

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Redefining Sustainable Tourism in COVID-19: A Political-Economy Approach

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Tourism has emerged as a critical sector generating economic growth and development across countries in the world. However, in the face of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also considered as one of the most heavily hit sectors. Given the backdrop of all the measures implemented to prevent the spread of the outbreak and the changing mindset of actors towards travel, sustainable tourism is expected to play a more critical role in the face of the new normal. This article aims to provide a better understanding of sustainable tourism by utilizing a political economy approach. Specifically, this article intends to explain the political-economy dynamics of pursuing sustainable tourism in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Keywords: International Political Economy, Theories, Tourism

JEL Classifications: F59, L83, N95

Tourism has emerged as a critical sector generating economic growth and development across countries in the world. However, in the face of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism is also considered as one of the most heavily hit sectors (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2020). In 2019, tourism accounted for about 10.3% of global gross domestic product (GDP), 6.8% of total exports, and 1 in 10 jobs (330 million jobs) in the global economy (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). The sector has become equally important to developing economies such as the Philippines,

wherein tourism has formed part of the country's development strategy (Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022). In 2019, the industry's total contribution to the country's GDP was estimated at 12.7%. In terms of employment, the industry employs approximately 5.7 million, or 14 out of 100 Filipinos are employed in tourism industries for the same year (Ilarina, 2020). It has become an economic pillar of growth in the services sector, together with overseas Filipino workers' remittances and the business process outsourcing–information technology sector (Villegas, 2018).

While the industry's performance remained impeccable over the years, experts emphasize the value of developing destinations in a sustainable manner—that is, pursuing sustainable tourism (ST). In the midst of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, its necessity has become more apparent. Tourism suffered major losses since the imposition of initiatives to prevent the pandemic—these range from travel restrictions, community quarantines, temporary and/or partial shutdowns of airlines, and closure of establishments, among others (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). In the Philippines, travel bans are expected to result in a projected loss amounting to approximately USD 9.3 billion worth of foreign currency flows, putting up to 50,000 jobs at risk. As a major contributor to the country's economic growth, tourism losses tantamount to a slowdown in the national economy (PricewaterhouseCoopers Philippines [PwC Philippines], 2020).

More than ever, the turn of events has proven the interconnectedness of the international and national spheres, especially in the tourism discourse (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019; Sigala, 2020). Arguably, the outbreak of the crises has been dubbed by both professionals and researchers as an opportunity to reset and recalibrate the practice and discourse of tourism across the world (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020; Sigala, 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020). This seeming break is considered as a transformative opportunity (Mair, 2020) to conduct structural changes (Romagosa, 2020) for a reimagined and reformed version of tourism (Sanders & Singhal 2020). A postpandemic scenario suggests a paradigm shift where sustainability should be considered a new norm, especially in tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; UNWTO, 2020).

With experts dubbing ST as the perceived *new normal* where social distancing and primacy of safety standards are becoming a priority, questions on the political economy of its pursuit have become increasingly significant. In the plethora of research on tourism, the political and economic aspects of its development are identified separately; only a few have used the lens of political economy (Bianchi, 2018). ST has been broadly defined as tourism activities that take into account the triple bottom line or 3Ps (i.e., people, planet, profit) of sustainability (Elkington, 1998; Slapper & Hall, 2011). This approach to tourism development requires the concerted effort among stakeholders in ensuring that a balance among the

economic, social, and environmental facets of tourism development is accounted for (Elkington, 1998). Despite the evident upward trend and significance of the sector to the development and growth of countries, questions about its sustainability are persistently being raised. Arguably, alongside tourism's economic achievements are environmental and social issues plaguing destinations and communities across the country (Anderson, 2007; Canteiro, Córdova-Tapia, & Brazeiro, 2018; Mollett, 2014; Wang, Lee, Château, & Chang, 2016).

Echoing the call of Zenker and Kock (2020) and Ritchie and Jiang (2019) on researches that explore the complexity and interconnectedness of tourism disasters and their political-economic environment, this article aims to utilize various lenses in better understanding the pursuit of ST. More specifically, this article aims to provide a better understanding of ST by utilizing a political economy approach. Primarily, this article answers the question “*How can sustainable tourism in the Philippines be analyzed using the lens of political economy?*” Specifically, this article intends to explain the political-economy dynamics of pursuing ST in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Given the backdrop of all the measures implemented to prevent the spread of the outbreak and the changing mindset of actors towards travel, the concept of ST in the new normal may be redefined. Responding to critics' argument on the theoretical limits and impracticality of ST as a concept, this article suggests that its underpinning tenets may now be more implementable, achievable, and relevant.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The concept of sustainable development was coined by the Brundtland Commission's paper on *Our Common Future* that broadly defined sustainable development “as the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987). Since then, sustainable development has formed part of the development agenda of countries across the globe.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified 17 goals that are aimed to “end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all.”(UNWTO, n.d., p.1) The goals are to be integrated

