception of Tourism Sustainability in Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark

#### 3.1.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The findings revealed that most respondents were adults within productive age groups, with a higher proportion of females than males. A majority had attained secondary education, many were married, and most had resided in their respective barangays for several years. This indicates that respondents were long-term residents directly exposed to tourism activities within the geopark sites. These demographic characteristics are significant because prior studies indicate that age and educational attainment influence awareness of sustainability issues and geopark importance (Ahmad, 2024; Dündar, 2023). Research also suggests that women are often more sensitive to environmental concerns and sustainability practices (Salvia et al., 2019), while marital status and long-term residency may strengthen community attachment and participation in sustainability efforts (Lee & Jan, 2019). Thus, the demographic composition of respondents provides a meaningful context for interpreting awareness and perception levels.

#### 3.1.2 Level of Awareness of Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark

The results showed that respondents were generally aware of the geopark designation, geosites, and its importance. Awareness levels ranged from moderate to high, particularly regarding the significance of the Chocolate Hills, Hinagdanan Cave, and the Tarsier Conservation Center. Sources of awareness included local government initiatives, community engagement, and media exposure. This level of awareness supports the assertion that community engagement is essential for geopark sustainability (Gajek et al., 2019; Septiana et al., 2023). Educational exposure and local initiatives strengthen understanding of geological heritage and conservation (Álvarez, 2020; Zafeiropoulos et al., 2021). However, global studies indicate that awareness of sustainability frameworks such as the SDGs often remains limited despite general recognition of sustainability (Schlange et al., 2020). The findings suggest that while residents are familiar with local geosites, continued education is necessary to deepen sustainability integration.

#### 3.1.3 Perception of Tourism Sustainability in Terms of Economic Sustainability

The findings indicated that respondents generally agreed that tourism contributes positively to local employment, business opportunities, and economic development. Residents recognized tourism as an important economic driver in their communities, although some concerns were noted regarding equitable distribution of benefits. These perceptions align with literature emphasizing tourism's role in generating employment and supporting local enterprises (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020; Kong, 2024). Sustainable tourism contributes to economic resilience when properly managed (Thangpreecharparnich, 2024). However, research also cautions against negative consequences such as inflation and displacement (“The Relationship Between Tourism, Dog Ownership, and Sustainability,” 2024; Pratama, 2024). The findings reflect a generally positive economic outlook while reinforcing the need for balanced tourism planning.

#### 3.1.4 Perception of Tourism Sustainability in Terms of Environmental Sustainability

Respondents expressed strong agreement that environmental conservation is essential for sustaining tourism in the geopark. They acknowledged the importance of protecting biodiversity, minimizing pollution, and preserving natural attractions as integral to tourism sustainability. This perception is consistent with studies showing that environmental awareness significantly influences support for sustainable tourism practices (Mironova, 2024; Zunaidi, 2024; Rijanta, 2024). The WTO emphasizes optimal use of environmental resources and conservation of natural heritage (UNWTO, 2021). In geopark settings, environmental stewardship directly supports long-term tourism viability (Buckley, 2012; Octaviani,

2023). The strong environmental perception among respondents demonstrates recognition of the link between ecological preservation and economic sustainability.

### 3.1.5 Perception of Tourism Sustainability in Terms of Social Sustainability

The results showed that respondents agreed that tourism fosters community pride, cultural preservation, and social cohesion. Many believed that community participation in tourism planning enhances social sustainability and local empowerment. These findings support research indicating that community involvement strengthens cultural identity and social sustainability (Mkhize, 2024; Hutabarat, 2023). When residents participate in decision-making processes, they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility toward sustainable initiatives (Muerza, 2024; Pencarelli, 2019). Inclusive tourism practices ensure equitable access to benefits and reinforce community cohesion (Štreimikienė et al., 2020). The positive social perception observed suggests strong potential for participatory sustainability programs.

### 3.2 Challenges Affecting Community Awareness and Tourism Sustainability

The findings identified key challenges, including limited understanding of the UNESCO Global Geopark concept, insufficient collaboration between local communities and government bodies, limited participation in sustainability practices, and the need for enhanced public education and awareness programs. These challenges reflect broader national concerns regarding sustainable tourism implementation amid rapid growth pressures (Rodolfo and Cruz, 2020). Studies indicate that awareness alone does not guarantee effective implementation without adequate training and institutional support (Alampay et al., 2023). Grassroots innovations and stakeholder collaboration have been shown to mitigate conflicts and environmental degradation in geoparks (Gezahegn et al., 2024; Ramachandran et al., 2021). Therefore, strengthening institutional partnerships and educational initiatives is crucial for overcoming these barriers.

### 3.3 Relationship Between Demographic Profile, Awareness, and Perception of Tourism Sustainability

The statistical analysis revealed significant relationships between certain demographic variables and levels of awareness and perception. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between awareness and perception of tourism sustainability, indicating that higher awareness is associated with more favorable sustainability perceptions. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that increased awareness leads to stronger support for sustainable tourism initiatives (Filho, 2023; Thananusak & Suriyankietkaew, 2023). Community-based tourism studies also confirm that informed residents are more likely to participate actively in conservation and sustainability efforts (Nguyen and Cheung, 2020; Weaver, 2018). The significant correlation reinforces the importance of continuous education, stakeholder engagement, and participatory governance in strengthening sustainable tourism practices within Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark.

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## 4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the community demonstrates moderate awareness of the Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark, yet holds a strong and positive perception of tourism sustainability across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Respondents recognize tourism's contribution to economic growth, environmental conservation, and social well-being, as reflected in consistently high evaluations across the three sustainability pillars. However, challenges persist, including the need for enhanced public education and awareness programs, limited community participation, insufficient collaboration between local communities and government bodies, and gaps in understanding the Geopark's significance. Demographic factors such as age, marital status, and years of residency significantly influence awareness, while educational attainment significantly affects perception. Moreover, the significant relationship between awareness and perception indicates that increased knowledge about the Geopark is associated with more favorable sustainability perceptions, underscoring the importance of strengthening community-based awareness initiatives.

It is recommended to implement a Community Awareness and Perception Enhancement Program aimed at strengthening knowledge and engagement in Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark. This program should provide more comprehensive training and workshops for residents, expand community participation in sustainable tourism initiatives, and strengthen collaboration among local government units, community leaders, non-governmental organizations, and private stakeholders. Communication strategies should be tailored to different demographic groups to address variations in awareness levels, while partnerships with educational institutions should be expanded to integrate discussions on geoconservation and sustainable tourism. Additionally, digital and in-person platforms should be enhanced to promote information sharing, best practices, and active community involvement in conservation and tourism development efforts.

The study is limited to residents aged 18 years and above from three selected barangays near specific Geopark sites, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other communities within Bohol Island UNESCO Global Geopark. The research focuses primarily on levels of awareness and perception using self-reported survey responses, which may be influenced by personal bias or subjective interpretation. Furthermore, the study examines selected demographic variables and does not explore other possible social, cultural, or economic factors that may also affect awareness and perception of tourism sustainability.

### Compliance with ethical standards

The study adhered to academic research standards and complied with Republic Act 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participation was voluntary, and the research employed a non-experimental, survey-based design. Confidentiality of respondents' information was strictly observed throughout data collection and processing.

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### Conflict of interest statement

The researcher declares no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest related to this study.

### Statement of ethical approval

The study involved non-invasive, survey-based data collection methods and did not require formal ethics committee approval.

### Statement of informed consent

Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study prior to participation, and informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was ensured, and no personal identifiers were disclosed in the reporting of results.

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