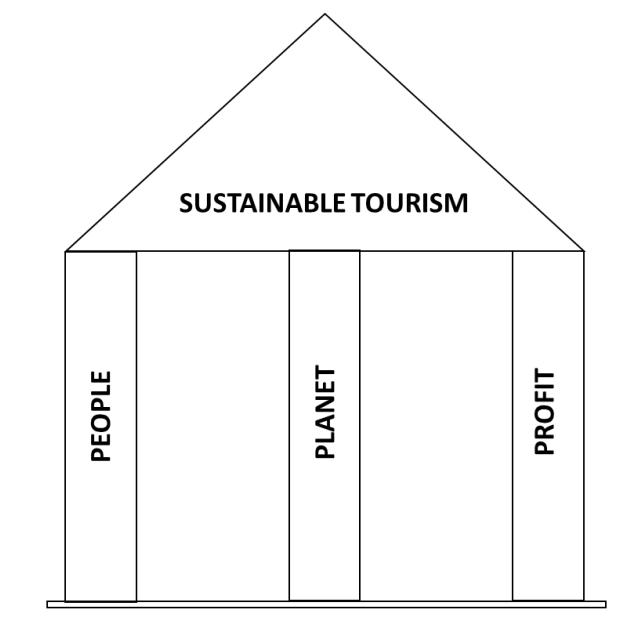


Figure 1. Pillars of sustainable tourism. Source: Author’s own figure.

in the development plans and agendas of countries. To achieve this, a concerted effort among all sectors of society from the international, state, and individual levels must be made. In acknowledging the significant role of tourism in the growth and development of the international economy, the sector has been identified as among the driving forces that foster sustained development and inclusive growth (UNWTO, 2017).

The pursuit towards developing ST has therefore emerged. At its core, ST is defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (United Nations Environment Programme & UNWTO, 2005, p.1). ST is the synergy of the economic, social, and environmental aspects of tourism, wherein a balance among these is required to ensure sustained development as illustrated in Figure 1.

In committing to this, the United Nations has officially declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, which aimed at raising public awareness of the significant contribution of ST to development. Specifically, it aimed at supporting changes in policies, practices, and behavior towards ST at all levels—government, business, and individual (UNWTO, 2017).

In the Philippines, the passing of RA 9593 (i.e., the Tourism Act of 2009) officially recognized the

vital role of tourism as an “indispensable element of the national economy and an industry of national interest and importance, which must be harnessed as an engine of socio-economic growth and cultural affirmation to generate investment, foreign exchange and employment, and to continue to mold an enhanced sense of national pride for all Filipinos” (Congress of the Philippines, 2009, p. 2). The act serves as the national blueprint in formulating “...an integrated ST management plan for the country and to develop the country as a prime tourist hub in Asia, as well as a center of world congresses and conventions, by promoting ST anchored principal on the country’s history, culture and natural endowments, and ensuring the protection, preservation and promotion of these resources” (p. 3).

Forming part of the national agenda, ST development strategies are underscored in the Philippine Development Plan. Complementing this are tourism-specific policies aimed at creating and developing ST products and services across destinations in the country such as the Ten-Year Tourism Plan (1978–1987), the 20-Year Tourism Master Plan in 1991, the National Ecotourism Strategy, and the Tourism Management Plan for Central Philippines. The most recent of these plans is the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2016–2022, whose vision is to “develop a globally competitive, environmentally

sustainable and socially responsible tourism industry that promotes inclusive growth through employment generation and equitable distribution of income thereby contributing to building a foundation for a high-trust society.” (Department of Tourism [DOT], 2020, p.1). In doing this, the NTDP follows a two-pronged strategic direction of improving competitiveness and enhancing growth, as well as pursuing sustainability and inclusive growth. Several tourism products are included in the NTDP’s portfolio, which includes diving and marine sports tourism; health, wellness, and retirement tourism; cultural heritage tourism; sun and beach tourism; and nature-based tourism, among others.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Political economy espouses the indivisibility of the study of politics and economics, in other words, the entwined nature of power and wealth (Underhill, 1991). In the literature of tourism research, the political and economic aspects of the industry are tackled separately. A dearth in studies utilizing a political economy approach to understanding tourism development has

been observed (Bianchi, 2018). A proposed explanation to the lack of link between tourism research and political economy stems from concerns and issues suggesting that political economy is subsumed by the social sciences including economics (Bianchi, 2018). However, studies and recent events have shown the need to address this by tackling the prospect of ST using a variety of lenses and approaches (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019; Zenker & Kock, 2020).

Complementing this approach is the use of the levels of analysis. The levels of analysis provide a theoretical perspective in understanding certain phenomena. The first level of analysis focuses on the influence of individual preference and actions as well as the domestic politics in the pursuit of ST in the country. The second level of analysis emphasizes the role of the government and domestic institutions. Finally, the third level of analysis highlights the role of the international environment and international institutions (Underhill, 1991). By distinguishing factors from the individual, state, and international levels, it provides a holistic and comprehensive analysis of the subject matter. Figure 2 illustrates the factors considered in each level of analysis.

In this article, the factors influencing the pursuit of ST in the Philippines from each level are identified.

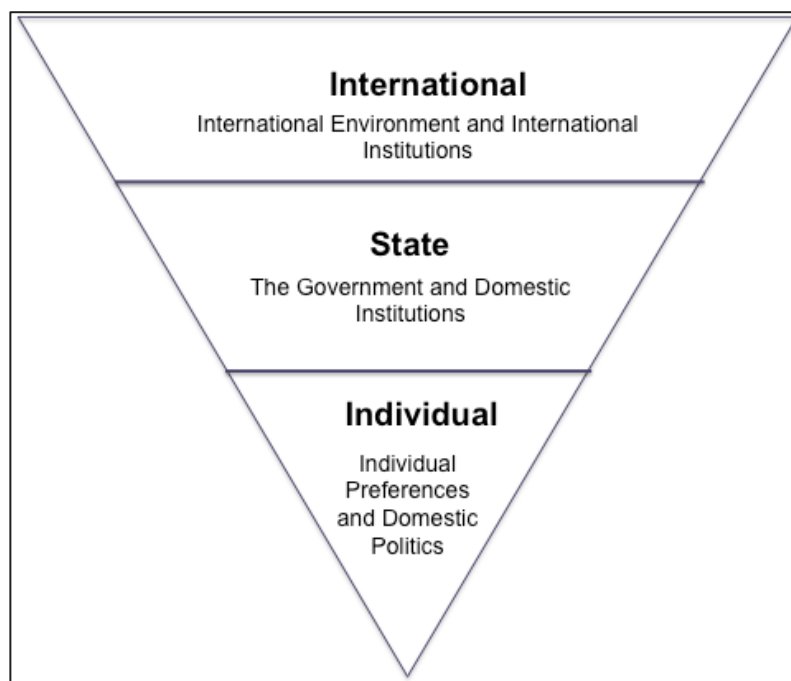


Figure 2. Levels of analysis. Source: Author’s own figure.

These factors are then subjected to the analysis using several political-economy theories.

Individual Level: Individual Preferences and Domestic Politics

In the field of tourism, individuals are generally characterized as tourists, local community members, and owners of private enterprises (Björk, 2000; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Gutierrez, 2019; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; Tsaor, Lin, & Lin, 2006). In this view, tourism is perceived as a multi-stakeholder activity that requires a concerted effort among its four key actors: tourists, local community, government, and business enterprises (Björk, 2000). While this analysis provides an understanding of the synergy among these actors, explanations as to how these individuals craft decisions regarding ST are not made (Björk, 2000). Figure 3 illustrates Björk’s key players framework.

The theory of classical liberalism best explains why individuals do not easily adapt sustainable practices. Individuals are perceived as self-interested and utility maximizing (O’Brien, 2003). The main concern of individuals is their pursuit of happiness primarily through consumption of tourism products and services, with little to no regard of environmental or social considerations (Ghazvini et al., 2020). Portrayed here are individuals classified as mass tourists. Mass tourists are identified as travelers who typically consume budget-friendly package tours and cheap flights. These are the travelers who descend on a given destination in a relatively short period of time (Mason,

2015). Furthermore, business entrepreneurs and local community members can also be primarily concerned with capital accumulation (Forsyth, 1997; Sutawa, 2012). These individuals supply for the demand of tourists. Business entrepreneurs build tourism establishments such as hotels, resorts, restaurants, and souvenir shops, among others, while local community members establish community-based destinations, while providing for the employment requirements of tourism establishments in their locality. As service and product suppliers, these individuals perceive the environment and sociocultural aspects of tourism as mere factors for production. Ascribing to classical liberalism, these individuals are typical economic agents whose aim is to ensure the profitability of their businesses or enterprises.

Offering an alternative view on individuals as tourists, local community members, and business owners is behavioral economics, which states that human behavior is complex. This theory argues that not all individuals pursue choices that give them maximum utility since every individual has a varying notion of utility (Buchholz & Feldstein, 1989). In this view, we speak of tourists whose concern apart from leisure activities is environmental considerations in their consumption (Kiper, 2013). These are the tourists who are willing to pay for an experience that does not compromise the environmental and sociocultural aspects of tourism. They usually come in the form of ecotourists (Kiper, 2013), responsible tourists, and sustainable tourists (Budeanu, 2007), among others.

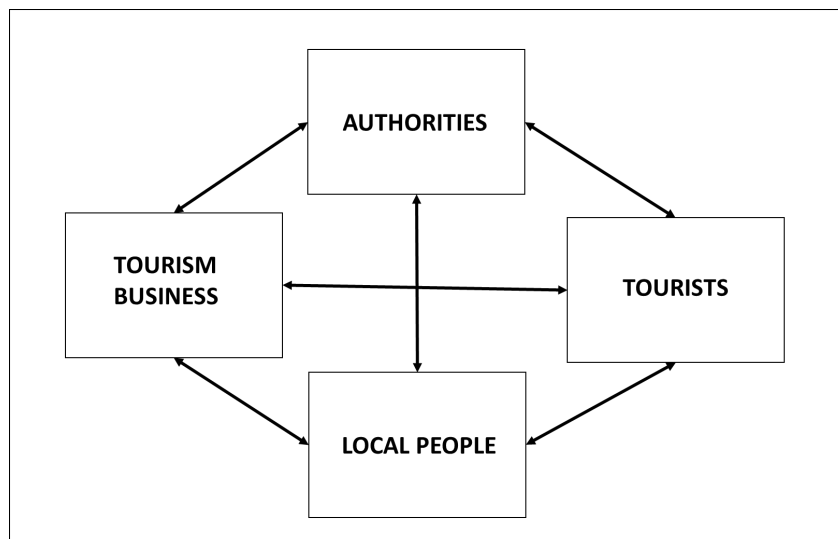


Figure 3. Bjork’s key players. Source: Björk (2000).

This growing number of tourists prefers sustainable forms of tourism such as ecotourism and other nature-based activities (Aref, 2011; Kiper, 2013). In the same view, these are local community members and business owners who take into consideration environmental and sociocultural facets of tourism development such as green resorts and hotels and community-based tourism activities, among others.

The public choice theory (PCT) suggests a varying perspective in understanding individual behavior and preference towards ST. Under this theory, individuals are classified as voters, politicians, and bureaucrats (Buchholz & Feldstein, 1989). In the context of the Philippines, we speak of voters composed of the domestic tourists, business owners, and local community members. Politicians are those who are elected by the voters both in the national and in the local levels, while bureaucrats are those who are working for the Department of Tourism (DOT), including the secretary for the department, and other tourism-related agencies. PCT suggests that the lacking national blueprint for ST in the country is due to the preference of the voters, politicians, and bureaucrats. For voters, they are viewed as economic agents whose main concern is profit generation. They have little to no incentive to participate in lobbying for ST policies. For politicians, they are primarily concerned with being elected. They have little to no concern for ST-related initiatives or policies. If voters desire for tourism to be primarily profit generating, politicians will simply follow to ensure that they will be elected. For bureaucrats who require incentives to function in a specific manner, they have fewer incentives to actually push for ST initiatives. With national-level policies in place, the implementation of these highly depend on both the politicians and bureaucrats at the local level or the members of the local government units.

The individual level of analyzing ST initiatives in the Philippines primarily focuses on how interest groups seek to influence and manipulate the regulatory and institutional framework guiding tourism development (Bianchi, 2018). While these theories focusing on the individual actors in tourism development provide insights on their preferences and behavior, the theories fail to account for the institutional dynamics influencing the actors' decisions, which groups can exert influence, and what institutional arrangements hinder or support them to pursue ST, among others. A complete

explanation on how these dynamics influence the pursuit of ST in the country remains undiscovered.

State Level: The Philippine Government and Domestic Institutions

In this section, the analysis of the state-level factors influencing the pursuit of ST in the Philippines will be made by looking into both the dynamics of the government and the domestic political institutions present in the country.

Central to this level of analysis is the role of the government, specifically whether state intervention remains necessary in managing and/or directing tourism activities and development. In the context of pursuing ST in the Philippines, the institutions include political institutions in the form of government agencies. The Tourism Act of 2009 designated the critical role of the DOT as the “primary planning, programming, coordinating, implementing and regulatory government agency in the development and promotion of the tourism industry both domestic and international, in coordination with attached agencies and other government instrumentalities (DOT, 2009, p.1).” Furthermore, it is assigned as the primary body responsible for tourism development together with its attached agencies, specifically the Tourism Promotions Board, Tourism Infrastructure Enterprise Zone Authority, and the Duty Free Philippines Corporation, designated with an integrated multi-sectoral structure bridging national agencies and private bodies. Figure 4 illustrates the tourism governance and management model for the Philippines wherein DOT works with government units from the national, regional, and local levels to ensure proper implementation and effective monitoring of tourism development policies. With policies governing tourism development and ST in the country, the enforcement of these has been devolved to local government units. This top-down approach to governance is similar to the significance of hierarchical systems of authority as espoused by the Conservative perspective (Clark, 1998).

State intervention in tourism is primarily justified in terms of its role as the public administrator, managing the exploitation and use of the country's resources and to distribute these for the welfare of its citizens. More specifically, state intervention is necessary in managing tourist destinations that are public in nature, as well as in correcting market imperfections in terms of the presence of imperfect competition (Torres-Delgado &

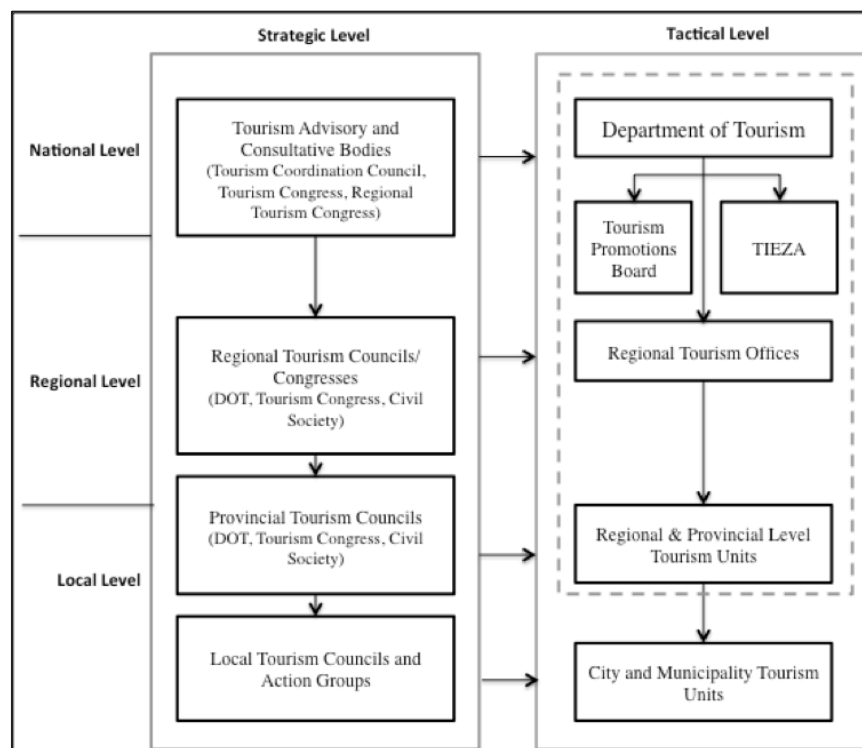


Figure 4. Tourism governance and management model for the Philippines. Source: National Tourism Development Plan.

Palomeque, 2012). Related to this is the developmental state view wherein the state remains at the core of tourism development. While a variety of governance modes have appeared, the state is unarguably critical in driving and leading the development of the sector, which includes the pursuit of ST. Addressing issues on sustainability requires a “whole government response” to catch up with environmental changes (Hall, 2011).

However, in the context of Philippine tourism, the continuous pursuit of mass tourism by the government raises the question on whether the government is truly for development. With this, some authors argue that state-led developments contributed to the failures of tourism development initiatives in developing countries such as the Philippines (Jenkins, 2000).

Conversely, ST suggests an alternative form of governance that emphasizes citizen participation in government activities. While ST suggests a framework that balances the three facets of sustainability, it also encourages cooperation of all stakeholders involved. This represents the “bottom-up” approach to tourism development (Koscak & O’Rourke, 2017; Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2012).

Taking into account the role of institutions in the pursuit of ST, the theory of new institutional economics (NIE) offers an alternative by suggesting the importance of institutions in alleviating bounded rationality of individuals and incomplete contracts engaged in by them. Institutions are built to supplement the limited knowledge of individuals. Furthermore, institutions aid in minimizing costs that may be incurred from entering contracts that are not self-enforcing (Williamson, 2000). Institutions identified in NIE include firms and bureaus instead of the government. The role therefore of institutions in proliferating ideas on ST is necessary. This includes addressing issues on the acceptability of solutions (i.e., use of green technologies, increase in taxes, change in travel lifestyle, increased government intervention, etc.) required to pursue ST (Hall, 2011).

The analysis of state-level factors influencing the pursuit of ST primarily focused on how state institutions shape the context for tourism development. While the individual level argues that individuals influence institutions, conversely, the institutional level argues otherwise. While both analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of the domestic factors influencing ST, they fail to resolve which level comes first (Milner, 1988).

International Level: International Institutions and Environment

The pursuit of ST in the Philippines cannot be insulated from the influences of the international system—the presence of international institutions and dynamics of the international environment.

Several theories have examined the role of the international environment in the pursuit of ST in developing countries:

Neo-Marxist theories of underdevelopment and dependency perceived the expansion of international tourism as a reinforcing mechanism of dependency patterns among developing countries such as the Philippines. Under the context of an international division of labor, inequalities are viewed by differentiating the experiences between capitalist states and the “Third World” economies (Britton, 1991), as well as between centers of accumulation and peripheral countries (Boissevain, 1977). The underdevelopment of the tourism industries of developing countries is seen as a result of the exploitation by developed countries. Tourism industries in developing countries are treated as peripheries of developed countries under a chain of exploitation of natural resources (Ochola et al., 2010). This vicious cycle leaves developing countries dependent on developed countries (Harrison, 2015). Dependency in the tourism sector is generally represented by the number of international tourist arrivals in the country, which consequently leads to the proliferation of mass tourism, which exploits the environmental and sociocultural resources of developing countries (Akdag & Öter, 2011).

Furthermore, the adoption of ST at the international level is seen to proliferate neoliberal ideas such as continued intervention (Hall, 2013), by imposing the need to rely on experts’ systems of scientific knowledge and techniques such as carrying capacity and cost-benefit analyses (Cerny, Menz, & Soederberg, 2005). The pursuit of ST therefore suggests global institutional governance (Jamal, Camargo, & Wilson, 2013).

The globalization of tourism has also influenced the pursuit of ST globally (Jamal et al., 2013). This phenomenon is characterized by the growth in international tourism leading to the integration of more societies as well as the increasing influence of transnational and multinational corporations in the sector (Lanfant, 1980). The concentration of power

among these corporations is viewed as inhibitors to the supposed contribution of tourism to developing countries as well as in the pursuit of ST (Brohman, 1996). The presence of such corporations encourages a “race to the bottom” in terms of environmental protection (Madeley, 1996). Corporations perpetuate the exploitation of natural resources through infrastructural developments that often disturb ecosystems as well as the local communities who rarely benefit from such developments.

Alternatively, the pursuit of ST is influenced by the presence of international institutions (Jiang, Zhuo, Zhang, & Gao, 2019). For the past decades, ST has been institutionalized at the international level. An increase in the number of institutional initiatives tackling ST has been observed (Bui, 2009; Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2012). From the formal definition of ST in the Brundtland Report, which exclusively highlights the conservation of the environment, it expanded to encompass the social, economic, and environmental aspects of development (World Economic Forum, 2017). The integration of the concept of ST in the international development agenda can be traced back to the year 1992, during the World Summit of Rio de Janeiro, where the concept of ST was first consolidated. A series of conferences and initiatives that encourage operationalizing ST principles into the international, local, and individual levels followed (Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2012). Figure 5 shows some of the international initiatives pursuing ST.

International institutions have shaped tourism development in countries across the globe (Garay & Cánoves, 2011). For several international organizations and institutions such as the UNWTO, the World Travel and Tourism Council, and the United Nations Environment Programme, among others, ST has formed part of some of their policy statements. The presence of such institutions has therefore shaped how tourism industries across the globe have been developed (Hall, 2011).

However, while the concept of ST has been widely discussed in a variety of institutional documents and conferences, it suffers from the same limitations of imposing sustainable development (Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2012). ST’s seemingly vague definition often leads to diverse interpretations and applications in the state and individual levels.

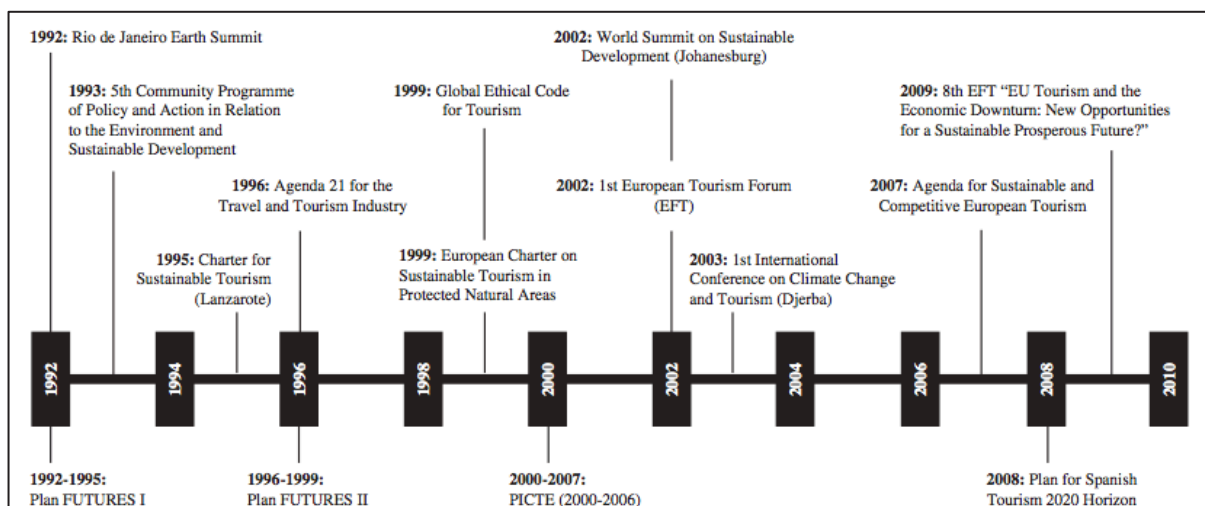


Figure 5. International initiatives on sustainable tourism. Source: Torres-Delgado & Palomeque (2012).

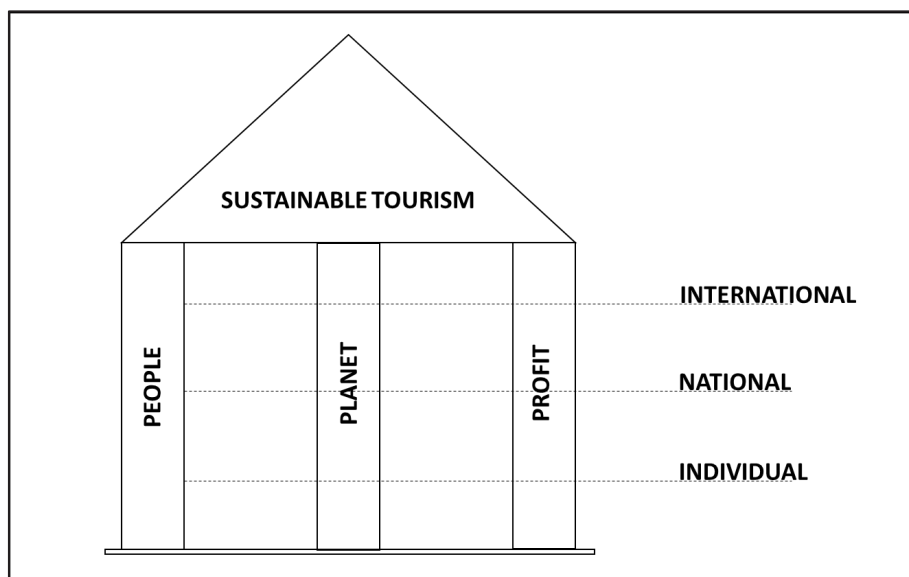


Figure 6. The pillars of sustainable tourism and levels of analysis. Source: Author’s own figure.

DISCUSSION

In approaching the subject using the levels of analysis, it has become apparent that the commitment to pursuing ST is influenced by the dynamics and factors rooting from the individual, state, and international levels as shown in Figure 6.

In the political aspect, ST challenges conventional views on the politics involved in pursuing a development plan as it suggests a new form of governance that requires state intervention and the active participation of the private sector. In pursuing ST in the Philippine context, tourist destinations and establishments are

generally privately operated; hence, government intervention becomes a necessity in ensuring that these develop in a sustainable manner. With this, governance of tourism destinations in the form of public-private partnership is beneficial for the country. On the other hand, ST poses a challenge on the supremacy of economic measurements to development. It suggests that environmental and social development is equally important to the economic development steered by tourism activities.

The examination of ST through the various lenses of political-economy theories renders a better understanding on how the concept is understood

Table 1. *Summary of Analysis*

Level of Analysis	Theory	Explanation	Application
Individual	Classical liberalism	Individuals pursue happiness primarily through consumption of tourism products and services, with little to no regard of environmental or social considerations. These individuals are typical economic agents whose aim is to ensure the profitability of their businesses or enterprises.	Mass tourists Businesses engaging in greenwashing
	Behavioral economics	Not all individuals pursue choices that give them maximum utility since every individual has a varying notion of utility.	Ecotourists, responsible tourists, sustainable tourists Community-based enterprises Green businesses Voters, politicians, bureaucrats
	Public choice theory	Individuals are classified as voters, politicians, and bureaucrats (Buchholz & Feldstein, 2007)	The lack or presence of a national blueprint for sustainable tourism in a country is due to the preference of the voters, politicians, and bureaucrats.
Domestic	Theory of new institutional economics	Importance of institutions in alleviating bounded rationality of individuals and incomplete contracts engaged in by them. Institutions are built to supplement the limited knowledge of individuals. Furthermore, institutions aid in minimizing costs that may be incurred from entering contracts that are not self-enforcing (Williamson, 2000).	Government and institutions
	Neo-Marxist: underdevelopment and dependency	Underdevelopment and dependency perceived the expansion of international tourism as a reinforcing mechanism of dependency patterns among developing countries (Boissevain, 1977).	Proliferation of mass tourism
International	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism in the tourism context suggests ways in which capitalism can produce and reconfigure new sources of capital accumulation (Büscher, Sullivan, Neves, Igoe, & Brockington, 2012; Duffy, 2015).	Presence of a global institutional governance system (Jamal, Camargo, & Wilson, 2013) and multinational corporations (Lanfant, 1980)

Globalization	Stable increase of international tourist flow suggests the globalization of tourism, especially in developing economies. More specifically, impacts have been observed in the context of ecological, sociocultural, and economic aspects (Zhao & Li, 2006).	Developing and developed economies
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and perceived by various actors in different levels of analysis. Most importantly, in the face of this pandemic, several propositions may be highlighted by looking at the summary of how the analysis was done as shown in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has shown that the crisis is multifaceted in such a way that it can be considered as a natural disaster, an economic crisis, and a sociopolitical and a tourism-demand crisis, all rolled into one (Zenker & Kock, 2020). By utilizing various theories, this article is able to explain the political-economic dynamics of pursuing ST in the Philippines in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, the concept of ST may be redefined in light of the events following the outbreak of the pandemic. This article argues that the concept of ST has been redefined in the face of the new normal. After the pandemic, the theoretical underpinnings of the concepts such as carrying capacity and use of green technology, among others, have become more practical and relevant at present.

More specifically, by analyzing ST in various levels, several findings are made: at the individual level, the views of classical liberalism may not be as strong given the events of the pandemic. This suggests that during this period, individuals arguably are more considerate of their environmental and social well-being as shown by their observance of certain protocols such as social distancing measures and the use of personal protective equipment such as masks and face shields. Despite the seeming discomfort and adjustments this may require of them, it seems that individuals have now gained a new perspective on how their personal behavior influences others. At the domestic level, now more than ever, institutions and the government have become increasingly important as NIE suggests. Institutions

more than ever play a critical role in safeguarding the limited capacities and knowledge of individuals. Finally, at the international level, the global and rapid spread of the outbreak reflects the growing interdependence of states through travel and tourism. Tourism has been the flagship of globalization to date; the movement of people has brought down physical barriers. Similarly, acknowledging interdependence may also be key to solving the issue.

This article contributes to the dearth of tourism research that utilizes a political-economy approach in understanding developments such as ST. In the end, this article provides concrete examples as to how the political and economic dimensions of pursuing development are intertwined and inseparable. The article shows how the pursuit of ST brings about a paradigm shift in the understanding of sustainability, which poses a challenge on both its political and economic aspects.

Future studies may contribute to the existing literature exploring the political economy of ST in the country by conducting a closer look at each level of analysis and by further examining the relevance of specific theories to the situation. Case studies may further be developed to establish and complement the findings of this article. The proposed method of analysis may also be recalibrated to fit the analysis for other countries or specific destinations.

Declaration of Ownership

This report is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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